



A Guided Tour of Mad Men: The Second Season

Ron Replogle

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You probably wouldn't be reading these words if you hadn't already discovered Mad Men's many virtues for yourself. Why, then, do you need this little e-book of Mad Men commentary?

Imagine what you'd get out of a serviceable guidebook you picked up in the middle of your first trip to Paris. You wouldn't already be there if you needed a book to tell you that the Eiffel Tower is worth seeing. If it's a decent guidebook, however, you might pore over it that night in your hotel room anyway because it deepens your appreciation of sights you've already seen and promises to make you a more discerning sightseer tomorrow. The reading experience might even be enjoyable in its own right if it evokes any of the pleasure of seeing pleasurable things for yourself.

Think of this e-book—the second in a series devoted to each Mad Men season—as a guided tour of the second season of a television series that, like Paris, presents you with more than you can take in on a single visit. In what follows, you'll find thirteen short essays, each one devoted to a separate episode.

Mad Men aspires to tell a story as wide in scope and as rich in dramatic detail as you might find in a sprawling novel. At its core, it's the story of Don Draper. As the Creative Director of a 1960s Madison Avenue advertising agency, he's in the business of turning articles of commerce into objects of mass fantasy. But his most fantastic creation is himself, or rather, that incarnation of himself that goes by the name of "Don Draper."

He used to be "Dick Whitman," the illegitimate son of a dissolute dirt farmer. Through a combination of fortuitous circumstance, native talent and outsized ambition, he managed to transform himself into a high-flying advertising executive with another man's name, a dark secret and a trophy wife who married him without knowing a thing about his past.

I'll leave it to you to decide whether that's the story of an imposter concealing himself or of someone becoming himself. In either case, we've all told other people, and ourselves, enough stories about who we really are to see something of ourselves in Don Draper.

You can usually plow through even a very long novel quickly enough to keep the pertinent details revealed in earlier chapters fresh in your mind while you digest later ones. If your memory falters or your perspective shifts you can always flip back over the pages you've already read as a prelude to tackling those you haven't.

Mad Men comes at you in the form of weekly episodes, grouped into seasonal packages of thirteen spaced across a currently projected seven television seasons at intervals ranging, so far, from eight to eighteen months. As a result, you can't appreciate the nuances of its storytelling without having either a photographic memory or the leisure periodically to review all of the past seasons in preparation for the next one.

Who has that good a memory or that much time? This e-book is designed to simulate the experience of flipping back over Mad Men's pages so that you can savor the pages to come.

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