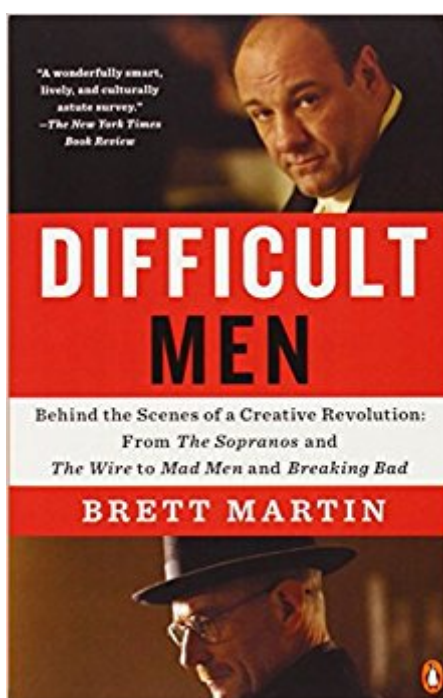


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# Difficult Men: Behind The Scenes Of A Creative Revolution: From The Sopranos And The Wire To Mad Men And Breaking Bad



## Synopsis

A revealing look at the shows that helped TV emerge as the signature art form of the twenty-first century. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the landscape of television began an unprecedented transformation. While the networks continued to chase the lowest common denominator, a wave of new shows on cable channels dramatically stretched television's narrative inventiveness, emotional resonance, and artistic ambition. Combining deep reportage with cultural analysis and historical context, Brett Martin recounts the rise and inner workings of a genre that represents not only a new golden age for TV, but also a cultural watershed. *Difficult Men* features extensive interviews with all the major players, including David Chase, David Simon, David Milch, and Alan Ball; in addition to other writers, executives, directors and actors. Martin delivers never-before-heard story after story, revealing how cable television became a truly significant and influential part of our culture.

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## Customer Reviews

The title of this fascinating study refers to the antiheroic male protagonists of some recent popular television series (*Mad Men's* Don Draper, *The Shield's* Vic Mackey, *The Sopranos's* Tony Soprano), but it also, to a slightly lesser degree, refers to some of the men who made those shows. David Chase, for example, the demanding creator of *The Sopranos*, and David Simon, the ambitious creator of *The Wire*. The author's premise, that around 1999 there came a third golden age of television (*The Sopranos* debuted in 1999),

might not sit well with all readers, but the argument that a new kind of TV series started to flourish around that time is undeniably true. Can you imagine any earlier point in television history when *Breaking Bad*, *The Wire*, *Mad Men*, *Six Feet Under*, and *Deadwood* could have existed? Martin combines standard making-of stuff (behind-the-scenes production battles, stories about the stars, etc.) with in-depth profiles of the people who, in a very real sense, changed the modern face of television. Fans of the shows he discusses, and especially those interested in television history, should consider this a must-read. --David Pitt --This text refers to the MP3 CD edition.

*Difficult Men* is a vastly entertaining and insightful look at the creators of some of the most highly esteemed recent television series. The book is crammed with pungent anecdotes about, and quotes from, people who have collaborated with these "difficult men"--or at least tried to. Male egos may grow lush under adoring gaze of online fanboys and fangirls, but as Martin's vivid and idea-packed study makes plain, the best way to make sense of our culture's difficult men is to subject them to rigorous, if often admiring, scrutiny. --Ken Tucker --This text refers to the MP3 CD edition.

Chances are, if you have any tolerance at all for television, you've watched at least one of the signature dramatic shows that have cropped up on cable during the past decade. I certainly have. I'm a sucker for this stuff, and I didn't fully understand why until I read Brett Martin's *Difficult Men*, a superbly constructed tribute to these programs and their creators. Martin argues that *The Sopranos*, *The Wire*, *Mad Men*, *Breaking Bad* and a few other high-quality TV shows are "the signature American art form of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the equivalent of what the films of Scorsese, Altman, Coppola, and others had been to the 1970s or the novels of Updike, Roth, and Mailer to the 1960s." His thesis is hard to argue with, and I say that having devoured much of the output of those filmmakers and writers. *Difficult Men* dwells largely on the creators of those four celebrated dramas--David Chase (*The Sopranos*), David Simon (*The Wire*), Matthew Weiner (*Mad Men*), and Vince Gilligan (*Breaking Bad*)--plus a few others, especially Alan Ball (*Six Feet Under*) and David Milch (*Deadwood*). If you've watched any of these programs, you will easily agree with Martin's assertion that their protagonists "belonged to a species you might call Man Beset or Man Harried--badgered and bothered and thwarted by the modern world." As Tony Soprano said, encapsulating the meaning of life for all these men, "Every day is a gift. It's just . . . does it have to be a pair of socks?" The conceit in Martin's title derives from the indisputable fact that Chase, Simon, Weiner, Gilligan, Ball, and Milch collectively possessed enough neuroses, inner conflicts, self-doubts, disappointments, psychological wounds, and personality quirks to match the six leading

men of the dramas they brought to the screen. In short, Tony Soprano and Don Draper have nothing on these guys--and Martin amply demonstrates that by recounting the sometimes colorful but excruciatingly frustrating paths most of them followed to sell their shows to HBO, FX, and AMC. At least one of the six, David Milch, would qualify for the Neurotics' Hall of Fame. Martin describes the time when a writer on one of his shows arrived for his first day of work "to see a man in the second-floor window peeing on the flowers below. 'Oh, must be Milch,' the receptionist told him." Milch had (and presumably still has) a reputation as a genius, but he tended to drive everyone working with him around the bend. "At some point," Martin reports, "Milch stopped committing scripts to paper at all, preferring to come to set and extemporaneously dictate lines to the actors." Can you imagine being one of those actors? Martin draws an interesting parallel between these contemporary serialized television dramas and the work of the Victorian writers--Charles Dickens, Anthony Trollope, George Eliot, and others--who gained the 19th century equivalent of superstardom on the strength of their serialized novels. In both cases, format enabled artistry, allowing the creators to develop complex, fully fleshed characters and story arcs that weren't limited by the 42-minute stricture of today's network-TV "one-hour" dramas. To my mind, the most fascinating chapter in *Difficult Men* is the last one before the epilogue. Martin describes sitting for days on end in the writers' room for the show *Breaking Bad* along with creator (called "showrunner") Vince Gilligan and his crew of very gifted and extravagantly paid screenwriters. That chapter alone is worth the price of the book. You'll never look at TV drama again the same way if you read it. *Difficult Men* is a well organized, skillfully crafted, and insightful look at one of the most-watched cultural phenomena of our time. According to his website, Brett Martin is a correspondent for GQ. His work has appeared in *Vanity Fair*, *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *Bon Appétit*, *Food & Wine*, and many others, as well as on public radio's *This American Life*.

Should I be embarrassed in admitting these are my favorite artists? I asked my artist-friend this question and he said: "NOOOO". This realization occurred to me while reading Brett Martin's book, *'Difficult Men'*. These artists are the driving creative forces behind the best artwork of my lifetime. They should be celebrated. My affection should not be closeted. Martin hones-in on the showrunners that I love: David Chase, David Simon, David Milch, Mathew Weiner and Vince Gilligan. I'm not sure I've ever devoured a book as I did *'DM'*. I couldn't get enough information on these fascinating men and their processes. Like most artists, they're damaged and reflexive. While they differ in technique, they share a passion and a focus. The expression 'too many cooks spoil the broth' has never been more fitting. These men were able to communicate their single vision and we learn how the TV

writing process is both an individual and a group effort. It's not for everyone, but this is certainly a book for writers. If you love one or two of these shows, you'll love this book. This book is not a love-letter; Martin is both a reporter and analyst. He presents deeply flawed, brilliant men, engaged in a high-pressure writing process. These television shows, and the artists that formed them, will be studied a century from now. I'm very confident in offering that prediction.

Lately, there has been a few books on the golden age of television. This book encapsulates the era better than any other book in this genre. Recently, I read "Revolution was Televised" by Alan Sepinwall. Sepinwall does a very good job of recapping the shows he enjoys each week. However, his book left me wanting more on the insights on the "why" these show runners tell us the stories they are telling us. *Difficult Men* skips the episodic recap prose of Sepinwall and delves into the brains behind the geniuses who created the best TV of all time. If you're looking for a TV guide type of article on TV of late 90s until now. Then buy Sepinwall's book. If you are looking for an in depth look behind of the scenes of how the Sopranos redefined how we watch TV, then buy this book. If you're like me and love all TV. Then buy both books. You won't be disappointed.

This book gives you, the reader, an insider look on how some of the best shows of what Martin calls the "Third Golden Age" of TV. This book does not give its focus to the stars, rather it tells you the stories of the great creators of the show, the struggles they went through to get these shows made, and how all of these shows fell into a "right place, right time" slot in television history that allowed them to not only get made, but influence all that follow. The insight, and back stories, that Brett Martin provides for these shows are unprecedented, as far as I'm concerned. There are moments, few moments, when the author gets bogged down with some of the minutiae of back story, particularly with the show *The Wire*, but when he wraps up his narrative, you find that it was all consequential. That chapter aside, the author's narrative is clean, and it flows like fiction. Highly recommended to anyone that loves *The Sopranos* and *Mad Men* so much that they want to know insider information on the stories behind the stories.

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