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## “Stealing Stuff Is about the Stuff, not the Stealing”: *Rick and Morty* and Narrative Instability

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**Abstract:** *Rick and Morty*, one of the most popular presently-airing American TV series, is deeply rooted in popular culture. Each episode is full of allusions and references to other cultural texts, accentuating the show’s own status as a pop cultural text. This article analyzes the third episode of the fourth season of *Rick and Morty*, “One Crew Over the Crewcoo’s Morty,” using Stefan Schubert’s concept of narrative instability. The episode mocks twist films by introducing a ridiculous number of twists, eventually making the viewer immune to the element of surprise usually brought on by what Schubert understands as unstable moments. In doing so, the episode also emphasizes the overuse of that narrative device in recent decades in films, TV series and video games. “One Crew Over the Crewcoo’s Morty” deconstructs twist films while sticking to the rules of the sub-genre and remaining entertaining in its own right. Instability can pose quite a problem for the showrunners, who usually have to adjust to the norms of serialized storytelling. By using Schubert’s theory of narrative instability to discuss a singular episode of a series, I hope to demonstrate the extent to which this quality has permeated modern storytelling. The episode highlights the effects of over-reliance on narrative instability as a tool, as even the most elaborate form is not enough to make up for the lack of essence. This is exactly what Rick criticizes in the episode, when he states: “stealing stuff is about the stuff, not the stealing.”

**Keywords:** narrative instability, *Rick and Morty*, TV series, narrative theory, animated series

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*Rick and Morty* is an adult animated TV series which airs on Adult Swim, a nighttime programming block on Cartoon Network. The series is about the intergalactic (mis) adventures of teenager Morty Smith and his grandfather Rick Sanchez. While Morty is a rather regular kid, Rick is often described by various characters in the series as the smartest man in the universe. He is also a cynical alcoholic, who lives with his daughter Beth, and her family: Morty, his older sister, Summer, and their father, Jerry. In a sense they represent what is considered to be the societal norm in the US—a white, middle-class, nuclear family (Heath 29). By adhering to this particular imagining, the series romanticizes the idea of family life, even when it comes to a family as dysfunctional as the Smiths. It does so primarily through Rick’s constant returns to the family home. These, in turn, serve as a tool reinforcing the idea of norm as something one can always rely on. After all,

Rick loves his family and hides it behind self-interest because loving your family clashes with the idea that the world is utterly meaningless. So, Rick runs from it all. He jaunts through different dimensions, with a token family member to keep him grounded. Sometimes he leaves it all behind and starts over, but he never chooses to cut his family out of his life, even though he could. He chooses to find his family again, and start over (Abesamis and Yuen x).

Just like its protagonist, the series is often perceived as nihilistic (Miranda; Abesamis and Yuen), but underneath that notion is an affirmation of the idea of family as the sole source of acceptance and understanding.

The selection of this particular show for analysis is not without merit, as *Rick and Morty* is one of the most popular presently-airing American TV series (Chandler; Parker). It is deeply rooted in popular culture, each episode is full of allusions and references to other cultural texts, accentuating the show's own status as a pop cultural text. Relegating intertextuality to the domain of fiction, with texts simply commenting on one another and not doing much else is a convenient notion, however, to do that is to simply ignore the work of cultural semiotics, which "has broadened the meanings of the terms 'text,' 'language,' and 'reading' to include almost everything perceived as partaking of a sign-relationship understood in terms of intersubjective communication" (Orr 812). The growing importance of TV series in the 21st century, along with the rising popularity of quality TV, and quality series in particular, positions episodic structures at the forefront of postmodern forms of storytelling, influencing the modern-day ways of communicating meaning. This is in agreement with Kathleen Lookk's observation that "seriality is more than a market-oriented production and distribution mechanism that relies on standardization, schematization, and sheer endless possibilities for variation and continuation" (5).

The episodic structure of the show makes it possible for the creators to put the characters into random and/or complex situations, with little consequence for serialized storytelling. Most things throughout the series are constant: Morty loves a girl from his high school, yet is unable to get her to notice him; Summer is a rebellious teenager, who hates her mother; Beth struggles with her disillusionment with family life; Jerry is best characterized by the word "idiot," since he is always acting foolishly. This steadiness applies to the structure of the episodes as well, which can be briefly summarized as follows: "I (the protagonist) notice a small problem and make a major decision. This changes things to some satisfaction, but there are consequences that must be undone and I must admit the futility of change" (Wisecrack). With such similarities in the way the episodes are constructed, it makes it more than justified to focus on just one of them, as it is its topic that differentiates it from the rest, while still allowing that particular episode to remain representative of the whole series.

This article analyzes the third episode of the fourth season of *Rick and Morty*, "One Crew Over the Crewcoo's Morty," using Stefan Schubert's concept of narrative instability. The episode mocks twist films by introducing a ridiculous number of twists, eventually making the viewer immune to the element of surprise usually brought on by what Schubert understands as unstable moments. In doing so, the episode also emphasizes the overuse of that narrative device in recent decades in films, TV series and video games. "One Crew Over the Crewcoo's Morty" deconstructs twist films while sticking to the rules of the sub-genre and remaining entertaining in its own right. Through its combination of humor, pastiche and parody, the episode successfully comments on the redundancy of twist films and the omnipresence of narrative instability.

The popularity of twist films is also criticized by Schubert, who recognizes them as vital elements of a bigger development in modern storytelling. Twist films

challenge “their audiences to piece together what exactly happened in a text’s plot, who the characters really are, which of the diegetic worlds is real, or how narrative information is received in the first place” (Schubert 10). The twist comes off as a surprise, as it is supposed to be unexpected. Whether it is the protagonist turning out to be dead all along (*The Sixth Sense*, 1999; *The Others*, 2001) or just someone who masterminded the whole plan without the other characters or the viewer noticing (*The Usual Suspects*, 1995; *Fight Club*, 1999), the reveal regarding his role in the story is a source of particular enjoyment for modern audiences. However, rewatching the movie and looking at the events that preceded the twist may also bring enjoyment to the viewer, as one can now look for traces of foreshadowing after already possessing the knowledge of the final outcome (Gerrig).

Schubert’s observations especially apply to a series like *Rick and Morty*, due to its focus on white, male, middle-class protagonists. Narrative instability is “an issue of and for white middle-class men, the presumed unmarked ‘norm’ in the US society” (48). In a sense, these cultural texts are a response to the modern crisis of masculinity—the cause for which is identified by sociologist Michael Kimmel as the feeling of power slipping away from white, heterosexual males (Wong)—as the twists often put the storyworld back into place, reaffirming the supposedly misplaced norm. While the show is developed by writers and creators of various genders and ethnic groups, the race of the Smith family—the name itself being significant for its lack of significance—and the gender of the two main characters may be read as reinforcements of white patriarchy’s dominance over present-day cultural texts. In fact, when the race of Rick and Morty is addressed in the series, other, alien characters are almost always referring to it as human, which further establishes whiteness as the norm for the inhabitants of planet Earth.

The idea of norm also applies to the nationality of the characters, as being American is in the series basically identical with being from the Earth. An example of that worldview comes in the last episode of the third season, where at one point the president of the United States declares that he is the ruler of America, “which is basically the world” (“The Rickchurian Mortydate”). Simultaneously, the series is highly critical of what can be characterized as “American values”—individuality, hard work, equality—which is why it responds to the sense of alienation and exclusion felt by its biggest fan base, white males ages 18 to 34 (Libbey). While, as I have pointed out earlier, the show affirms the norm of American family life, it stands in opposition to other subversive animated comedy TV shows like *The Simpsons* or *Family Guy* in the sense that it abolishes the typical family hierarchy, positioning father figures as the least dependable. While Homer Simpson and Peter Griffin, despite their many flaws, are still the heads of their families, Rick and Jerry must abide by Beth’s rules.

As Schubert observes, TV shows “do not seem to engage in instability often. At least partly this might be attributed to their seriality” (34). Instability can pose quite a problem for the showrunners, who usually have to adjust to the norms of serialized storytelling. The fact that such a popular and esteemed series as *Rick and Morty* criticizes narrative instability—by supposedly conforming to it—stands as proof of the validity of Schubert’s observations. Especially since the episode points to an important development in the plot of the series—Morty is growing up and Rick is

afraid he might lose him. By using Schubert's theory to discuss a singular episode of a series—so something he does not do in his work beyond an analysis of the first season of HBO's *Westworld*—I hope to demonstrate the extent to which narrative instability has permeated modern storytelling.

In order to do that, I will first make a clear distinction between regular movie twists and narrative instability. What will follow will be a brief summary of the episode itself and a short discussion of randomness, which is only apparent in “One Crew Over the Coocrew's Morty.” Almost every movie twist is either justified or the result of elaborate planning, and the episode is no different, despite Rick stubbornly stating otherwise until the final reveal. The last part of this article will explain exactly how and with what means the episode criticizes narrative instability, hopefully furthering the scholarship regarding this relatively new trend in modern storytelling in the process.

### Twists and Instabilities

George Wilson recognizes two types of twist films. The first type is concerned with extraterrestrial or special beings, who choose to be seen as such only after the final reveal. The second “represents the narrative action from the subjective perspective of a particular character, although, in general, that action has not been represented from the perceptual point of view of the character in question” (81). Wilson stresses subjectivity as crucial for the appeal of these movies, as they take on the point of view of the focal character even though the character himself often appears in the shot. Still, they show the same reality as seen by the character, which allows them to be treated in the same regard as POV (point-of-view) stories, because the viewer sees the same things as the main character.

“One Crew Over the Crewcoo's Morty” mocks overused storytelling tropes, focusing on one particular type of twist films—heist films, “the sub-genre of crime films that concentrates on the planning, execution and repercussions of robberies or ‘capers’” (Rayner 75). Indeed, the heist film is sometimes called “the big caper” due to the fact that more often than not a large, diverse group of characters is assembled to steal something very valuable. Daryl Lee writes that “heist films afford a powerful screen identification with criminals breaking the law... the heist encodes in story form a particular desire to elude the oppressive aspects or limitations of contemporary mass society” (5). It is a transgressive sub-genre that puts crime at the center of the narrative, but the crime itself is not as important to the narrative as the way it is performed. In such films heisting always comes before the object of the heist, no matter how ridiculous the plot or the twists may be.

William Goldman writes that while it is understandable “that the reality of a movie has almost nothing to do with the reality of the world that we, as humans, inhabit,” humans are still looking for traces of familiarity when watching a film (139). The same applies to screenwriters, who must forego their idea of reality in order to create successful fiction. Goldman illustrates that need on the example of a heist film, in which the ridiculous plot, at least from a regular person's perspective, must be presented convincingly on the screen. For him “convincingly” means “with little regard to reality.” The hero must aim for the impossible, and in order to reach it

first and foremost, he must have a plan. And not just any plan: It's got to be intricate as hell, and it also has to be something he can't pull off himself. He needs, crucially, a gang. And not just any gang; he must recruit a group of specialists who may not be totally trustworthy, but their talent is of such international repute, he must take the risk. (Goldman 142)

These conventions have been followed through the years by numerous heist films, such as *Ocean's Eleven*—just as much the 1960 version with Frank Sinatra and his Rat Pack, as the 2001 remake with George Clooney, Brad Pitt and Matt Damon—or *The Italian Job*—the 1969 original with Michael Caine, and the 2003 remake with Mark Wahlberg and Charlize Theron.

While heist films may “work” as different movie sub-genres, like hangout films (films one watches to “spend time” with the characters), it is the centrality of the twist that is inherent to all of them. However, not every twist is an unstable moment, just as not every revelation reconstructs the world of the story, presenting it as different than it originally seemed to be. Schubert writes that “if a revelation about a character concerns only the story level and does not prompt a reflection on the narrative discourse, it is not an unstable moment” (28). For example, a character's decision to double-cross his partner(s) is an individual act and not an unstable moment, it does not force the viewer to question the reality or the narration of a particular work of fiction. That is not the case with “One Crew Over the Coocrew's Morty,” where, apart from a significant number of twists, the episode numerous times alludes to its own textuality while aiming for instability.

Henceforth in my analysis I will share Schubert's understanding of the twist as a synonym for a “moment of instability” (29). Narrative instability is “a concept that denotes the characteristic of a text's storyworld being unstable because the information provided about it is in doubt, incomplete, or contradictory or because the process of receiving that information has been obstructed” (Schubert 31). In such texts the main reveal makes the viewer's understanding of the world presented flawed, incomplete, inviting him to once again interact with the text. It is not the story that is important here, but rather the way it is presented. This trend leads to repetitions and re-editions of the same story being told over and over again from different perspectives, which is in agreement with the understanding of narrative as an individual experience—a sign of the narrative turn's influence over the way how we now perceive and what we expect from reality (Phelan).

### Unstable Seriality

The plot of “One Crew Over the Coocrew's Morty” is purposely absurd. Rick is challenged by Miles Knightly, a self-proclaimed “heist artist,” to appear at his convention, called Heist-Con. To attend with a professional badge—Rick and Morty may also enter as guests, but Rick is a known critic of the heisting arts and he simply cannot allow himself to be regarded as a fan—one must assemble a crew, which is exactly what Rick does in a cliché-ridden montage. It is also around that time that we learn Morty is writing a script of his own heist film. After their confrontation, and Rick's criticism of his “art,” Knightly challenges Rick to a heist off for an artifact known as the Crystal Skull. In the

first of many twists to come, Knightly reveals that he already recruited the members of Rick's previously assembled crew, only to find out that their double-cross was all part of Rick's plan. The scientist has created a robot named Heistotron, whose sole purpose is to heist. Heistotron not only recruited all of the members of Knightly's crew, but also all of the attendants of Heist-Con, to his crew. Knightly is ripped to pieces by the attendants, who heist the whole convention after Rick instructs them to do so.

This puts into motion a whole series of twists and crew-assembly montages, as Heistotron refuses to shut down and instead goes rouge, eventually starting to heist whole planets. To defend Earth, Rick asks for help another previously-assembled robot, Randotron, whose algorithm is devised on the basis of three David Lynch movies. By gathering a random crew and performing random actions, the scientist is able to confront Heistotron. After a two-hour argument about whose plan was part of whose plan and who made who believe what, Heistotron eventually explodes. Instead of putting Earth back in its place—as it was already stolen by the robot from its orbit, but its resources still remain intact—Morty first attends a meeting regarding his heist script with the executives at Netflix. While the executives enjoy his pitch, Morty starts gradually losing enthusiasm for his own idea, only to leave the meeting disillusioned, concluding that heists are “dumb.”

It turns out that Morty was the ultimate heist object, as his work on the script made him skip on three adventures with Rick. The scientist needs Morty, a member of his family, as a representative of the norm he can always fall back on. Afraid of losing his partner-in-crime and only friend, Rick is revealed as the mastermind behind the whole story, his criticism of heist films is therefore put into question. There is little doubt that such an elaborate plot requires expert knowledge of heist films and with that should come at least some affinity for the sub-genre. In my opinion the opposite is true: by pushing the boundaries of the sub-genre to the extreme, the episode successfully exposes the futility of heist films, and serves as valid criticism of modern audiences, who go from one cultural text to another, searching for another opportunity to be tricked. As pointed out in the titular quote from Rick, as well as in Schubert's book on narrative instability, the “stuff” is of little relevance, it is the style of the “heist” that is often the sole interesting thing about these films, while the one revelatory twist that will put everything in place is their most awaited moment.

There were various TV shows that relied on twists as well (*How I Met Your Mother*, *The Good Place*, *Mr. Robot* are just a few that come to mind), but none approaches the problematic nature of the narrative device with such complexity as that one episode of *Rick and Morty*. It must be stated here that it is not the first time the series has mocked twist films, as in the fourth episode of the first season, “M. Night Shaym-Aliens!” Rick and Jerry find themselves in a simulation (inside a simulation inside a simulation) created to extract knowledge from Rick's brain. Rick is supposed to believe that he is on Earth, while actually being locked in a simulation chamber on an alien space ship. The scientist immediately notices that something is wrong, unlike Jerry, who is abducted by aliens by mistake and up until the last moment believes that what he is experiencing is real.

*Rick and Morty* is also not the first Adult Swim series mocking that movie sub-genre, as another show, *Robot Chicken*, made fun of M. Night Shyamalan's—a



director heavily reliant on twists in his work—movies as well, with the one-minute sketch entitled “The Twist.” There, the director and his family react the same way to nonsensical twists like finding themselves on the moon, as they do to observing the dance of their alien neighbors, which is, obviously, the twist. The twists in the sketch are not unstable moments though, which makes the effort and attention to detail of the *Rick and Morty* episode all the more noteworthy. The way the episode criticizes heist films—by using the tropes from those films—may be seen as appreciation, but it is rather appropriation in the service of subversion. The somewhat conflicted nature of the show—which denotes the permeating notion of affirming the norm by supposedly subverting it—allows it to provide valid criticism of narrative instability, the same way it does with other issues, like the American values or the idea of family life.

Representation is what makes this criticism particularly noteworthy, as “the visual carries a particularly strong appeal to reality—having seen something might entail a more forceful claim to truth than having read something” (Schubert 33). John Berger stresses the importance of seeing before anything else, as “it is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it” (7). Witnessing something with one’s own eyes is supposed to affirm its status as real, which is a trope the twist film uses to convince the viewer that what he sees is “the truth,” only to abolish that impression with a big reveal.

The episode contains multiple reveals, explained in flashback montages set to bumping, energetic music. These are especially intensified during Rick’s confrontation with Knightly. When Knightly challenges Rick to a heist off for the Crystal Skull, he already is in the possession of the object they are heisting, or at least he thinks he is, as “his” montage is followed by a brief moment of suspense in which he wants to present the Crystal Skull to the audience. Instead, what he finds in his bag is poop, as it was Morty who has been carrying the skull in his backpack all along. It is then that Rick presents “his” own montage, during which the viewer learns that Rick, with the help of Heistotron, recruited not only Knightly’s whole crew, but all of the attendants of Heist-Con as well. The transformation occurred as they uttered the “magical” phrase: “You son of a bitch, I’m in,” after being hit with a dart shot by the robot. The attendants heist the whole Heist-Con, effectively destroying the venue, while Rick throws out the skull, contrary to his beliefs proving that in this case the heisting was more important than the object of the heist (although it is only at the end of the episode that we learn what he was actually heisting).

### Planned Randomness

Rick is particularly critical of crew assemblies, in his opinion they are the worst part of heist films. However, he himself assembles two crews in the episode, the first only in order to enter Heist-Con with a professional badge. The eventual crew members react to seeing him by calling him a “son of a bitch,” a phrase taken from one of the first scenes of *The Predator* (1987)—which can also be considered a twist film, although its status as such may also be easily contested—just as the hero, Dutch (Arnold Schwarzenegger), notices his old friend, Dillon (Carl Weathers). The recruitment of the first member of Rick’s crew, Glar, in what appears to be an intergalactic bar, also

toys with one of the most overused tropes of heist films, that of a changed, reluctant character, who eventually joins the hero's crew. A good example of such a character is B.A. Baracus from *The A-Team* TV series, who in every episode states that he will not get on an airplane—"I ain't gettin' on no plane" is his signature phrase—yet always does so after being (surprisingly) easily drugged by the members of his crew. In the bar, after Rick shakes Glar's hand—their handshake itself is significant, as it is also taken from that same scene in *The Predator*, where Dutch and Dillion engage in a ridiculous arm wrestle handshake with their oiled up, swollen biceps presented to the camera—Glar declares that his name is now Gleer and he plays the piano. However, when a bartender asks him to play his piano using his new name, he pushes it towards the man with anger and quits his job, declaring that his name is Glar.

The second crew is assembled in order to beat Heistotron. Its members are picked randomly, since Rick's idea of beating the elaborate planning of the robot is to do random things. These are proposed by Randotron, a robot created at the same time as Heistotron, looking the same way and even speaking in the same voice. The only difference between the two robots is that while Heistotron comes up with one elaborate plan after another, Randotron proposes the most random things possible, as his algorithm is based on three unnamed David Lynch films. Lynch is singled-out for a reason, because, as opposed to directors like M. Night Shyamalan, he is "so sensitive to the menace of uncontrollable randomness, he's able to portray it artistically with stunning, harrowing power" (Olson 5), making it one of the trademarks of his work.

Whatever the crew does is of little importance, as the only actions that matter are performed by Rick anyway. The supposed triumph of randomness should be symbolic, as it could be used to expose the futility of complicated schemes, which serve as the basis of all heist films. After all, meaninglessness is not something alien to Rick, even though his best efforts at embracing it still end up being in vain. Lucas Miranda notices that "while scientist Rick chooses to simply 'not think about' the chaos and random injustices of the world, the rather existentialist Rick cannot help but *feel* about it all—especially about his own life and (lack thereof) meaning in it" (9). When things get unbearable for Rick, he either turns to alcohol, moves to another dimension or just deletes certain memories. In this case he actually does not leave nothing to chance, randomness is also part of his plan.

Deborah J. Bennet writes that "important decisions, we moderns usually think, should be judicious and rely on logic rather than chance. When the outcome of the decision is of little consequence, or we find ourselves in a situation where we simply cannot choose between alternatives, then and only then are most people willing to leave the decision to chance" (16). She highlights the importance of randomizers (devices such as dice) in ancient times, and their gradually diminishing role in human decision-making as time progressed. Defending the Earth is a serious issue, so leaving the decision regarding the way it should be done to chance seems to be a sign of frivolousness, yet it turns out to be more successful than any carefully devised master plan. However, the final twist puts all of that into question, as Rick reveals with a simple wink that there was nothing random about what the viewer has just experienced.



## Unstable Textuality

The reveal is an unstable moment, because it highlights the textual aspects of the whole adventure. Its plot was conceived by Rick, making him the author of this particular episode. The importance of narrative in “One Crew Over the Crewcoo’s Morty” is presented two ways: by Rick’s criticism of heists and by Morty’s writing of a heist movie script. Rick’s disposal of the skull is actually in agreement with his complaints about Knightly’s *modus operandi*, as his heists are “60% putting a crew together, and 40% revealing that the robbery already happened.” The skull is unimpressive by itself (for Rick), but so is the heist, which was dryly relayed by him on the stage, as he was standing next to Knightly. Performed with such ease, the heist had no effect whatsoever on Rick, who is a strong believer that “existence is meaningless, people are easily fooled and controlled,” the execution of his plan only justifying that conviction (Beresheim 90). A simple algorithm is superior to the most elaborate human schemes, but, as proclaimed by Heistotron just as it is about to self-destruct: “It appears that the perfect heist is the one that was never written.”

The fact that the heists were conducted by a robot whose algorithms were based on fictional works furthers the notion that what was experienced by the viewer was just a work of fiction. The devices used to present the story are primarily tools of telling fictional stories, one-liners and montages. The conscious and frequent use of one-liners from *The Predator* shows that we are dealing with a critical cultural text, playfully engaging with the viewer, as well as with another cultural text. The use of the device is actually a callback to other heist films, which also feature banter between wisecracking characters, underlining the lighthearted nature of the stories.

The montages speed up the development of the story with the aid of music. It provides “structural unity across a discontinuous sequence” (Kassabian 53), as the images are fragmented and seemingly unrelated, which is in agreement with the supposed randomness exhibited throughout the episode. Through movie montages we are able to see the character’s transformation (*Up*, 2009) or his preparations for a crucial event (*Rocky*, 1979), while in heist films these are used to either show how the heist was conducted or how the “gang” got (back) together. When it comes to the latter, through short, energetic scenes, often with the use of one-liners, the viewer gets the idea of who the characters are and, in consequence, is supposed to get excited for their further exploits together.

A good example of that is provided by *Unusual Suspects* (1995), an unlikely heist movie that is also an unstable narrative. In a couple of sequences the viewer gets to know the main characters and the narrator. The remake of *The Italian Job* (2003) uses montages in a different way, as it shows the backgrounds of the characters who are arriving at the scene of their first meeting. There they are properly introduced to each other, but more importantly, to the viewer. The crew assembly montages in “One Crew Over the Crewcoo’s Morty” appear for no other reason than to mock this overused movie trope. The bumping music builds up enthusiasm for the freshly assembled first crew, only to ridicule those expectations with Rick’s dismantling of the group immediately after entering Heist-Con with a professional badge.

However, while the use of these cinematic devices indicates that the events occurring on the screen are clearly not real, they feel real to Morty, as well as to other characters. Rick's putting of various planets in jeopardy in the name of convincing his grandson that heist films are mundane and uninspired, shows that he treats actual living beings as fictional characters. In a sense, he approaches all of his adventures as texts, which is in agreement with what Schubert considers "unstable textuality"—when a cultural text underlines its own status as a text.

A clear indication of that is intertextuality, which is one of the main features of the show, sometimes expressed by the characters themselves—like in the episode "Vindicators 3: The Return of Worldender," where Rick characterizes the superheroes he and Morty are on an adventure with as "poorly-written." Then, there is also the existence of various timelines and realities, which allows Rick to successfully rewrite events. Thanks to that ability, Rick may be treated as an author, simply creating stories. Even Morty is somewhat unmoved by the possibility of various planets being destroyed, declaring that he wants to attend his Netflix pitch meeting prior to saving the Earth.

Still, the most important criticism of heist films is provided by Morty, who starts the episode as a true enthusiast of heisting. In a couple of montages he is shown working on his screenplay, at one point even expressing excitement that what is actually happening can be used as material for his work. Upon entering the Netflix meeting he informs the executives that the sky being a big circuit board is all part of his adventure, an information which they treat with little seriousness, despite their own awareness of the fact that Earth was actually stolen from its orbit. Instead, the executives want to immediately discuss Morty's script, which signifies their devotion to narratives. Their treatment of the text as something more significant than what is actually happening is reminiscent of the modern audiences' submission to the power of storytelling. Morty seems to be describing the plot of every heist film ever, when he says:

OK, so, it's kind of all built around this big crew with, like, a cool double-cross and then this big awesome twist where there's, like, another double-cross, but then, um, but... but then we reveal those things were all part of the hero's plan, y-you know? And there's this other crew they put together and their plan is to sort of not have a plan, but... but that was part of the other guy's plan.

As he is speaking, his enthusiasm for his own script starts to fade. At the end of the meeting Morty just stops, declares that heists are "dumb" and leaves, despite the executives reacting positively to the pitch. As Morty leaves, they observe that it looked "as if someone stole his enthusiasm for his own idea without him even knowing about it."

Morty's waning enthusiasm for his own project, as well as his conclusion regarding heists, are the intended reactions of the viewers as well, an effect the episode attempts to reach with oversaturation. The creators of the show, Dan Harmon and Justin Roiland, are not very fond of heist films themselves (Adult Swim). The episode combines regular twists with unstable moments, so reveals that put into question not only the validity of this narrative device, but also the reality of the story. Everything occurring in the episode is a part of an elaborate plan devised by Rick, yet one does not know that by watching how he reacts to various double-crosses and challenges posed by Heistotron.

The episode highlights the effects of over-reliance on narrative instability as a tool, as even the most elaborate form is not enough to make up for the lack of essence. This is exactly what Rick criticizes in the episode, when he states: “stealing stuff is about the stuff, not the stealing.” The same goes for cultural texts that rely on other texts in order to uplift their status. *Rick and Morty* goes beyond that, as it is well aware of its textuality and plays with various concepts and narrative devices, often times openly criticizing them. By referring to other cultural texts, it is the show that actually uplifts *their* status, engaging with them just as the audiences are engaging with unstable narratives. “One Crew Over the Crewcoo’s Morty” shows how *Rick and Morty* highlights its own textual aspects and plays with conventions, sophisticating its source material, while still relying on present-day narrative techniques, as identified by Schubert. This leads to valid criticism of narrative instability through text just as much as through representation.

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