

TV Review: Denis Leary Suits Up For Final Season of ‘Rescue Me’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on July 13, 2011 - 11:18am

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CHICAGO – It’s hard to believe that we’ve been through six seasons of FX’s beloved “Rescue Me,” a show that never really took off with a very wide audience but has loyal, ardent followers. Being a fan of star Denis Leary for years, I think I can safely say that he’d rather have the small, dedicated following, then one larger but filled with a-holes. Those fans should be satisfied with the start of the final season of one of FX’s most notable shows, even if it does, once again, highlight both the strengths and weakness of a program that was always good but rarely great.



Television Rating: **3.5/5.0**

When “Rescue Me” premiered in 2004, it seemed to capture something about the continuing impact of 9/11 that had been missing from dramatic television. Tommy Gavin (Denis Leary) was a perfect protagonist for those times when war and the constant threat of another terrorist act loomed. He was a man who wished he had done more to save those he loved; a man who struggled with personal demons after physical ones changed his city and his life forever. As Tommy says in the seventh-season premiere, “normal” ended for him on 9/11. There is no more “normal.”



Rescue Me

Photo credit: FX

Through six seasons, “Rescue Me” has produced dozens of episodes with similar senses of humor and tone but the most striking thing about the entire arc of this series to this critic is how consistently unpredictable the show has strived to be. Leary, working with co-creator Peter Tolan, was completely unafraid to kill off major characters with absolutely no foreshadowing at all. I always read the random acts of tragedy

that occurred throughout "Rescue Me" as a nod to the inciting event for the whole show. Just as no one on the ground saw 9/11 coming, no one sees car accidents or the suicide of a mentor coming either. Sometimes the extreme randomness of the world of "Rescue Me" deflated the show with a lack of realism and repetition, but I always respected Leary and Tolan for taking risks.



Rescue Me
Photo credit: FX

Which is why I have to say that the season premiere of "Rescue Me" is a bit disappointing. It feels like familiar ground as Tommy tries to deal with his daughter's alcoholism and the blame he takes for it, while continuing to juggle his relationships with Sheila (Callie Thorne) and Janet (Andrea Roth). We've seen it before. I respect the desire to not pile on more extreme behavior just because it's the final season (although I totally expect the actual finale, scheduled for near the tenth anniversary of 9/11 to be insanely over-the-top), but this is just a bit dull for a season premiere.

I think one of the problems with "Rescue Me" this late into its run is that there's a lack of believability created by all the drama in the lives of these people. With baby kidnappings and murders, it's hard to believe that these people can so casually shoot the shit sometimes. They're all total messes. Every single one of them. OK, some of the guys at the fire station are relatively normal, but they are such a minor part of the premiere that you'd never know it.

And that brings me to my biggest problem with "Rescue Me," which has been the same for years now — it's a one-man show. We never fully got to know the rest of the guys at the station. They tried a bit with Lou (John Scurti), and Franco (Daniel Sunjata) and Sean (Steven Pasquale) sometimes got minor plot arcs, but they would inevitably get dropped for more Tommy drama. "Rescue Me" never became the ensemble show that it really should have been in order to work. Tommy's life wasn't the only one messed up that day and I so desperately hoped that every new season would bring a broader scope to the characters that just never happened.

Despite that, I'll be there for every episode of this nine-part final season. I've always respected what Denis Leary and Peter Tolan have accomplished with this show even if I wanted it to be something a bit more than it clearly was ever going to be. The performances are strong, the writing is solid, and the show represents something about our culture in the last decade since 9/11. It's no small feat that Tommy Gavin's firefighter suit is going to be included in the Smithsonian. He symbolizes not the men who died on that fateful day but the ones who had to struggle through living after it. He will be missed.

"Rescue Me" stars Denis Leary, Callie Thorne, Andrea Roth, John Scurti, Daniel Sunjata, Steven Pasquale, Adam Ferrara, and Mike Lombardi. The new season premieres on FX on July 13th, 2011 at 9pm CST.



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