

## TV Review: 'Torchwood: Miracle Day' Builds Up Steam With Second, Third Episodes

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on July 15, 2011 - 12:38pm

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CHICAGO – We didn't get the screener in time to give you a heads up about the series premiere of Starz's "Torchwood: Miracle Day" but we have seen episodes two and three and have some good news to end this long week — if you liked the first episode, don't worry. It definitely doesn't drop in quality. And if you worried a bit after that premiere that this wasn't the same "Torchwood" you knew and loved, fret not, the program starts to really get into gear by the end of the third chapter and there's little reason to be concerned.



Television Rating: **4.0/5.0**

I'll admit, being a big "Torchwood" fan, I was a bit concerned after episode one, which aired last Friday, July 8th, 2011 on Starz. The premiere felt a bit like a remake of something you know and love — similar but not quite the same. In case you're not familiar, the original "Torchwood" on BBC (available on 7/19 in a gorgeous full-series Blu-ray box set which we'll review next week) is, without question, one of the best sci-fi shows of the last decade. It's a brilliant piece of adult sci-fi that is thematically dense while also being daring, edgy entertainment. If you haven't seen all the "Torchwood" you can, you're not really a sci-fi fan.



Torchwood: Miracle Day

Photo credit: Starz

With that kind of adoration of the original, there was a healthy mix of excitement and skepticism when I approached the Starz version of the

show. The fact is that network transitions rarely come off without a hitch, but if “Miracle Day” could deliver even an approximation of the original, I’d be happy. Sub-par “Torchwood” would be better than nothing. And that’s what the premiere felt like — sub-par “Torchwood.” It was an entertaining episode that nonetheless was missing the wit and pace of the BBC show. Some of my problems with the premiere carry over to episodes two and three, but by the end of the third chapter I felt more comfortable with what Russell T. Davies and his team are doing here. All that really matters is this — I can’t wait for chapter four. If you make it that far, you’ll surely feel the same way.



Torchwood: Miracle Day  
Photo credit: Starz

In case you’re completely unfamiliar, “Torchwood: Miracle Day” is about the moment that everyone stopped dying. With only the word “Torchwood” on official channels as a warning, death no longer became an option. A brutal child-killer named Oswald Danes (Bill Pullman) couldn’t be killed by lethal injection. CIA Agent Rex Matheson (Mekhi Phifer) watched lead pipes that should have killed him go through his body in a car crash. Surgeon Vera Juarez (Arlene Tur) was one of the first to notice that the morgue in her hospital hadn’t received any new bodies in 24 hours. People had stopped dying.

But they hadn’t stopped getting hurt, getting sick, or getting old. The potential aftermath of “Miracle Day,” not just in pain and suffering but also in depletion of natural resources, is catastrophic. Meanwhile, the two remaining Torchwood members found themselves drawn into the worldwide event as Jack Harkness (John Barrowman) came to the aid of a woman investigating the Torchwood connection named Esther Drummond (Alexa Havins) and eventually returned to the in-hiding Gwen Cooper (Eve Myles), who returned to society after learning that her father had two heart attacks but didn’t die.

The first episode of “Torchwood: Miracle Day” was tasked with introducing new characters, setting up the premise for the ten-episode season, and bringing back the surviving “Torchwood” duo. To that end, it worked, but the need for set-up was obvious. The episode felt a bit talky and expository, only really clicking once Jack and Gwen were reunited. There was an intangible energy missing from the premiere simply by virtue of how much exposition was required to set-up the season.

With that out of the way, I hoped that episodes two and three would up the intensity and bring back the edge from the BBC series. In some areas, they do, but the show still feels oddly repetitive. The second episode covers way too much ground that was already covered in the first — we get it, people can’t die...don’t tell us again. To be fair, it’s an improvement over the first partially because the intensity brought by Phifer feels more channeled. He’s a man in enough pain that he should be dead. That pain is more focused on getting to the bottom of the conspiracy once he meets Gwen and Jack and an extended sequence on a plane (that includes Dichen Lachmann from “Dollhouse”) in episode two is very entertaining. I wasn’t sure about the newbies after episode one but I really like what Tur and especially Phifer bring to the second and third episodes. The jury is still out on the odd casting of Wayne Knight and Lauren Ambrose.

It takes to the end of the third episode to really feel like “Miracle Day” knows where it’s going. A number of the questions from the premiere are answered by then and the show feels more driven. It also begins to use its Starz license with a pair of sex scenes that make it a more logical fit on the network of “Camelot” and “Spartacus.” I think “Miracle Day” may have lost something by stretching to ten episodes, forcing repetition to fill out episode count and adding to the sense that the first two episodes spin their wheels a bit. After three episodes, it’s really ready to rock. Hold on tight.

*“Torchwood: Miracle Day” stars John Barrowman, Eve Myles, Arlene Tur, Mekhi Phifer, Alexa Havins, and Lauren Ambrose. It airs on Starz on Friday nights.*





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