

'American Idol' recap: It's Shock-Tale Hour!

As judges' favorite Danny gets booted, the season 8 battle (correctly) comes down to the outré glam rocker versus the laid-back, guitar-playing artiste



Kris can't hide his surprise as Ryan sends him to safety; Adam strikes a rock-star pose; Danny and Adam await their fates; Simon watches his master plan unravel; and the Allen family makes a strong case for group hugs

Frank Micelotta/Fox

ALL ABOUT AMERICAN IDOL

By [Michael Slezak](#)

As the great philosopher Mick Jagger once said, "You can't always get what you want. But

if you try sometimes, you just might find you get what you need." And those words certainly sprang to mind as I watched [American Idol's](#) four-judge panel react with utter shock to Danny Gokey's elimination during tonight's Top 3 Results Show telecast.

You see, for 10 weeks running now, Paula, Simon, Randy, and Kara have been marching in lockstep and beating the drums for a Danny-vs.-Adam Lambert showdown. Oh sure, Paula and Simon offered less subtle sound bites than their colleagues, but everybody ultimately seemed to be working from the same script. There was Paula, dancing around the ankles of her favored duo like an overstimulated Chihuahua, intermittently reminding them since Top 13 week that she'd see 'em in the finale. Simon, meanwhile, seemed contractually bound to predict a Danny-Adam face-off during every media appearance he's made dating back to mid-March. Randy earned himself an Emmy consideration last week for convincingly giving Danny an "A for effort" despite the fact that his "Dream On" caused a widespread wave of PTSD among Aerosmith fans nationwide. And Kara's semifinal mantra ("You give us all hope!") set the ridiculous tone for her season of superlative Gokey praise.

But then something completely unexpected happened. With the judges so focused on memorizing their lines, not one of 'em bothered to look up and see

how Kris Allen, with his subtly shaded vocals and his sneaky-awesome song-arranging skills, had recast himself in the role of Adam's ultimate rival. And we the people followed suit, tossing the screenplay that said we had to give up our annual chance to play record exec, to give major-label deals to someone other than Jamie Foxx or Katy Perry or other pop stars of the Auto-Tune era. In the process, we put the reality back in America's most popular reality series. And as a reward, we are now preparing for the Best Possible Season Finale Not Involving Allison Iraheta That *American Idol*'s Eighth Season Ever Could've Hoped For.

In other words, *Idol*'s judges and producers may not have gotten what they wanted, but the show got *exactly* what it needed.

In the Dangerous Corner, we have Adam, the man who turned "Ring of Fire" into a sexually charged, sitar-infused scorcher that left *Idol* viewers either panting or recoiling (or perhaps a little bit of both)...the man who sent us marching to iTunes by tackling a somewhat obscure cover of a very obscure Tears for Fears song...the man who moved Smokey Robinson to tears...the man who threatened to give us every inch of his love during Rock Week and bookmarked his performance with such humble, charming sound bites, you'd almost have thought he'd stepped out of some classic '60s sitcom (if not for the guyliner and mischievous sparkle in his eye)...the man who, even if you can't fathom buying his music, has undeniably provided the weekly *Idol* telecast with badly needed snap, crackle, and pop.

And in the tender corner, we now have Kris, the man who turned a dated Donna Summer tune into a radio-ready anthem for our grim economic times...the man who, armed with only his acoustic guitar, reinvented a Kanye West rap smash into an even better R&B ditty...the man who turned his nose up at the show's standard-operating schlock and, with the unexpected choice of "Falling Slowly," reminded *Idol* viewers that soundtrack fare is not just limited to Bryan Adams, Whitney Houston, and Phil Collins...the man who's been so good, so effortless, he's frequently learned his songs on guitar or piano, even though we love him just as much when he's just standing behind the mic...the man who's won our hearts, even though he was supposed to be cannon fodder coming into the semifinals, and even though his backstory hasn't been fleshed out much beyond his penchant for wearing matching red aprons while cooking with his equally button-cute wife.

Yes, *American Idol* has a "dark" and moody rocker against a bona fide dark

horse!

Weirdly enough, the signs and signals pointing to Danny's "shock" ouster were everywhere on the *Idol* stage tonight. Ryan opened the show by telling us "if you think you know how the competition stacks up, think again," and did anyone else notice the most unfortunate "Scream On" sign front and center during Danny's hometown package? Katy Perry got in on the act, too, sporting a tacky cape emblazoned with the name "Adam Lambert." And there was Danny himself, looking squeamish and half-defeated, telling Ryan that "I just need this to be over."

Now, look, I know I've been pretty tough, or more accurately, pretty brutal on Danny this season, but I'd be lying if I said the guy didn't have some vocal ability. His rendition of "Come Rain or Come Shine" was a definite *Idol* moment, and while I found it maddening that he almost never sounded equal to the wild praise he got from the judges (and that he outlasted Allison despite what he did to Aerosmith, I will nonetheless dedicate this week's *Idol*-themed ditty, set to the tune of John Lennon's classic "[Imagine](#)," to the season 8 third-place finisher. Click on the link if you want a little musical accompaniment!

Imagine there's no Kara It's easy if you try No rambling critiques That make you want to die Imagine all her screen-time Went toward singing...

Imagine there's no Randy His limited vocab No dope, no dawg, no pitchy Now wouldn't that be fab? Imagine if the Top 3 Sang three songs apiece...

You may say I'm deluded But I've hope for season nine Although the world looks brighter When you've had a glass of wine

Imagine Paula focused Eyes on the *Idol* stage With Simon facing forward Quite possibly engaged Imagine Jesse Langseth In the top 13...

You may say I'm a dreamer But check out the hot finale Kris and Adam are the top two Too bad there's no room for Allie

Yes, folks, another Allison reference for you! Anyone else note she appeared on screen (in the audience) at exactly 9:13 p.m. EDT? Anyone else get a sudden rush of the sads when you saw her? ("Come on, and cry, cryyyyyy baby!")

In all seriousness, though, you kind of had to take the emotion where you could get it during the results-show telecast, seeing as how the hometown packages seemed not as well put together, and therefore less able to make me reach for a

Kleenex the way they have in years past. I blame the lack of good, solid footage of weeping parent figures in Danny and Adam's packages, and a weakness in emotionally manipulative soundtrack choices, for my failure to cry.

Kris' hometown visit, however, was an altogether different story, and one that can be summed up with a simple mathematical equation: Sobbing, adorable dad + Kris' acoustic-only take on "Falling Slowly" + group hug involving crying mom and crying wife and crying brother (I think) + aerial footage of massive small-town turnout = immediate waterworks. Also, dude is getting free cheese dip for life at Stobies. He seriously may have the best life of all-time ever.

Danny's journey to Wisconsin, on the other hand, seemed to be edited as if the producers knew he was finishing third, and therefore tamped it down so it wouldn't overshadow his dark-horse rival's. Not only was there the aforementioned "Scream On!" signage and an additional scream reference by the mayor of Milwaukee, but there was also an overabundance of footage of Danny's pal, Jamar Rogers, which only served as a reminder of what a crap job *Idol* did in selecting its top 36 this season. (Really, Norman Gentle and not Jamar?)

Adam's trip to San Diego highlighted the following facts: Fox's local news affiliate is staffed by crazies; Adam does a heckuva nice job with the National Anthem; not even older gentlemen are impervious to Lambert-mania; and that in *Idol*'s mind, women who strip to their bras are streakers. (Controversial pair-up of "Baba O'Riley" and its "teenage wasteland" refrain with footage of Adam's high school, no?)

And now, before we come to the end of our story, a quiz:

Tonight's most amusing cameo arrived when: A) Bill Hader imitated the opening to the *Idol* theme song during the *Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian* promotional skit (Score one for the film's producers; I just typed the full movie title in my TV Watch!) B) That adorable kid at the Metropolitan Educational Theater in San Diego asked Adam "How did you get so good at singing and dancing?"

C) Paula's Divine Secrets of the GaGa(h!) Sisterhood Lace-Doily Blouse transported us to the center of a Fredericks' of Hollywood catalog (daywear section) D) Noah from Rawanda busted out with the MC Hammer side-dance during his "performance" of "I'm the World's Greatest" (which still contained 72.3% more actual singing than Paula's "I'm Just Here for the Music" last week)

E) That chick in Milwaukee wearing the pink plaid pajama bottoms ran after Danny's limo. (Important programming note: I do not condone public wearing of

pajama pants.) F) Alicia Keys's arrival on stage was met with tepid applause from Simon (because anyone who offers competition to Leona Lewis is a problem!)

What did you think of tonight's elimination? Were you shocked? Upset? Delighted? Who's going to take home the season 8 crown? And what did you think of the night's musical guests? For me, Katy Perry's vocals fell somewhere between Megan Joy and Jackie Tohn on the quality scale, and the literal choice of Vegas artifice made her performance of "Waking Up in Vegas" kinda blushworthy. I was much more impressed by season 6 champ Jordin Sparks, who got a little pitchy in certain spots, but has certainly improved her stage presence in the two years she out-ThisIsMyNow-ed Blake Lewis. (Even her little military salute worked up there.) Plus, the young woman looked sensational! And finally, I am convinced the vocals on "Break My Stride" during the Ford Music Video were sung by the SIMS from the opening credits. Anyone else agree? Then by all means, do share in the comments section below!