

TV Review: USA’s ‘Burn Notice’ Continues to Set Bar For Spy Shows

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on November 11, 2010 - 12:11pm

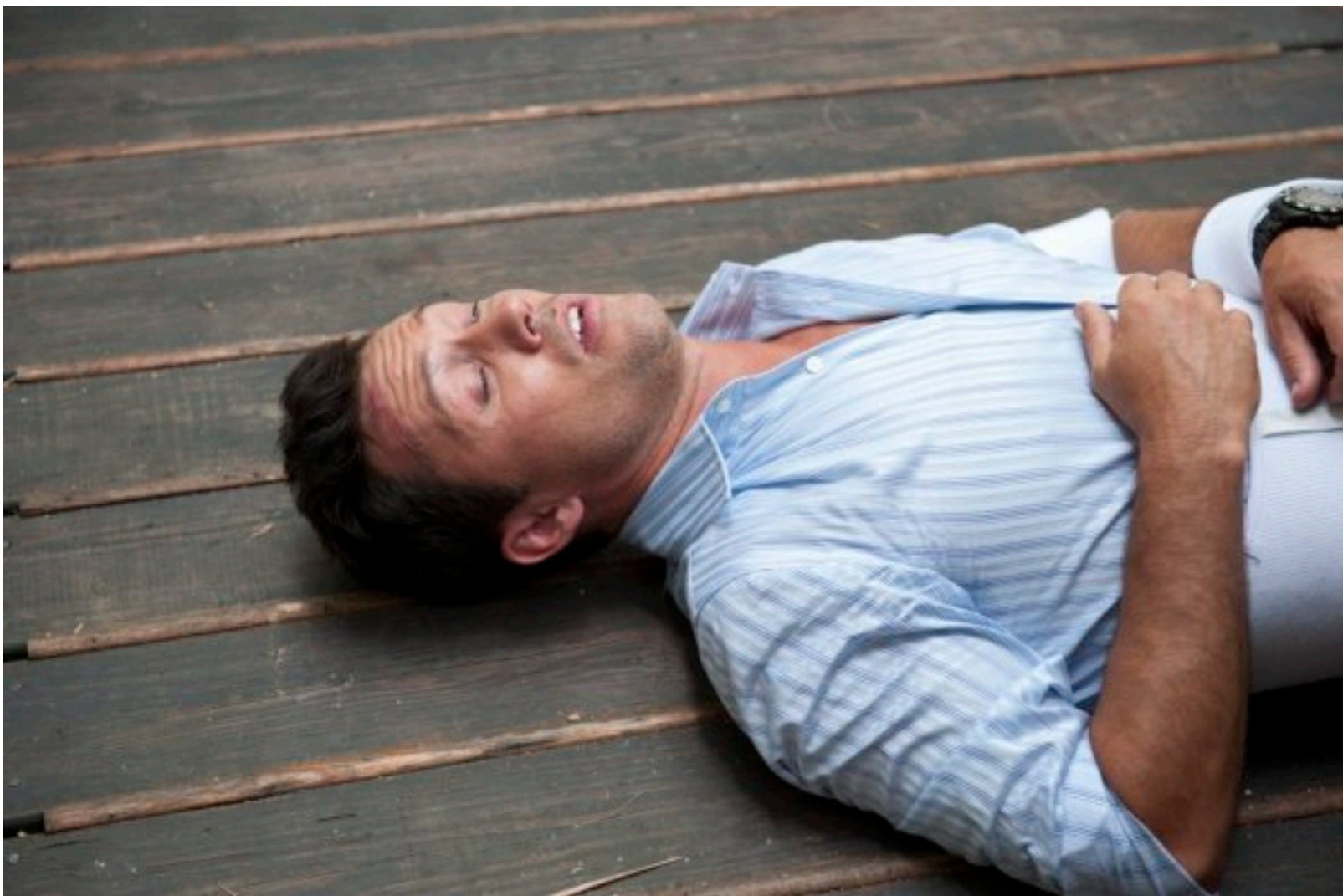
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CHICAGO – USA’s spy hit “Burn Notice” returns tonight, November 11th, 2010 with another solidly-entertaining mix of the cool, the comedy, and the crazy. The middle of season four ended with Michael Weston (Jeffrey Donovan) crossing paths with two lunatics (Michael Rooker & Robert Patrick), being given a list that was the key to destroying the people who burned him, getting into an intense shoot-out, and a horrible car accident. Yes, there are a lot of loose ends to tie up.



Television Rating: **3.5/5.0**

When “Burn Notice” is actively pursuing and detailing Michael’s spy past and future — the people who burned him and how he can get revenge while also staying alive — it’s a fantastic spy thriller. No program does this kind of thing better (and several recently, including NBC’s “Undercovers” and even FOX’s “Human Target,” have tried) and I wish the show would commit fully to ditching the USA mystery-of-the-week format and embracing one continuous season arc. The cast of the show has gotten better every year and they’re more than up for the challenge of dramatic plots that don’t tidy themselves up in 44 minutes.



Burn Notice
Photo credit: Glenn Watson/USA

With the intense ending to the mid-season finale, one would assume that “Burn Notice” would pick up its mid-season premiere running. Clearly, Michael survived and we quickly learn that he still has the ammunition to take down the people who burned him. Wouldn’t it be great if the team behind one of cable’s biggest hits committed to that plot for the rest of the season? Of course it would and of course that’s not going to happen.



Burn Notice
Photo credit: Glenn Watson/USA

Michael is still in hospital scrubs when Dale Lawson (Rooker) ends up dead and it looks like Michael's former client killed him and a few other innocent people. He's tracking down Dale's gang in an effort to get revenge. Michael, Fiona, and Sam have to work to find the South Beach bomber who doesn't seem to care much about collateral damage.

On a performance level, "Burn Notice" has never been stronger. Donovan has become more confident and comfortable with this character every season, particularly in the way he has carefully revealed Michael's vulnerability. One of the more interesting themes of Matt Nix's creation over the last four seasons has been that when everyone hangs you out to dry, you better have a girl, best friend, and mother to help you out. Even a super-spy needs friends. Donovan played Michael a bit too cool and self-aware in the first season but he's truly developed into one of the more interesting actors on TV. And every single show would be better with a supporting cast as strong as Gabrielle Anwar, Bruce Campbell, and Sharon Gless. All three are as consistent as any ensemble on basic cable. And newcomer Coby Bell has added an interesting new flavor to the mix as the charismatic Jesse Garcia.

Perhaps it's because the cast is so strong that I'm a little harder on the #1 show on cable than I would otherwise be. The writing on "Burn Notice" is just too inconsistent. When the show really clicks, it's great entertainment but some of the dialogue in the premiere rings a little false, especially given what Michael's been through recently. It's clear that they had to come up with a big case to distract Michael from his burn plan and there's a nice intensity to this week's drama that's often missing from the weekly mystery, but the pattern of "Burn Notice" is starting to grate.

I'm tired of most of Michael's spy teaching through narration (he advises on using flower bouquets as gun disguises this week of all things) and his impersonations of criminals to get closer to the bad guy. "Burn Notice" works best when it's shaking up its own formula, not giving into its repetitive nature. To that end, a surprising twist to the finale courtesy of Jesse perfectly hints at the darker show that "Burn Notice" could be.

In the end, I love that "Burn Notice" has redefined basic cable programming. It has helped lead the USA Network into the driver's seat when it comes to character-driven mysteries. I just wish that "Burn Notice" would stop and focus on its characters more often than it does on its mysteries.

The mid-season premiere of the fourth season of "Burn Notice" airs on USA on Thursday, November 11th, 2010 at 9pm CST. It stars Jeffrey Donovan, Gabrielle Anwar, Bruce Campbell, Sharon Gless, and Coby Bell. It was created by Matt Nix.



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By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [15]
Content Director
HollywoodChicago.com
brian@hollywoodchicago.com [14]

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