

TV Review: 'Rescue Me' Struggles to Keep Creative Fires Burning

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on June 29, 2010 - 10:43am

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CHICAGO – When the first four episodes of the new season of “Rescue Me” allows the actors to merely live in the shoes of these characters they know so well after five seasons on the air then the show finds some of the magic that it produced more consistently in its superior early seasons. Sadly, the writers know they can’t just shoot a drama about guys hanging out in a firehouse and the scripted drama often doesn’t click.



TV Rating: **3.5/5.0**

At the end of last season, Teddy (Lenny Clarke) shot Tommy (Denis Leary) and left him bleeding on the bar floor. Creators Peter Tolan and Leary make the very risky choice of opening the new season on the other side of existence with Tommy seeing a vision of Heaven followed by a vision of Hell. The entirety of the first episode of the new season never finds the right rhythm after its jarring opening scenes. After opening with Hell, where do you go from there?



Rescue Me

Photo credit: Craig Blankenhorn/FX

Subsequent episodes settle into a more natural rhythm as Tommy continues to try and find balance in his life after more recent tragedies. While he was in the hospital, Franco (Daniel Sunjata) and Shawn (Larenz Tate) helped his family get through the struggle of day-to-day life and it's shocked Tommy into a realization about what's really important in his life and proven to him that he still loves Janet (Andrea Roth).

The problem is that Tommy's latest quest for redemption may be too late. To his friends and family, claims of finally giving up alcohol for good reek of the firefighter who cried wolf and his squad may even get shut down due to budget cuts and the fact that one of their best men is now injured with bullet wounds. Tommy's bad behavior and burned bridges may finally be past the point of repair.



Rescue Me
Photo credit: FX

"Rescue Me" has never avoided serious issues but a season that opens in Hell naturally is going to be washed in more darkness than usual. It feels almost like the people in Tommy's life, including his now-alcoholic daughter, are almost worse off with Tommy back in their lives instead of being able to mourn him. As Janet says to Tommy, *"Now everything that I do is coated with anger and cynicism and ash. I hate what you've made me."*

Luckily, "Rescue Me" doesn't wallow too deeply in its own miserable subject matter and the new season works best when it's cast isn't working on the sometimes-forced drama. After this long on the air, the cast, particularly those that have been there since the beginning, are completely believable in the character-driven, natural moments, most of which take place in the firehouse. After overhearing that Tommy would be burning in Hellfire if he hadn't been pulled from the other side, the gang has a funny, natural conversation about whether or not masturbation will damn them forever. These are the moments that work.

Denis Leary has become a better actor with each passing season of "Rescue Me" because he's found an unforced rhythm for Tommy Gavin, making him one of the most believable characters on TV. I still think that his progression is too often at the expense of the rest of the underdeveloped cast but Andrea Roth does her best work to date with a more prominent role in the first few episodes of the sixth season.

It's hard to tell this early but the sixth season of "Rescue Me" starts with a definite misstep before settling into a more confident, entertaining groove than it did during the majority of the very inconsistent fifth season, easily the show's worst to date. When I told my wife I was about to review "Rescue Me" again and was concerned about continued downward trajectory after last season, she said something like "Well, it was pretty good for awhile." Ignoring the first episode, the good news is that "Rescue Me" can still be pretty good.

'Rescue Me,' which airs on FX, stars Denis Leary, Michael Lombardi, Steven Pasquale, Andrea Roth, John Scurti, Daniel Sunjata, Callie Thorne, Adam Ferrara, Larenz Tate, Robert John Burke, Lenny Clarke, and Tatum O'Neal. The show was created by Leary and Peter Tolan. The sixth season premieres on Tuesday, June 29th, 2010 at 9PM CST.



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