

Succession's final season doubles down on its core conceit – to a fault

At its core, HBO's *Succession* has always been a story about people doing everything in their power to attack and dethrone the only god they truly worship and crave validation from – a very wealthy, very human man who, rather understandably, thinks of everyone he meets as morons.

Succession has spent three seasons reminding us that, no matter how many times Logan Roy's would-be successors try to maneuver him into a tight spot, he simply can't be beaten – an idea reinforced by its repetition throughout the series. That repetition gave *Succession* a kind of Sisyphean hopelessness in the past when it felt like the show was still finding new, unexplored depths to the Roys, and then putting everyone right back in their places regardless of how certain they were that things were about to change.

In its fourth and final season, though, *Succession* sticks so closely to its classic narrative playbook that it sometimes feels like it doesn't have the guts to make bold choices. The show knows how much audiences have come to love these characters in very specific, familiar dynamics, and it delivers on them in abundance. But while this season is sure to enthrall fans longing for the dark satire to continue indefinitely, those expecting to see the show shift into a fresher, more dynamic mode for its last hurrah might be disappointed.

In many ways, the first chunk of *Succession*'s fourth season feels like a return to the show's season one roots that first

laid down the fundamental power dynamics between billionaire media titan Logan Roy (Brian Cox), and each of his ambitious, deeply-broken children. Consummate tryhard failson Kendall (Jeremy Strong) still craves his father's validation more than any of his siblings, in part, because he knows that he's often been the heir apparent to the family's news empire in moments when his addictions weren't getting the best of him.

As always, Siobhan (Sarah Snook) is as sensible as she is shrewd about playing the game to get what she wants while outwardly appearing to cause as little damage as possible. For all of his performative dirtbaggery and penchant for popping up where no one expects him, Roman (Kieran Culkin) knows that he's safest when everyone assumes that he's thinking about "them" as a unit rather than only looking out for himself. And Connor (Alan Ruck), Logan's oldest and most bearded child, is still there hovering on the periphery of his family's endless quarrels doing everything that he can to find meaning and purpose in political endeavors everyone knows are doomed to fail.

After a lifetime of being deftly played against one another, *Succession's* third season left Logan's three youngest children reeling from their father's power play to shut them all out – an act of war that united Shiv, Roman, and Kendall in a way that felt portentous for the show. The Roy siblings are still a unified front hellbent on trouncing their father as *Succession's* fourth season opens, but the show wastes no time in homing in on interpersonal frictions meant to make you question just how committed they are to winning as a team, let alone whether they can.

With Shiv's craven leech of a husband Tom Wambsgans (Matthew Macfadyen) being the reason the Roy sibling's last ploy to overthrow their father failed, there isn't really anyone else but her brothers in her corner, and the same is true for both Roman and Kendall. Whatever tenuous and twisted sort of affinity that Waystar RoyCo's recent temporary CEO Gerri

Kellman (J. Smith-Cameron) felt for Roman is seemingly dead, and Kendall's past has effectively made him a persona non grata in the eyes of his peers. To its credit, season 4 knows that it can't simply replay those character beats, and it instead touches on them to reinforce what makes the Roy children feel so alienated from most everyone else except for one another.

But even in their present predicament – with it looking very much like Logan plans to sell to GoJo's Lukas Matsson (Alexander Skarsgård) – the Roys siblings can't help but second guess one another, and *Succession* can't help but revel in the quippy, biting tragicomedy of it all, despite it often just feeling like more of the same.

Genuinely funny, stinging moments like when cousin Greg (Nicholas Braun) takes Logan up on a demand to be roasted by pointedly asking him why, in a moment of need, his children are nowhere to be found, do stand out and speak to how these characters have become sharper over the years. But those moments are rare, and save for a few bright spots, *Succession's* comfortable leaving Greg and Tom to bumble along together as cartoonish jesters signifying that this is all meant to make you laugh at some point.

In the four episodes that were provided to the press, *Succession* feels blissfully stuck in a holding pattern that's trying to prolong this saga as long as it can while still only moving incrementally. Even when the show does find some forward momentum, *Succession* never seems to want to lean all the way into it for fear of hastening its end. But with the finale in clear sight, that hesitation ends up doing *Succession* few favors.

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