

Thoughts on Breaking Bad (a ramble)



[Don't read if you haven't gotten all the way through the series yet; definite spoilers ahead!]It's all about Walter White. Or is it? I finally finished the series last night, and the thought came to me later on, when discussing it with my wife... what if this was actually all about Jesse? It was Jesse that finally broke free in the end, Jesse who discovered free will, vs Walter's ability to enforce his will upon others. Up until the very end things were not looking so good for Jesse. How strange that a failing character like Jesse should become the only ray of hope in the finale. But ultimately, it was Walter White's transformation to and perfection of Heisenberg that steals the show.

Walt's progression from nice guy school teacher to Heisenberg was steady & unrelenting; fascinating for its ability to grip us tightly on a ride that we know is a one-way trip to hell without detour. Without detour. You kept watching because you think maybe something will happen, Heisenberg will put down his hat for a moment and Walter White will come back. We want to believe that can happen, but we're never given any real hope that it could. The only thing we hang onto is Walt constantly saying he's doing this for his family, and it's got to be intentional that nobody ever seriously questions that. That's a key point. This ability to get away with such a huge lie, because if he doesn't take the audience along for that same ride, it's just another "Leaving Las Vegas" type of story. We have to believe in the possibility of a sincere motive causing someone to do very bad things, because if there isn't something like that behind those eyes, all you're left with is a devil without secrets.

The closure in the final episode comes when Walt finally admits to his wife that he did it all for himself, not the family. But it's not complete; there's no reconciliation between Walt and his son. Loose ends are not nicely tied up. Just like real life, not everything is nice & tidy.

If you haven't caught Breaking Bad, it's available on Netflix, all but the last half-season. It also shows on AMC as reruns. It's seriously addictive, so don't be surprised if you end up "binge-watching" 3 to 5 episodes at a time.