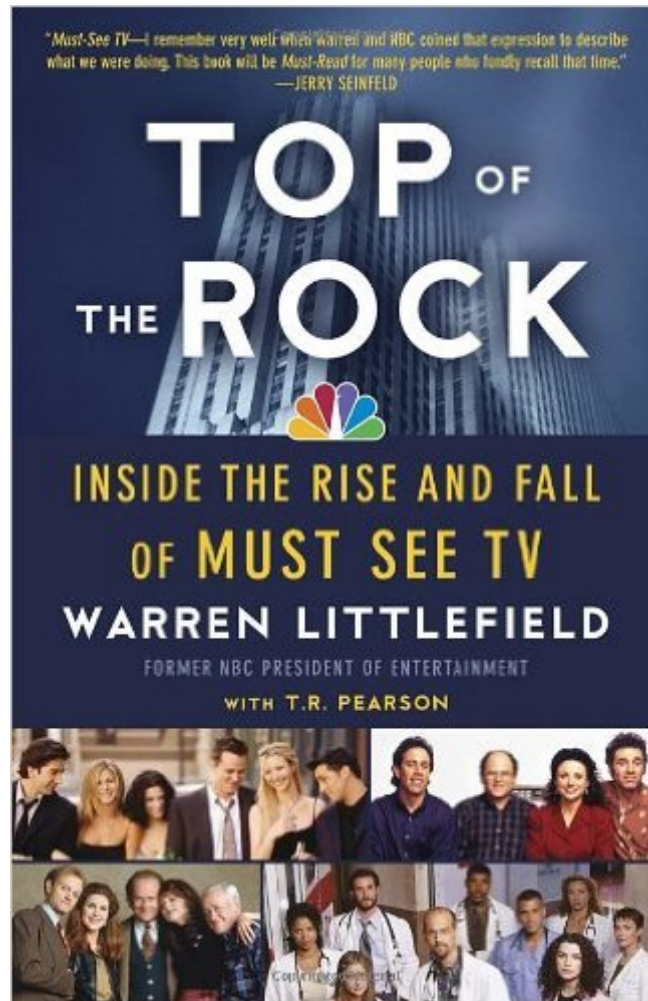


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Top Of The Rock: Inside The Rise And Fall Of Must See TV



Synopsis

Top of the Rock is an absorbing insidersâ™ account of an incredible time and place in television history: the years when Must See TVâ™ led by Cheers, Seinfeld, Friends, ER, and Law & Orderâ™ made NBC an unstoppable success. Here the story is vividly told through the words of the actors, writers, producers, creators, and network executives who helped the Peacock rise to its greatest heightsâ™ and then saw it all fall apart.Â Under the supervision of President of Entertainment Warren Littlefield, NBC went from being an also-ran, losing millions of dollars in failed shows, to the number one station, generating billions of dollars in profit. At its height, the Thursday night lineup alone brought in more revenue than the other six nights of programming combined. Top of the Rock dishes out behind-the-scenes stories from all the biggest shows, revealing the highly risky business decisions, creative passion, and blind leaps of faith that made Must See TV possible.Â Jerry Seinfeld | Jason Alexander | Kelsey Grammer | Sean Hayes | Helen Hunt | Lisa Kudrow | Eriq La Salle | Matt LeBlanc | John Lithgow | Julianna Margulies | Eric McCormack | Debra Messing | Megan Mullally | David Hyde Pierce | Paul Reiser | Noah Wyle | and more

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Customer Reviews

If ever there was a book I was looking forward to, it was Warren Littlefield's account of his days as NBC President of Entertainment. "Top of the Rock: Inside the Rise and Fall of Must See TV," however, ends up getting somewhat of a mixed reaction. Littlefield ushered in and supported a new era of quality network programming that raised NBC to the level of appointment television. The book

has fascinating nuggets of information about a myriad of shows that I grew up with including Seinfeld, Cheers, ER, Mad About You, Frasier, Will and Grace, and Friends among others. It seemed a simple recipe for success, and one that's gone out of fashion with contemporary network TV. Bring in talent and let them do what they're good at. While sometimes this tale can seem self-serving or boastful, the talent and executives that make up the primary text seem to support Littlefield's pivotal role (and I certainly have no need or wish to question that assertion). Indeed, it was a time of TV that I'll always remember. And yet, with such a terrific and broad topic, "Top of the Rock" sometimes feels stronger in parts than it does as a whole. Maybe there was simply too much material. Far from a comprehensive accounting of anything in particular, this is snapshots of history. There is a certain randomness to what is covered and at what length. When the book is digging deep, it can be absolutely riveting. Most of the time, however, topics are introduced and dismissed with little development. Chapters can spend 20 pages talking about a show's premiere and 1 page on the following decade when it aired. It is so hit or miss in its presentation, I became absolutely frustrated in the telling. But still, if you love entertainment stories--this would be hard for me not to recommend.

Warren Littlefield and his co-author T.R. Pearson used the device of providing excerpts from oral interviews (from around 50 people) to demonstrate all that he accomplished as the former NBC President of Entertainment. There is so much back-story available here, real inside information as to the production and eventual end of such great shows as Cheers, Frazier, Seinfeld, E.R. and Will and Grace that makes this book a very worthwhile read to people interested in television show production. Essentially, Mr. Littlefield's overarching theme is that the best way, in fact, the only way, to secure quality television is to let the creative people do their work with minimal involvement from the network suits. Based on NBC's ratings during most of his reign (as set forth by Mr. Littlefield), he may be right but, of course, as he points out, thanks to technology, the television business was quite different in the 1990s than today. Given the amount of people involved in each show, it is unclear for a reader to determine how much credit should be given to Mr. Littlefield's contributions to each of these and other shows through the years but the quotes attributed to the people interviewed (from Jerry Seinfeld to Jim Burrows to Bob Wright to Jack Welch) suggest that it was indeed substantial. If this book has a second theme, it would be to serve as documentation that James Burrows was the greatest thing to ever happen to television sitcoms and that former NBC executive Dan Ohlmeyer (who was eventually allowed to fire Littlefield) was a chronic and moving obstacle. Mr. Littlefield's former boss, the now deceased Brandon Tartikoff, once said that Mr. Littlefield was like a

cockroach who could survive a nuclear war. We get to see those survival instincts in this book.

I work in the entertainment industry (although not TV) and this topic really interests me. However, this book was the most confusing publication I've ever read. Picture yourself channel surfing, talking on the phone, answering an email, and trying to listen to your kids all at the same time. That's exactly how this book read. My problem with this book is its format. The book is organized by chapters (so far, so good), and each chapter covers a topic or show, like Cheers or Seinfeld. That makes sense, so far. Then the chapter starts with a blurb from the author, former NBC President of Entertainment Warren Littlefield. The blurb is set off with the author's name in bold so we know he's the one doing the "talking". Then it's followed by paragraph after paragraph of quotes from other contributors, some of whom you know and some you don't. This pattern keeps going, round-robin style, as the topic meanders along. Some of the quotes pertain to the topic, and some of them seem completely irrelevant. And since they are just set up with the contributor's name, you have to wrack your brain to remember who that person was. Is this somebody I'm supposed to know? If it's a celebrity's name, then it's usually pretty simple. But if it's someone's manager or publicist or an exec from NBC, maybe the name doesn't ring a bell. There's nothing to stitch these quotes together at all. The pages present the quotes as if they're all part of a conversation, but it's clear that all of these contributors weren't sitting around in a room talking with each other. I think they were interviewed and then the contents of their interviews were parsed and patched back up into these pseudo conversations. They completely lack continuity though.

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