

TV Review: Fourth Season of USA's 'Burn Notice' Sizzles

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on June 3, 2010 - 10:46am

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CHICAGO – USA's hit action series "Burn Notice" returns tonight, June 3rd, 2010, with a very dark season premiere that hints at an emotional roller coaster to come and, potentially, at a resurgence for a show that has been spinning its wheels a bit since an amazing second season finale.



Television Rating: **3.5/5.0**

The #1 show on cable picks up immediately after the end of the last season, as Michael Westen (Jeffrey Donovan) has finally reached the end of the line in his quest to discover who burned him and ended his life as a spy. I'm always interested in seeing where shows go when they essentially finish the inciting incident that spawned the pilot (like when the "Lost"-ies got off the island) and the premiere of the fourth season could be called "Burn Notice 2.0".



Gabrielle Anwar as Fiona Glenanne, Bruce Campbell as Sam Axe, Jeffrey Donovan as Michael Westen

Photo credit: Glenn Watson/USA

Before he knows it, Michael is being recruited by the head (Robert Wisdom) of the people who burned him. Before the credits, he's off in a jungle dodging drone fire and explosions while he tries to track down an arms dealer (a cameo by Michael Ironside). But, of course, it's not long before our hero is back in Miami, reunited with Fiona (Gabrielle Anwar), Sam (Bruce Campbell), and his mother (Sharon Gless).

While Michael was gone, Fiona and Sam continued his good-guy-for-hire routine and he happens back into their lives in the middle of a case involving a poor guy with a bounty on his head from the toughest biker gang in Florida. It's hard to protect a guy when nearly everyone on a motorcycle wants him dead, but Sam and Michael have an interesting plan that relies on using brain as much as brawn. One of the most clever things about "Burn Notice" is that the "resolution" of the mystery-of-the-week plotline almost always involved Michael's

problem-solving skills more than his ones with a machine gun.



Burn Notice
Photo credit: Nigel Parry/USA

At the end of season two, Michael learned a lot about who burned him, how it had impacted his life in Miami, and was a bit adrift as to what to do next. So was the show. The third season had something of an identity crisis as it seemed like the writers weren't sure where to go with their characters.

There's a lot more confident storytelling and writing in the fourth season premiere. Fiona's love for Michael feels more believable. Michael's mother actually has a storytelling purpose, and it feels like the stakes of the show have been raised. This is a DARK hour of television. The biker gang plotline features several violent scenes and the implication that Michael is becoming what he once fought against could be a very strong dramatic arc for the season.

A man with a skill set like Michael Westen must make moral decisions all the time as to how far is "too far" and his potential descent into darkness looks like it will drive this summer's season. Such a plot adds dramatic weight to a show that's too often missing it and, just as importantly, makes the supporting cast more essential. How does a man like Michael stay away from the dark side? The love of his life, his best friend, and his mommy.

I still think the writing on "Burn Notice" needs a bit of tightening. Michael's narration is getting a bit repetitive and cliched. His explanation of spy behavior isn't as inspired as it used to be. Dodging drone fire isn't a "walk in the park"? Really? You don't say. And the show still works best when the case-of-the-week is thematically tied to the overall arc (as it is this week if you think about the parallels between a lawyer with a bounty on his head and a spy who has been the target of hundreds of enemies).

Last season, "Burn Notice" was at a creative turning point. The writers could have easily settled into the complacency that comes with massive success and merely produced a mini-spy-movie every week like "CSI" or other serial shows. The fourth season premiere hints at a writing team unwilling to get lazy and trying to take chances as the show moves forward. "Burn Notice" is starting to sizzle again.

The fourth season of "Burn Notice" premieres on USA on Thursday, June 3rd, 2010 at 8pm CST. It stars Jeffrey Donovan, Gabrielle Anwar, Bruce Campbell, Sharon Gless, and Robert Wisdom. It was created by Matt Nix.



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