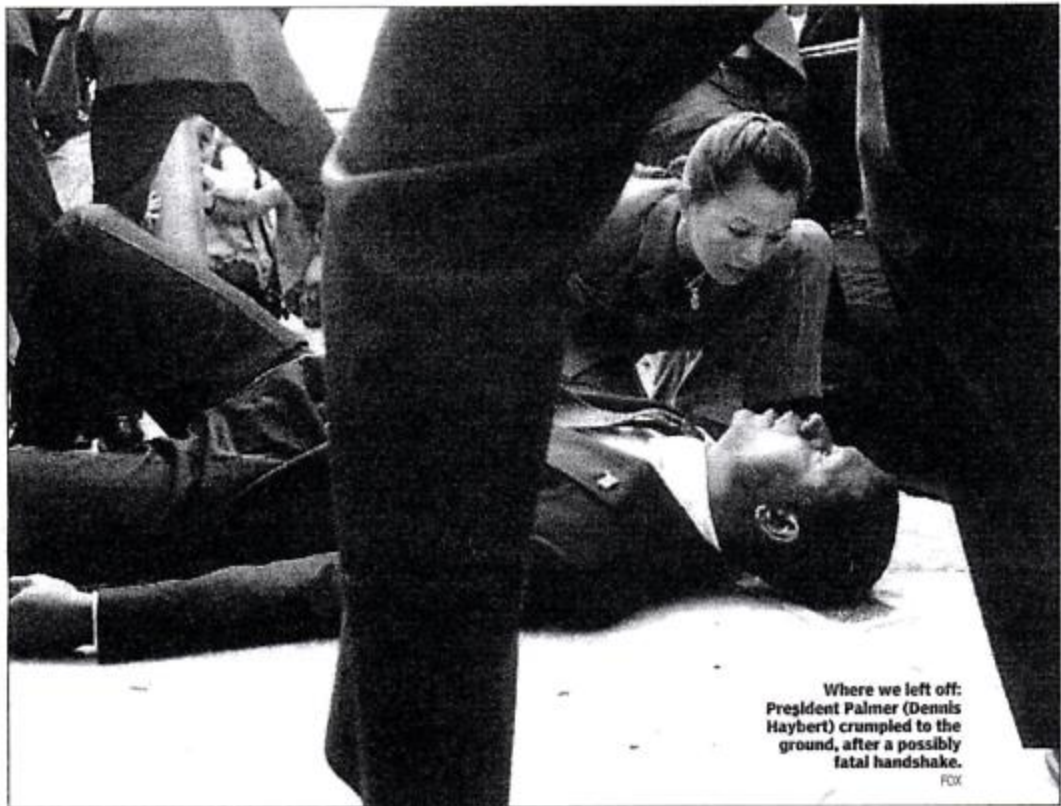


● REALLY BIG SHOW

'24' Marathon

The suspense is a killer



Where we left off: President Palmer (Dennis Haybert) crumpled to the ground, after a possibly fatal handshake.

FOX

By Michael Giltz

FINALLY, a marathon of the second season of "24" on FX will give fans of the cliffhanger series an idea of what it's like to be Jack Bauer (Kiefer Sutherland) for a day. The Fox show breaks down federal agent Bauer's hellish days into 24 one-hour segments that take place in real time. Now, anyone with a lot of coffee can endure the same nightmare of a nuclear threat in Los Angeles right along with star Sutherland, Dennis Haybert (who plays President Palmer) and the rest of the cast. Here are 10 reasons why you should catch up with one of the best shows on television.

1. It always pushes the envelope. Co-creator Joel Surnow admits "24" really wows the suits at Fox. "The network liked the very first episode when Kiefer just shoots and kills a guy in cold blood," he laughs. "That's something you couldn't have done on television even four or five years ago."

2. You won't go crazy waiting a week to find out what happens next. The marathon's back-to-back episodes will satisfy viewers' frustration with the series' penchant for twist endings. Says Surnow, "We modeled ourselves a bit on 'The Twilight Zone,' when there would be some outrageous moment in the last act and you'd go, 'Holy cow.'"

3. Dramatic payoffs are huge. When "24" introduces a nuclear bomb, it's not

just to provide a scary threat that will never really materialize. In episode 15, the damned thing actually goes off.

4. The series is just as sophisticated as many movies. "The production values are much greater than most indie films," says Kiefer Sutherland. "In fact, I don't think I've ever worked on a film that carried three full camera units, which '24' does."

5. "24" has great villains. For example, Penny Johnson Jerald as Sherry Palmer, the President's estranged and stupendously duplicitous wife. "We didn't know her character was going to go the way it was," says Surnow. "But we started giving her things and she just really wowed us with it. We pushed a character and she really kept it really wonderful."

6. Watching the marathon is cheaper than buying the DVDs. "The DVD sales of '24' have been phenomenal and I think it really fed into our viewership for the second season," says Surnow. "And we're hoping the second season DVD set [due out September 9th] helps us with the third and allows the show to keep growing."

7. '24' provides great lessons in office politics. CTU, the counterterrorist unit Jack Bauer nominally works for when he isn't acting on his own rogue instincts, has one of the most poisonous atmospheres imaginable. Not one employee trusts another and if someone gets in

someone else's way, they'll beat them up, draw a gun or dope them with drugs — if simple backstabbing doesn't work.

8. You can laugh at the crazy escapades of Jack Bauer's daughter, Kim. "We had to shoehorn her story in," confesses Surnow when asked about the increasingly frantic attempts to keep Jack Bauer's daughter in mortal danger. Next season (which takes place some three years later), that problem is reportedly solved by having Kim officially join the CTU.

9. The torture scene. The jaw-dropping moment in episode 12 when Jack threatens to kill a suspected terrorist's wife and sons unless the man divulges where a nuclear bomb is located was one of the most gripping moments on TV last season. "I thought that was the ultimate statement of what you have to do in order to stop something so horrible," says Surnow. "It turned out to be much more timely than when we first sat and discussed the ideas for it."

10. "24" frequently ends with a bang. Season One ended with a real shocker — the brutal death of a central character: Jack Bauer's wife. That proved you couldn't assume that anyone was "untouchable." Season Two concludes with a twist just as dramatic — and leaves you panting for the third season to begin.

24 Marathon
Sunday, Starting at midnight, FX