

TV Review: USA Launches ‘Suits,’ Reignites ‘Burn Notice’

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CHICAGO – While AMC, FX, and even TNT have been pushing forward in the world of basic cable programming, the very-successful USA network feels like it has been treading water. Their Tuesday night hits (“White Collar,” “Covert Affairs”) have begun their summer seasons without much fanfare and now we have the first night of a new Thursday pairing — the rookie “Suits” and the veteran “Burn Notice.” Is this a more enticing duo or does USA continue to struggle? Sadly, this is not the pair to save the day at USA.



Television Rating: **3.0/5.0**

“Burn Notice”

The night starts with the beloved “Burn Notice,” a show that I’ve liked in the past and even thought had the potential to really become something special after season two but that has only grown more frustrating as the years have gone by. The season premiere this summer is particularly disappointing as it feels like the writers have lost touch with what works about the program. There are still elements that work here but they’re just not being put together in the way they used to be. Something’s not clicking.



Burn Notice

Photo credit: USA

It's not through lack of effort by the talented cast. Jeffrey Donovan is still giving his all as Michael Westen and his character has grown increasingly complex as Michael's now back in the fold as a superspy, trying to get deeper into the heart of the mystery as to why he was burned so long ago. While Michael tries to take apart the agency from within, Fiona (Gabrielle Anwar) and Sam (Bruce Campbell) continue to provide support while his mother (Emmy nominee Sharon Gless) occasionally offers maternal advice.

The season premiere of "Burn Notice" is very action-heavy, playing more like a traditional spy/action series and Matt Nix's program was never strong on action. The show works off the chemistry of its stars and its cool locations, not as another "Jason Bourne for TV." We loved "Burn Notice" because it was a "different" spy show not because it was just another spy show and the season premiere gives the feeling of a show that's losing that quirky identity.

"Burn Notice" has been a popular summer diversion by providing escapism in the warmer months. We got to know and love Michael, Fiona, and Sam and we looked forward to taking the trip to Miami. Watching these three become elements in just another action show is honestly depressing. There's a sense of fun and identity that's missing. Hopefully they can find it again before it's too late.

If you want to see how we got here, check out the recently-released season four DVD of "Burn Notice." From Fox, the 18 episodes are spread out over 4 discs and presented in expected 1.78:1 widescreen. Special features include deleted scenes, "Sam Axe's Guide to Ladies and Libations," "Burn Notice Roasts White Collar," "White Collar Roasts Burn Notice," "Best-Laid Plans: The Stunts of Burn Notice," Audio Commentary on the season finale, and a Gag Reel. It was released on June 7th, 2011.



Television Rating: **2.0/5.0**

"Suits"

Debuting right after "Burn Notice" in an extended premiere is yet another legal drama, the inert "Suits." With a genre road as well-trodden as the legal arena, it takes a bit more effort to stand out and "Suits" just doesn't do it, especially with a far-more-entertaining offering airing this very season on USA's closest basic cable competitor ("Franklin & Bash" on TNT).



Suits

Photo credit: USA

Of course, "Suits" follows the basic buddy formula that USA has patented on shows like "White Collar" and "Psych," focusing on two men from other sides of the legal universe. On one side there's Harvey Specter (Gabriel Macht), a smooth-talking hotshot who can close the case and bed the waitress at the celebratory dinner later that night. Harvey can apparently do no wrong. On the other side, there's Mike (Patrick J. Adams), a smart kid who actually takes other student's tests for spending money but can't focus himself enough to get ahead on his own.

Mike finds himself in a potentially deadly situation when a drug deal he apprehensively gets involved in is about to go wrong and he ducks into the interviews for a new Summer Associate being conducted by Harvey. Thinking that his stuck-up firm could use an injection of street smarts, Harvey actually hires Mike. He may not have the actual credentials but he’s something of a legal prodigy. Can the Harvard-educated lawyer really learn something from the man on the street? And vice versa?

Macht and Adams have reasonable chemistry (a key ingredient in a show like “Suits”) but the writers let them down. The show just never clicks, at least in the premiere. To be blunt, I just didn’t care. There was a time when engaging leads with strong chemistry was enough but the fact is that the summer season has become nearly as crowded as the rest of the year. With “Falling Skies,” Franklin & Bash,” “Royal Pains,” “True Blood,” “Curb Your Enthusiasm,” and more on this Summer, “Suits” just isn’t well-tailored enough to stand out.

“Burn Notice” stars Jeffrey Donovan, Gabrielle Anwar, Bruce Campbell, and Sharon Gless. The fifth season premieres on June 23rd, 2011 at 8pm CST. “Suits” stars Gabriel Macht, Patrick J. Adams, Meghan Markle, Gina Torres, Rick Hoffman, and Sarah Rafferty. It premieres on June 23rd, 2011 at 9pm CST.



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