



Nick Prescott's Reviews

Dexter, Season 1 (DVD)

Talent: Michael C. Hall, Jennifer Carpenter, Julie Benz, Lauren Velez, James Remar, Erik King, Keith Carradine.

Date of review: Thursday 21st February, 2008

Directors: Various

Duration: 12x60 minute episodes

Classification: MA

We rate it: Four stars.

Dexter may well answer the question “How disturbing can a television series possibly get?” in the most intriguing and intelligent way. Based on a well-received (and wryly funny) novel by Jeff Lindsay, Dexter centres around the titular character of Dexter Morgan, a Forensic blood-splatter analyst working for the Miami police force, whose expertise at analysing blood patterns in part stems from the fact that he has himself caused a fair bit of blood to splatter over the years. Dexter, you see, is that rarest of sociopaths: a serial-killer who only strikes at victims who truly (in his eyes, at least) deserve to die. Dexter, whose childhood entailed traumas that are at first vaguely hinted at and then gradually become clearer as the series progresses, was taken in by a good-hearted cop (James Remar) and eventually raised to harness his murderous urges for the cause of good. Having grown up into the otherwise-respectable and utterly charming Police professional he is, Dexter spends his days working as a law-abiding cop, and his nights researching the lowest of low-lives and then devoting himself heart and soul to wiping them off the face of the earth in the messiest of ways, always keeping a drop of their blood on a microscope slide as a souvenir.

Michael C. Hall, whom many TV viewers will know as David Fisher from the amazing *Six Feet Under*, was the perfect choice to play this utterly unnerving and singular figure. Lindsay's novel, entitled darkly *Dreaming Dexter*, was written in the first person, and gave the reader the discomfiting experience of being inside this damaged character's head, being able to laugh at his jokes while at the same time being horrified by his violent actions. Hall is able to transform this disturbing mix of the horrific and the humorous into a terrifically compelling performance, and what would be otherwise unwatchably dark becomes deeply fascinating.

This tremendous TV adaptation is, if anything, even more disturbing than the book itself, and stretches out the action of the novel by adding subplots and extended secondary elements that have been made to work extremely well in the context of the

larger narrative. The hook that the novel uses to grab its readers is that Dexter is being taunted by another serial killer, an anonymous stalker who is leaving dismembered corpses sitting in awfully conspicuous places, and who may or may not be trying to frame Dexter for the killings. This too is the larger premise for the series, and once a dismembered Barbie-doll turns up in Dexter's refrigerator, he knows that the killer-on-the-loose is speaking directly to him, and what might be called a cat-and-cat chase is set in motion.

This first series DVD set is presented in immaculately-transferred widescreen glory, and is horribly compelling from start to finish. A striking piece of work by anyone's standards, the series will be way too disturbing for some, but will be the fill the gap left by *The Sopranos* and *Six Feet Under* for others. Brilliant, brutal and genuinely unnerving, *Dexter* is crime drama of a psychological complexity that I've never before seen on television.

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