

## TV Review: NBC Mystery Series ‘Persons Unknown’ is Worth Meeting

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CHICAGO – Written by the man who gave the world Keyser Soze in his Oscar-winning script for “The Usual Suspects,” NBC’s “Persons Unknown” is a summer mystery mini-series not unlike last year’s “Harper’s Island” or a mini-“Lost” in that the team behind it want people talking about the questions of the show over summer barbecues. NBC is in such dire straits and the show is just flawed enough that it’s hard to believe that “Persons Unknown” will become a phenomenon but it is likely to be a satisfying cult hit for those who seek it out.



Television Rating: **3.5/5.0**

It’s very difficult to judge a mystery series on the basis of one episode, but the set-up for “Persons Unknown” is undeniably intriguing. A small group of seemingly very different people wake up in an old-fashioned hotel. They have no memory of how they got there and none of them appear to know each other. They have been kidnapped and transported far from home and loved ones with no explanation. And things are about to get weirder.

The first “abductee” we meet (and the lead character of at least the premiere episode) is Janet Cooper (Daisy Betts), a single mother of a five-year-old and, for the record, the only character we actually see get kidnapped from her domestic life. In the opening scene, Janet is confronted by a private investigator who has been looking for her ex-husband moments before she’s drugged and kidnapped, leaving her five-year-old alone at the park.



Persons Unknown

*Photo credit: Michael Levine/NBC*

Janet wakes up in the aforementioned hotel where the charismatic male lead of the show, Joe Tucker (Jason Wiles) busts down the door to free her from her room. Joe seems a bit rough around the edges and claims to have no friends or family but will clearly be the “Sawyer” of the piece; the tough guy with a heart of gold.

Janet and Joe meet several of their fellow victims in the hall of the upper floor of the hotel: Sergeant Graham McNair (Chadwick Boseman), Moira Doherty (Tina Holmes), Tori Fairchild (Kate Lang Johnson), and Charlie Morse (Alan Ruck). They make it out of the hotel and soon realize that they’re in an entire small town that appears abandoned except for them. There are stores and restaurants, but no one to be seen. The group takes on a seventh member in the suspicious Bill Blackham (Sean O’Bryan), who claims to have been in the hotel but somehow escaped before anyone else, and first attempt to merely walk to the next city. That doesn’t go well.



Persons Unknown.

*Photo credit: Carlos Somante/NBC*

As of the premiere, “Persons Unknown” is all questions. Are these people related in some unknown way? Why are there cameras everywhere recording/watching their every move? What could the purpose of throwing together seven strangers possibly be outside of a variation on “Most Dangerous Game”? Is it possible that any of the seven supposed victims could be in on the secret? (I have no insider knowledge, but considering the fact that we only saw one kidnapping, I’ve read plenty of Agatha Christie, and McQuarrie’s most notable work centers on a perceived good guy being something very different, I’m guessing the answer is yes.)

While Janet, Joe, and the rest of the demographically diverse gang try to get to the bottom of their predicament, a journalist (Gerald Kyd) and his editor (Lola Glaudini) back in the real world have latched on to the unusual case of a mother who left her five-year-old at the park. Easily the weakest material in the pilot, the investigation that will clearly eventually cross paths with the mystery (and probably provide a few answers for the audience that the lead characters don’t have) doesn’t click dramatically. I’m sure the producers are hesitant to present a show with too many questions, but the atmosphere is punctured every time we leave Janet and her crew and the mood would have been more consistent if we never did. The best way to present a mystery like “Lost” is to give the viewer the sensation of being a part of it and the “real world” material deflates that feeling.

With so many “Lost” rip-offs littering the landscape of the last few years, I was kind of dreading “Persons Unknown,” but the tightly paced script by McQuarrie and the likable performances by Betts and Wiles make the premiere effective enough that it passes the ultimate test — I’ll tune it to ‘know’ what happens next.

*“Persons Unknown” premieres on NBC on Monday, June 7th, 2010 at 9pm CST. It stars Daisy Betts, Jason Wiles, Chadwick Boseman, Tina Holmes, Kate Lang Johnson, Alan Ruck, Sean O’Bryan, Gerald Kyd, and Lola Glaudini. It was created and written by Christopher McQuarrie.*



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