



AWARDS

The Emmys honor the big moments. We call out the smaller, more distinctive scenes.



(George Wylesol/For The Times)

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In 2020, we were locked in our homes, afraid of the pandemic just outside, and we needed some serious escape. Thankfully, TV offered more options than we knew what to do with. So as the Television Academy undertakes the massive effort to figure out

which traditional categories deserve recognition, our job was a bit more particular: to single out the deserving, underappreciated aspects of what our small screens had to offer. Here, then, we present the 2021 Envy Awards!

Method acting with a prop

Jean Smart

Smart needs no inanimate objects to rivet us to the screen, but she continues to wow us with her unusual prop manipulation. Back in 2019, we were left reeling from the blue sex toy she revealed in “Watchmen,” but more recently she replaced an entire CO2 soda canister in “Hacks” — mid-monologue — and racked up *beaucoup* points in Fruit Ninja on her iPad in “Mare of Easttown” while dispensing motherly advice. Chef kisses to you, Ms. Smart. (And a hat tip to NPR’s Glen Weldon for noticing this talent.)

Greatest deployment of flash-forward

“Superstore”

With so many series either failing to stick the landing or hedging their bets in the hopes of a sequel, it was a refreshing change to learn (by way of flash-forward, a la “Six Feet Under” and “Animal House”) where Cloud 9’s Store 1217 gang ended up. And we even got a parting image of Myrtle, R.I.P.)

Questionable use of streaming standards and practices

“The Boys”

In a year where we were treated (ahem) to gouged-out eyeballs (“Utopia”) and dribbling poisoned babies discovered in a drawer (“The Alienist”), “Boys” triumphed over them all, showing us Kimiko ripping off much of a villain’s *face* as if it was plastic wrap on a salad bowl. All amid an ongoing mystery about exploding heads. Yipes!

Unnecessary red-herring alert award

“Mare of Easttown”

Easttown turned out to be the little burg that could ... kill anyone at any time. Packed with angry residents and malcontents who were barely kept in check by the also troubled detective, Mare, we have now routed our summer car trips to bypass Pennsylvania altogether. Knowing that, was it necessary to throw in a moment when it appeared that 4-year-old Drew had drowned in a bathtub while his exhausted, recently out-of-rehab mama slept inches away? Of course, he didn't drown, he was just holding his breath, but *come on*, like we needed yet another punch to the heart?

Most welcome baby announcement

“The Mandalorian”

Babies had it rough this past year — see “The Alienist” and its poisoned tot, or Astrid, a doll poorly subbing in for a baby on “Bull” or a baby with its eyelids stitched open on “Perry Mason.” Fortunately, we had Baby Yoda's slightly more life-affirming tale: This past season, he got a name (Grogu!) and the start of a little backstory that hinted maybe he's not so much of a baby after all.

The “Not Dead Yet” Monty Python homage prize

Tie: “This Is Us,” “Grey’s Anatomy”

Any given year may feature characters who we thought were gone for good but insist on resurfacing (and we're not counting “The Walking Dead”), but this year it was helpful to learn that life goes on wherever possible. Enter “This Is Us,” who revealed that Randall's biological mother had *not* died shortly after his birth as he was told, and “Grey's Anatomy,” which found a way to bring back two characters who really, most sincerely were dead: Derek and George. Though in that case, they were part of ailing Meredith's McDreamy memories.

Near-reverse Darth Vader reveal award

“The Blacklist”

Because “The Blacklist’s” gonna “Blacklist,” we’re *still* not 100% sure of the true identity of Red Reddington (the living one). But the show has given us every indication that the character James Spader has been playing for eight seasons is not actually Keen’s father ... but her *mother*, having undergone extensive surgery to hide from various governmental and shadow organizations to avoid being killed. For that alone, it deserves an award — though we are 100% sure not everyone’s gonna be happy if there’s ever a definitive gender-flip reveal.

Most unintentionally appropriate symbol of 2020

The 72nd Primetime Emmy Awards

Last year’s biggest night in TV kicked off with Jennifer Aniston and Jimmy Kimmel doing a bit on disinfecting the envelope announcing the winners, but that involved setting it on fire. And that’s when things got out of control because it kept burning and burning even after Aniston attacked it with a fire extinguisher. Then the trash can was on fire and ... yeah, there you go: a literal dumpster fire, on live TV. Is there anyone who isn’t thrilled to see 2020 in the rearview mirror?

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