

TV Review: USA's Hit 'White Collar' Returns With Lackluster Premiere

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on June 7, 2011 - 2:34pm

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CHICAGO – They can't all be winners. The third season premiere of "White Collar" definitely feels like a show trying to find its identity after spinning several of the same plates in the air for two hit seasons and with no clear direction on where to go for chapter three. Even the actors seem a bit lost in this lackluster premiere for a program that I said was getting bumpier last winter and is now in danger of going completely off the rails.



Television Rating: **2.5/5.0**

"White Collar" rode on its charming cast and clever premise for two seasons, distilling many of the elements that turned other USA programs into hits. It had the buddy comedy element (like "Psych"), the mystery-of-the-week element (like "Monk"), spy action (like "Burn Notice"), and an appealing cast. All of the ingredients were there, but midway through season two, it started to look like they may not be mixed into an appealing recipe of their own. That bad taste continues with the premiere of season three.



White Collar

Photo credit: USA

First, a little catch-up for the newbies. The oil-and-water duo at the core of "White Collar" are a con man and a G-man. The former is Neal Caffrey (Matt Bomer), an old-fashioned Danny Ocean type who always has the right con for the right situation. He is handsome, suave, and

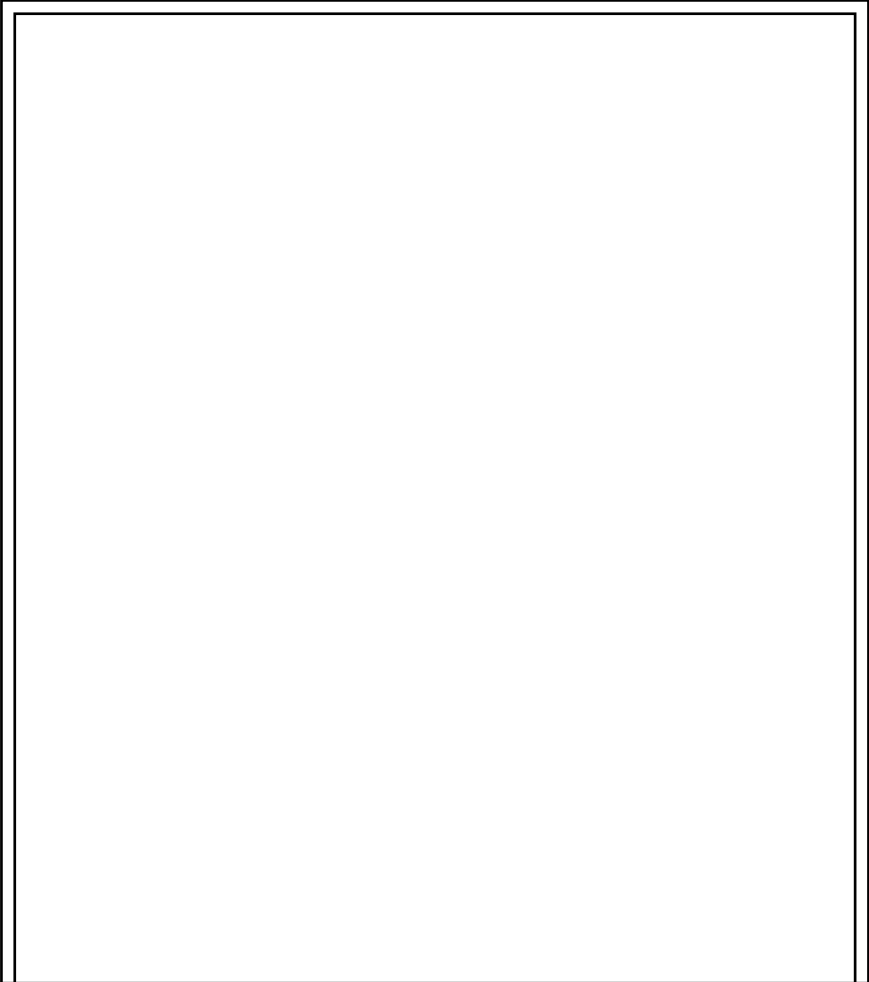
persuasive, and he's made millions in the world of white collar crime. At least, he did so until he got nabbed by the government and now helps them catch the men trying to pull the same scams that he used to pull off with ease.

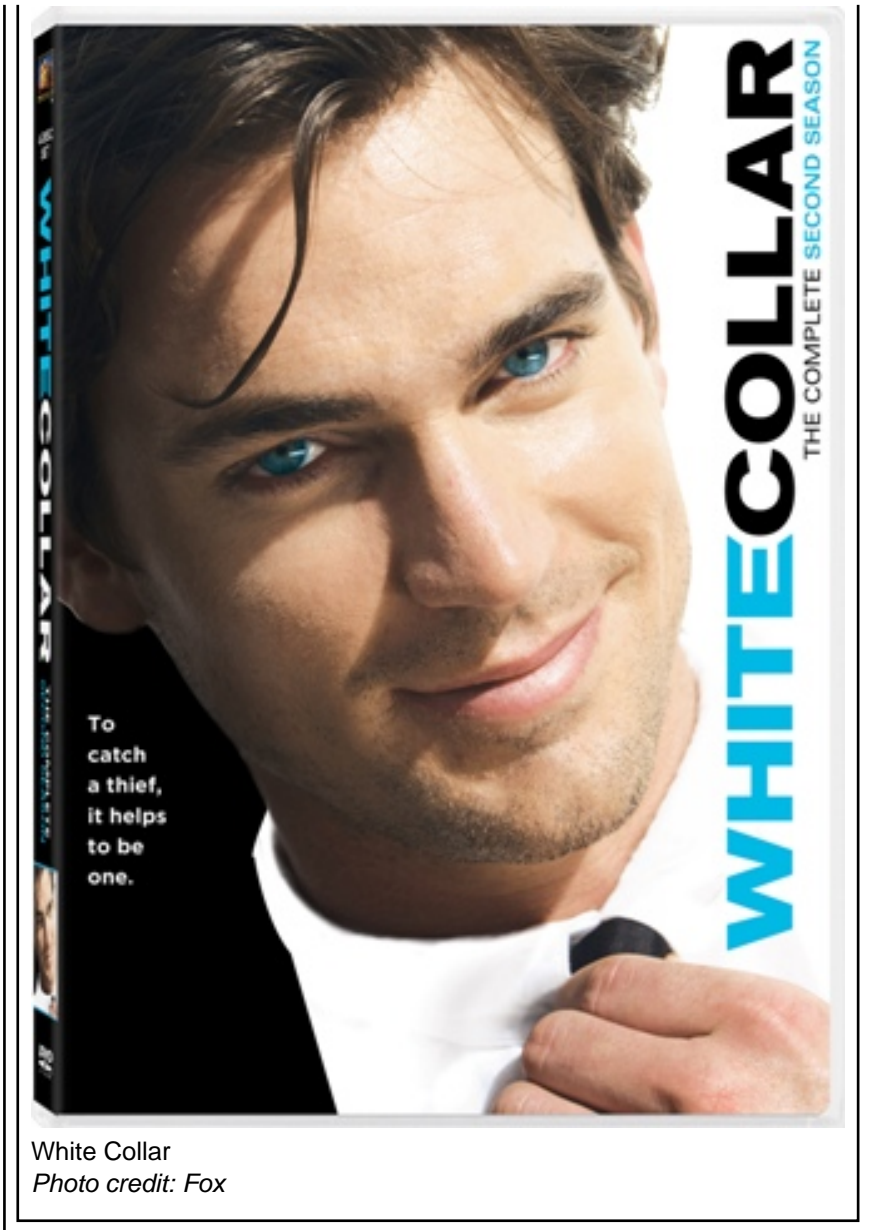


The dilemma at the core of the season premiere is that Neal has been up to his old ways. At the end of season two, a ton of Nazi-era art was found and Neal and Mozzie (Willie Garson) made off with it while blowing up some fakes in their place. Agent Peter Burke (Tom DeKay), the man tasked with keeping tabs on Mr. Caffrey, suspects his source and most of the premiere revolves around Neal trying to hide his theft until he can get it out of the country and Peter (with his wife, played by Tiffani Thiessen) trying to prove he did it.

The “good vs. bad” aspect of Neal’s character has always been one of the most interesting aspects of the show. Is he a con man just doing his time or has he honestly turned over a leaf and become a good guy? I think it’s a question that the writers of “White Collar” need to stop asking us and answer for themselves. Should we root for Neal to get away with his crime? Should we want Peter to catch him? The inability to come down with a yes on either of those questions leaves the season premiere up in the air.

Even more damagingly, there’s just not much going on in the season premiere of “White Collar.” The best episodes of this show feature elaborate cons with enough twists and turns to make the relatively lackluster characters and plot holes easier to ignore. It’s easier to focus on unbelievable dialogue when the plot is as simple as it is in this premiere. When we’re scrambling to catch up with what Peter and Neal are up to then it’s easier to forgive. The season premiere is too often boring.





And I worry that it will become a pattern. Even the talented DeKay and Bomer look less comfortable with their characters. It's as if no one is quite sure where this show is going. If they don't figure it out soon, it could be too late.

See how "White Collar" struggled last season with the Fox Home Video release of "White Collar: The Complete Second Season," which hits stores on the same day that the show returns, June 7th, 2011. The 16 episodes have been segmented over four standard-only DVDs (why a show so reliant on looks isn't released on Blu-ray is beyond me but this is a new pattern for Fox) and each episode is presented in 1.78:1 widescreen with a Dolby Digital 5.1 audio track.

Special features on season two of the USA hit include "So Here's the Deal: Anatomy of an Episode," "Slick Willie," "White Collar Roasts Burn Notice," "Burn Notice Roasts White Collar," deleted scenes, a gag reel, and audio commentary on select episodes.

'White Collar,' which airs on USA, stars Matt Bomer, Tim DeKay, Tiffani Thiessen, and Willie Garson. The show returns with its third-season premiere on June 7th, 2011 at 8PM CST. The second season DVD is released on the same day, June 7th, 2011.



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