



**MANIPULATED, BUT WE LOVE IT:** There's nothing real in Georgie Parker's and Paul Tassone's *All Saints* fantasy, but it's good enough to rate over reality.

# Drama strikes back

**N**OT TOO long ago – just last year, in fact – drama was a dirty word in the television world. Forget the soaps and stories we'd had for years, reality TV, we were told, was the way of the future.

Dropping a bunch of ordinary people in front of the cameras was cheaper to make, easier to produce and far more interesting to watch than any old drama series.

And so convinced were the powers behind the cameras that funds poured into a plethora of reality projects, while dramas failed.

*My Restaurant Rules*, *The HotHouse* and a new season of *The Block* were green-lighted while dramas such as *Always Greener*, *Young Lions*, *Marshall Law* and *White Collar Blue* were axed. But now, much to the horror of all concerned, the trend appears to have quickly reversed.

The new reality shows are, at best, proving slow to win audiences, while the surviving dramas continue to rate.

Two weeks ago, for example, when Channel

Seven's much-touted reality program *My Restaurant Rules* debuted, it attracted a national average audience of just 860,000 viewers.

Three nights later, when *All Saints* returned for the year, it managed a more respectable average of 1.3 million.

Nobody, least of all those in the industry, are exactly sure what happened, but a strong guess from those who make drama is that reality might be, well, too much like real life.

"With a drama, we can manipulate," said John Holmes, Seven's head of drama and executive producer of *Home And Away* and *All Saints*.

"We can actually create a world and then we can control that world. We give them births, marriages, deaths, the whole gamut and we have total control over that in the way we tell our stories."

For example, last year in *All Saints*, series star Georgie Parker's character suddenly found herself alone when the great love of her life died. Weeks later, she was cowering in the corridors as a madman

with a gun ran riot, shooting away at one and all.

Even in their wildest dreams, reality producers can't inject that level of emotion.

Later this year, when *Home And Away* again competes with *Big Brother*, Holmes could, if he wanted, send a tidal wave crashing through Summer Bay all in the name of keeping things interesting.

"You've seen the storylines!" he said. "But really, why not?"

"With *Blue Heelers* it was

They're quite aberrant incidents and that's why people like them," Wild said.

Even more interesting than drama's resurgence against reality, he added, was the way reality TV was copying drama.

"If you look at the reality shows that work, they have good drama within them," Holmes said. "Drama is the backbone of all good storytelling."

Even the production techniques were leaning

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the Maggie/PJ story, which no one would have guessed would reach the heights it did when the show started.

"I guess that's where you're restricted in the reality area – you have to work with those characters as they are."

*Stingers* producer John Wild agreed, saying that sticking with real life often just wasn't that interesting.

"All our episodes are based on truth, but it's heightened.

toward drama, Wild said.

"It's interesting that a lot of the lifestyle/reality shows have adopted drama techniques such as diverse interesting characters, throwing them into conflict and contriving good cliffhangers at the end of episodes," he said. "It's part of the game I suppose."

***All Saints*, Channel Seven, Tuesday, 8.30pm. *Stingers* returns to Channel Nine next week.**