

TV Review: Kerry Washington Stars in Over-Written, Melodramatic 'Scandal'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on April 5, 2012 - 9:54am

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CHICAGO – Shonda Rhimes has made waves on network TV with her unique, stylized approach to characters on hit shows “Grey’s Anatomy” and “Private Practice.” She occasionally has a gift for pulpy TV and her latest, “Scandal” sometimes hits that nerve that wants an escapist soap opera after a long day at work. More often, it feels over-done, like someone trying to stir controversy with outlandish, unbelievable behavior. It’s a tough show to review. If you approach it with even an ounce of sincerity, you’ll likely laugh it off. But if you approach it knowing that this is a daytime soap opera that just happens to be in primetime and can appreciate the fearless ludicrousness of it all, it just might be your favorite way to turn off your mind.



TV Rating: **2.5/5.0**

Kerry Washington plays Olivia Pope (which wins the award for best TV name of the year...it just sounds like an old TV icon), a legend inside the D.C. Beltway. She’s not an attorney. She’s not a publicist. She’s not a damage control specialist. She’s all of the above. When people in political circles have issues — a woman accusing a President of infidelity, a decorated veteran who may have killed his girlfriend, etc. — she’s not only the first one to know but she’s the one who spins the story before her client is arrested, interviewed, mocked, or impeached. She is tough, fast-talking, and brilliant and, as someone tells her new employee, “*she doesn’t know what ‘I don’t know’ means.*”



Photo credit: ABC

Now, dialogue like that is part of the problem with "Scandal." To say that "Scandal" is over-written would be an understatement. Characters speak with a confident, super-fast rhythm that's common to Rhimes' shows but not common anywhere in the real world. From the very opening scene, a blind date that's actually a job interview, "Scandal" is full of dialogue that's so rapid fire that it completely punctures any sense of realism. It's a pilot script with four times the dialogue of a typical TV drama, almost as if Rhimes and her writers are trying to overwhelm the viewer: You won't turn away, you'll be too busy trying to just keep up with what people are saying and doing. Everyone's over-caffeinated, hyper, and, too often, kind of annoying.



Scandal
Photo credit: ABC

To be fair, Rhimes did assemble a pretty stellar cast to deliver her rat-a-tat dialogue. Kerry Washington has long been an underrated actress (and she was a delightful interview when I was lucky enough to speak to her a few years ago) in films like "Ray," "The Dead Girl," and "Night Catches Us." She's more than talented enough to carry a network drama and while I don't think "Scandal" is the right one it's not through any fault of hers. She's engaging and charismatic, exactly what Olivia Pope needs to be to work.

And she's surrounded by a talented cast, including Henry Ian Cusick ("Lost") as Stephen Finch, a smooth talker who may be settling down after years of one-night stands, Columbus Short as Harrison Wright, Pope's back-up and the man who seems to truly run the office behind her, Guillermo Diaz ("Weeds") as Huck, the company hacker, Darby Stanchfield as Abby Whelan, a tough investigator, and Katie Lowes as Quinn Perkins, the new girl in the office. The cast outside of Pope's office includes the great Joshua Malina, Jeff Perry, and Tony Goldwyn. There's no shortage of talent in the ensemble and Rhimes' greatest skill with shows like "Grey's Anatomy" has been how she can deftly juggle large casts like this one.

However, I can't get past the writing. The premiere of "Scandal" centers on a murder investigation with a last-act twist and a potential Presidential scandal. It turns out that Pope has a history with President Fitzgerald Grant (Goldwyn) that may cloud her typically-sharp judgment. The melodrama is piled too high on the premiere, leading me to wonder where it could possibly go from here. The required suspension of disbelief in both of the major stories turns this into something closer to "Days of Our Lives" than "All the President's Men." I guess one shouldn't expect realistic commentary on how Washington ticks from a show called "Scandal." But one can expect something a bit more grounded with a cast this strong. If "Scandal" can become a little more "New York Times investigative journalism" and a little less "National Enquirer headline story," I'll check back in. But, for now, the real DC is crazy enough. I don't need an even-more-exaggerated version of it on Thursday nights.

"Scandal" stars Kerry Washington, Henry Ian Cusick, Columbus Short, Guillermo Diaz, Darby Stanchfield, Katie Lowes, Tony Goldwyn, and Jeff Perry. It was written by Shonda Rhimes and premieres on Thursday, April 5th, 2012 at 9pm CST.



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