

TV Review: Piper Perabo Stars in USA's Improved 'Covert Affairs'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on November 1, 2011 - 10:12am

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CHICAGO – In the mid-season premiere of “Covert Affairs,” Annie Walker (Piper Perabo) is learning what it’s like to be alone. The fact is that CIA Operatives don’t have many friends. It’s too dangerous for both sides of the relationship. How can you keep your friends and family around when you know they could get killed? And what do you when it’s your very family who you learn you can’t trust?



Television Rating: **3.5/5.0**

At the end of the summer, “Covert Affairs” revealed to her sister (Annie Dudek) that she was a CIA operative and was forced out of her life. In the prologue of the first new episode of the Fall, Annie makes a mistake, allows a package to go missing, and gets injured. I can’t provide any details or critical assessment of this Rio-set sequence because it wasn’t filmed in time for critics. I hope it’s a lot of fun.

What I do know is that the aftermath of that unseen prologue impacts Annie’s position at the start of the mid-season. She feels ostracized at work, even if she’s tougher on herself than anyone there is on her. Being pushed out of her sister’s life has clearly left her a bit fragile and she’s realizing that she’s pretty much on her own. When a handsome chef falls into her life, it seems too good to be true. Of course, it is.



Covert Affairs

Photo credit: USA

The mid-season premiere of “Covert Affairs,” “The Wake-Up Bomb,” not only advances the overall arc of Annie’s forced solidarity but

features a stand-alone plot about her getting close to a handsome chef whose brother has ties to the Basque separatist movement ETA. Annie uses her new, possibly-romantic relationship to further her professional one while her new potential beau realizes that his brother doesn't seem to care too much about using his own blood as collateral damage. I still think the dialogue on the program could use some work but I found the plotting admirable in the way the case-of-the-week played into the overall themes that the writers have been working with about trust and the dangers of getting close to someone in a risky profession. As Auggie (Christopher Gorham) says, "*On the bright side, at least your sibling is not trying to blow you up.*" Even the arc with Jai (Sendhil Ramamurthy) plays into these overall themes of trust and the relationships that sometimes make a gray area of it.



Covert Affairs
Photo credit: USA

Excellent mystery-of-the-week programs find a way to provide an interesting stand-alone mystery while also tying it into and advancing the overall arc of the series. The writing here is stronger than "Covert Affairs" has been before even if some of the dialogue scenes, especially between Jai and his slimy father (Gregory Itzin), still don't sound quite right. No one is really tuning into this USA hit for clever dialogue. The important thing is that the season premiere of "Covert Affairs" is well-paced, fun, clever action storytelling.

I still don't quite buy many of the relationship dynamics or performances, but they're getting better. Piper Perabo looks more comfortable in the action scenes and has always worked outside of them. Her sister relationship with Dudek feels genuine and Christopher Gorham and Kari Matchett are effective counterparts on the CIA half of the show. My biggest problem with the program now is one of the problems I had with "Heroes" — Sendhil Ramamurthy. He's simply not a believable, in-the-moment actor. I will admit that he's better here than in his worst moments on "Heroes," so it's worth noting that, like every element of this show, he seems to be improving.

USA has become the most successful network on cable through a very proven formula — find a strong central character and build a mystery/case-of-the-week around that character. At first, I didn't feel like Annie Walker was a strong enough character to join the legends of the network like Michael Westen or Adrian Monk. She's not yet there, but she's well on her way.

"Covert Affairs" stars Piper Perabo, Christopher Gorham, Annie Dudek, Kari Matchett, Sendhil Ramamurthy, Gregory Itzin, and Peter Gallagher. It returns for its mid-season premiere on November 1st, 2011 at 9pm CST.



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