

ALTERNATIVE

By Dr Oh Jen Jen

Following my piece, "Resuscitating a Genre Stuck in Cardiac Arrest", about the disappearance of great medical TV series in the October 2012 issue of *SMA News* (<http://goo.gl/hhlgwg>), I am happy to report that in recent months, circumstances have somewhat improved. These intriguing TV doctor characters do not wear scrubs or carry stethoscopes, but I thoroughly enjoy living vicariously through their fascinating exploits. Read on, and perhaps you will too.

Dr Joan Watson from *Elementary*

This American spin on the very British *Sherlock Holmes* novels features not only a woman in the sidekick role, but a Chinese one at that. Don't ask me to explain why someone who looks like Lucy Liu has an *angmoh* name, or how anyone with half a brain will buy a storyline about an accomplished surgeon giving up her career to become a sober companion.

However, such ludicrous details fade into the background because – admit it – we all secretly hope to chuck our jobs if something more stimulating comes along.

For me, not many things trump working with the legendary, brilliant Sherlock Holmes, especially one who looks like Jonny Lee Miller. Holmes' superior mind has zero patience for ignorance, and Watson's powerful intellect proves instrumental in solving a number of perplexing crimes. Before long, their yin-and-yang partnership becomes indispensable even to the great detective, and he takes her under his wing as an apprentice.

Watch her learn how to pick locks and interrogate suspects like a pro! She also displays admirable gut instincts by disproving seemingly airtight alibis. The only disadvantage to this otherwise ideal arrangement: Sherlock doesn't pay her a single dime. *Tsk tsk!* We shall see how long she lasts before complaining.

Captain Homer Jackson from *Ripper Street*

This fast-paced crime series, about a police division in late 19th-century London district Whitechapel, showcases Forensic Pathology in a primitive form. Captain Homer Jackson (played by a terrific Adam Rothenberg) is an ex-US army surgeon who flees his home country under dodgy circumstances, becoming a consultant for London's H Division.

In his free time, Jackson revels in women, booze and gambling. He also resides at a Whitechapel brothel, which proves convenient when detectives need to locate him urgently.

Jackson's expertise has helped nab serial killers, uncover a mass poisoning spree and expose heinous conspiracies. But nothing beats seeing him elbow deep in blood, sans gloves, whenever he performs an autopsy (occasionally on a filthy jail cell floor). I know it's fake, but hats off to the special effects team for making these gruesome scenes look unnervingly real.

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EDUCINE



Dr Hannibal Lecter from *Hannibal*

Adapting Thomas Harris' bestselling novels into a TV series may seem like a no-brainer, yet it took 20 years for the idea to come to fruition.

Undoubtedly this year's most anticipated new show, it features Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agent, Will Graham (Hugh Dancy), a gifted criminal profiler whose ability to think like the predators he hunts pushes him to the brink of insanity.

Enter Dr Hannibal Lecter (Mads Mikkelsen) – a renowned psychiatrist whom the FBI engages to treat Graham's tormented psyche. The premise is especially enticing since viewers are fully aware of Lecter's homicidal streak, but the series' prequel format provides a cloak of ambiguity as the plot slowly unravels.

The *Hannibal* films rarely dwelled on Lecter's clinical practice, but this series offers a much more intimate experience. We visit his impeccably decorated office and observe his therapy sessions. We're also privy to his various misdeeds, which will progressively escalate throughout the series. Ironically enough, a teenager recognises Lecter's true nature, while the FBI – including Graham – remains blissfully oblivious.

Personally, I find Lecter's medical background fascinating, considering his status as one of crime fiction's most notorious serial killers. How does a brilliant doctor commit such horrific crimes without remorse? Will we learn why he became a monster? (Hopefully, Harris' laughable *Hannibal Rising* will not be used as source material.) When will poor agent Graham realise that Lecter is really the one who needs therapy?

Producers have indicated plans for a five-season run, so I suggest you start watching.

Meanwhile, stay tuned for Alternative Medicine Part 2! **SMA**



Hannibal currently airs every Saturday at 10.55 pm and Sunday at 5 pm on StarHub TV's Channels 511 (AXN) and 559 (AXN HD). *Elementary* and *Ripper Street* are available online, and may be screened on local cable TV in the near future. All information is accurate at the time of printing.



Dr Oh Jen Jen is a consultant at the Department of Emergency Medicine, Singapore General Hospital. When not battling endless patient queues at the hospital, she spends way too much time in front of the TV. An avid blogger since 2002, she also hopes to write a screenplay or novel someday – if she manages to survive her three-monthly episodes of job burnout.