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Get all the best moments in pop culture and entertainment delivered to your inbox. I first visited the world of reality in earnest back in 2013 when I accidentally joined The Bachelor Nation. My then-colleague, whose group of friends also hosted a monthly book club I desperately wanted to join, invited me to wine, pizza and season premiere of Desiree Hartsock Bachelor. I was, unlike many Bachelor villains, literally there to make friends. The episode of many limousine entries was offensively stupid, the manipulation of the cast of producers was egregious, and there was not a second in which I believed that this woman was on the way to true love (the egg is definitely on my face now - Hartsock and her winner are still happily married). Despite all this, I was hooked. There was a ritual to this show, from eating and drinking to hasty debates between commercial breaks, to Tuesday morning summing up the coffee maker's office and accompanying live band lyrics. By the time Hartsock was dumped by textbook fuckboy Brooks Forester during the finale, I was hosting my own viewing party and inviting new inductees into the world of reality. I was never invited to this coveted book club, but I left with a newfound hobby that turned into a career move. Go ahead a few years and I've written and edited more stories about The Bachelor than I can count on: I'm literally making a living - at least in part - from my dedication to reality TV. In addition to watching The Bachelor weekly and covering shows from all angles - from daily gossip to in-depth criticism - I've also co-produced and co-hosted the Bachelor podcast for two years. Currently defunct do you accept this podcast? Best weekly interviews with the series's biggest stars, from The Bachelor's Nick Viall to polarizing contestants like Olivia Caridi, which means I'm also responsible for some of the gossip coming out of Chris Harrison's drama Factory. And most importantly, I know how to find a new reality show and get to know the audience that loves it so dearly. I'm still sure I'm not the only person who's seen every episode of Bachelor in Paradise and feels like they need a cold shower afterwards. For many of us, the only way to immerse ourselves in reality TV is with many, many grains of salt. Despite the point of view of anti-reality TIP TV (see: every guy who asked me to justify his habit on a first date), watching these shows does not betray a major lack of intelligence or willful ignorance of the (actual) real world. Like many people who've resisted reality TV siren songs, I once thought the genre was pure rubbish - nothing but an endless loop of fabricated fights, all designed to exploit real people's (most often female) emotions in the service of a volatile narrative for callous viewers to gawk at. It is possible that in due course it is all was, but now it's a little more complicated. Calling this pulsating, mutating world of human charm just plain unfair, if only because this designation is subjective is only one aspect of this world. I constantly jumps down a rabbit hole of ethical, moral and emotional dilemmas about the thousands of minutes I spent watching reality stars throw crafted bon mots at each other in a straight-to-camera confession. Every time I allow myself to really think about this world, I end up sitting in a vat of self-esteem, wondering how I can reconcile the love of these funny shows and the genuine care and care for the real world they are sure to affect. While the appeal of reality TV kicks back, is relaxing, and gives zero fucks, it's

actually not that easy. There's nothing simple about it. Kelsey Weir brought a bottle of Dom Perignon, which she has kept for years, to the 2020 Peter Weber season of The Bachelor. On the night of 2, Weir was the victim of a champagne theft when another participant opened the bottle. But when this story no longer served the producers, she became a vile girl through a time-honored villain edit. It wasn't long: just three episodes later, she became a victim again, preying on Tammy Lee, who claimed Weir was an alcoholic. This kind of frenetic story is often the result of manipulation; reality TV producers are creating dominoes for actors to knock down for entertainment viewers. But there was a real sacrifice: Lee, who began the season as a voice of reason only to become a poster child for the bachelor villany, would later be sent death threats and racist emails by fans who took the edit as gospel. Kelsey Weir, Victoria Paul, Tammy Lee on The Bachelor. It's TV magic like this that makes your habit of reality hard to fight with. To watch The Bachelor, engage in lively Twitter discussions, and, in my case, publish articles about it all, it's tacitly endorsing the whole machine. Yes, fandom involves a lot of thoughtful, caring people, but it also includes viewers who take the villain to edit for his coin and write vicious messages to someone whose only real crime gives the producer footage that can be stitched into a nefarious plot. I've never had the easy to fully justify enjoying the absurdity of a show like Vanderpump Rules (or below deck... or Sale Sunset), but it's quite another thing to wonder if that VPR group text with my former colleagues is also worth being supportive beam in the platform of a pretty toxic reality star. Because of the distorted prism through which we get reality SHOWS, we only know the parts of the stories of reality stars that make good television. We can't comfortably greet them as heroes (no matter how much hell yes moments they give us), and even most of the mean ones aren't the villains they seem to be. However, the genre thrives on the possibility of convincing us that the 25-year-old home flipper from Syracuse got into an argument about The Bachelor's entire story. And as soon as you let process that genre is a moral minefield which is very very very Depending on the viewers taking the bait, you start revisiting sending a stern tweet about that house flipper when you don't like the person she's doing in pre-recorded (see: heavily edited) women say all special. And then you'll find yourself where I am: Questioning your place in this reality TV universe. Stassi Schroeder and the cast of Vanderpump Rules on stage Bravocon 2019. But let's be real: The release of the reality show will mean giving up talking to friends, weekly rituals, and the perfect accompaniment to winding away from the day at work with a glass of pink. It's my job to cover these shows, but they're also completely stitched into my social life. Watching The Bachelor helps me stay in touch with one of the best friends I left back in New York after moving to Los Angeles. My Fridays are reserved for RuPaul's Drag Race - either I watch it on time or episodes spoiled by my sister-in-law's usual Saturday morning lyrics. I've even been known to spend the entire Saturday night with my friend's showdown production of shows like Netflix's The Great Flower Fight, the Great British Baking Show inspired series that have forgotten the original's greatest appeal: relentless kindness. We're all too deep to quit smoking at the moment, but loving reality TV and calling on it isn't a mutually exclusive activity. Documentary filmmaker Werner Herzog recently explained why he, of all people, felt obliged to watch his chosen reality show, Keeping Up With the Kardashians, telling Variety, you should know what a good number of people are watching. Don't underestimate Kardashian. As vulgar as they are, it doesn't really matter, but you have to find some kind of orientation. As I always say, a poet should not turn a blind eye, he should not prevent them. I'm not saying that any of us are coming at this from the lens of a prolific filmmaker whose documentaries are aimed at capturing the human experience, but if Werner Herzog can find meaning in a seemingly thoughtless reality show, believe that there's a sense to be found. A good population resides in The Bachelor Nation, amounting to about 8 million viewers of the episode. That's why social progress on the show, from hiring a black lead to providing survivors of sexual assault to a platform, actually matters. For each of us who were practically screaming It's about a damn time! when The Bachelor in Paradise finally included a PARIA LGBT cast - the absolute least the show can do - it was just like many fans of the show who were shocked by that inclusion. For anyone who supported Hannah Brown or Kaitlyn Bristowe talking about sex on The Bachelor, there is a faction of fans who shamed them publicly and violently. It may be easier to dismiss any of these shows as empty fluff, but to ignore that The Bachelor Nation really is a reflection of our actual nation - and its many perspectives and flaws - is Ourselves. Once you've recognized that reality TV is a window into the soul of America, America, Have a foot to stand on when you ask that box to get a random cleaning. At least that's what I'll tell myself next time I have a reality show induced by an existential crisis. In the early days, reality TV was easily mocked by entertainment that serious people talked about in muted tones. Today, it's an Emmy Award-winning genre in its own right, and perhaps the most important and relevant form of entertainment in the world where we're documenting and distributing every moment of our lives in high definition. But now, amid troubling headlines and social upheaval, the genre's previously low stakes provides welcome relief (see: Bed Heary and Breakfast), cultural commentary (see: Survivor) and consideration of how the country got here (see: Vanderpump Rules). In 2020, there really is no escape from reality, whether it's playing on our screens or outside our doors. The door.

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