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I chose 'Battlestar Galactica' over a boyfriend

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By Maya Rock

My last tortured breakup led to two things: television and online dating. The painful end to the long-term relationship led me first to the glory of take-out and then to television, culminating in renting DVDs of the Syfy show "Battlestar Galactica."

At the same time, I became an online dating veteran. For two years, I went on countless first dates and a handful leading to a second, none leading to romance. I shed no tears about these strike-outs, having already found plenty of substitutes for men. Little did I know then that watching "Battlestar Galactica" would, in part, spell the end of my attempts to find love.

Riveting plot aside, the men on "Battlestar Galactica" make for distracting eye candy – they're handsome in a traditional, firm-jawed sort of way, athletic (to escape outer space enemies) and driven (to survive their frequent outer space peril.) The women are equally attractive, and all the characters are constantly thrust into thrilling, high-stakes situations. What's not to love? I began pushing this show on my friends, determined to bring them into my new world. For me, there was no higher paradise than sitting on my floor, eating Ethiopian take-out, and watching my characters go through their torrid emotional ups and downs (while I, coincidentally, experienced none).

Sated by TV, happily singleI met the man who would be my final online date on a Friday night, that is, a "Battlestar Galactica night." Gerald and I had arranged to meet at a hip downtown Manhattan coffee shop, where the atmosphere was hectic and the lighting dim. I arrived first, bought a coffee and settled in to daydream about ensconcing myself afterwards in the messy apartment of my friend, Brianna, an intense "Battlestar" fan. She'd turn the volume high and together we'd let ourselves become enthralled. Gerald came in to the coffee shop while I was wondering if I'd see Starbuck and Lee – my star-crossed lovers on "Battlestar" – brush arms on that night's episode.

Gerald was OK, I decided immediately. He smiled and was not unattractive. This was high praise for someone I met via the Internet. I knew we had the right chemistry for a painless date. I tried not to judge his beverage selection – a frothy-looking mochachino. There was so much automatic judging on online dates.

"You don't drink coffee?" I asked.

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"Even though you're in law school?" I asked. "I mean, coffee's a serious necessity, right?"

We discussed law school, his soon-due term paper, my current position in book publishing. And, of course, I could not help but nudge him in the direction of "Battlestar Galactica." He indulged my lavish praise. He knew the love of series television, though these days, he didn't have much time to keep track of a show. I felt buoyed and intrigued by our conversation, willing to overlook his love of "Lost" which, to me, seemed like a vanilla version of "Battlestar." We walked out of the coffee shop together, and he asked for my number. I was grateful we seemed to be on the same page. Another date? Sure. While I wasn't head over heels, our conversation had been pleasant with few awkward pauses.

Gerald called the day after our date but left no callback number. Weeks passed without another word. My Friday get-togethers with Brianna to watch "Battlestar" grew in scope. We incorporated other friends into our meetings, brought more food and eagerly speculated about how the show would resolve. These laid-back gatherings where we shared details about our outside-"Battlestar" lives were easily the highlight of my life that winter.

I didn't spend much time worrying about what had happened to Gerald. Lately it seemed like the space in my head that had been reserved for worrying about true love was shrinking. I wanted a boyfriend – at least I thought I did. Didn't I? With the companionship of friends and TV, I was sincerely losing track of what I needed a man for. I hadn't checked my online profile in weeks. I hadn't replaced Gerald with any romantic interest, online or off; I just wanted time to myself.

Was I taking this "happily single" thing too far? When a friend asked what had happened to this promising date, I tried to remember and explain. I mentioned that I had told Gerald I was "busy." My friend reminded me what a bomb this was in conversation. Everyone was busy. It was a code word for not wanting to deal with something. Had I inadvertently scared Gerald off?

I decided to re-contact him. What if I was blowing off the chance for true love? "Battlestar" was charging toward its end – maybe it was a good time for a new beginning in my love life.

He's got nothing on Helo Gerald and I met for a second time at a well-lit café. The brazen lights of reality, I thought, revealing his slightly geeky face. I chugged down my sweet chai and we exchanged measly vacation anecdotes. Again, I was struck by his warm smile. But there was something different. In the time since I'd last seen Gerald, I'd submerged myself happily into a life of non-dating, and, when I met him again I recognized that a "normal" interaction, while great and unexpected for two strangers meeting, was not enough for a romantic relationship. The best I could hope for with someone like Gerald was a friendship, like that between Helo and Starbuck.

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When the café closed a half an hour after we met, I was half-hoping he'd take advantage of this natural ending point and call an end to our date. We settled on walking some blocks, despite the cold. I found myself desperately searching for topics. After having wrung dry the subject of his summer internship, he turned it back to my old standby, "Battlestar Galactica."

"It's going really really well," I gushed. "There's just so much they have to wrap up though in the final few episodes. I don't know how they're going to do it. You really should watch it, what's your excuse?"

He hemmed and hawed about being wrapped in law studies and "Lost." I was relieved when he declared his intention, in the quiet voice that was beginning to grate on me, to go into the subway. We lingered above the entrance. He came toward me with his hand stretched out. I stretched out my arms for a hug. I noticed as I moved forward that his lips were coming toward me. A cheek kisser, I guessed. New York is full of them.

I was shocked when his lips landed half on mine. I sprung back, giggled nervously and chanted, "Whoa, whoa."

"Whoa, whoa?" He imitated, that same damn grin on his face.

He started descending the steps. "Well, we'll do it again sometime?"

Never, I thought. I knew from my reaction to the kiss that a romantic future with Gerald was impossible. The fact that he thought it was the right time for a kiss convinced me not to pursue a friendship either.

I walked home, on the phone with a friend immediately, recounting the details of the mortifying experience. I could still feel the fishy texture of his lips against mine. This had been the closest I'd gotten to a kiss in over a year. I realized I was not regretting my previous kissless existence at all. I felt embarrassed for Gerald, that he had misread my feelings so entirely. And I was annoyed with myself for letting things progress so far, for showing up and sitting down, and again not finding it in my heart to open up.

The embarrassment truly bloomed a day and a half later when Gerald actually wrote me. His email was short and simple, asking how "Battlestar Galactica" had gone. I knew the right thing to do – not respond. I thought back briefly to my last gathering at Brianna's, the night before, when I'd munched on pita chips and we'd made fun of Gerald's missed kiss. Nights with my friends, in mutual admiration of the show we adored, these were the things that were filling that empty love life space in my head.

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at least for now.

I'm taking tips from "Battlestar." Many of the characters, haunted by dreams, signs and symbols, wondered if there was any meaning to the strangeness in their lives. In the end, they couldn't solve it all, and, indeed the show's producers left many questions unanswered. But in the end, it's easier to let life flow and trust that those answers, like true love, will come when you need them.



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