

TV Review: Clever ‘Episodes’ Mocks Industry with Hilarious Results

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on July 1, 2012 - 1:06pm

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CHICAGO – Life really does imitate fiction, especially when the fiction is so clearly inspired by reality. While Showtime’s very funny “Episodes” is an exaggerated version of the chaos, infidelity, backstabbing, and general stupidity that goes down behind the scenes of a network TV show, one need look no further to prove the statement than the fact that “Episodes” star Stephen Mangan watched as his British hit “Free Agents” was turned into the first casualty of the Fall 2011 season in the States. Sometimes things just don’t make the trip across the pond.

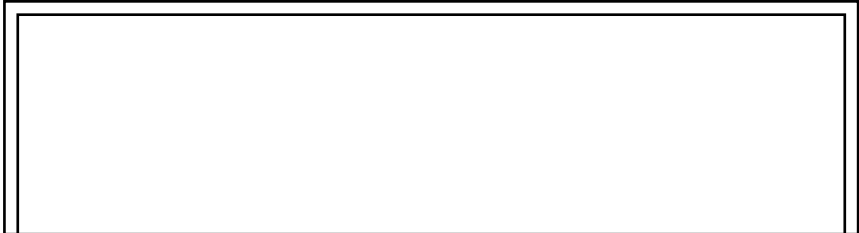


And this is the focus of season two of “Episodes” as Mangan’s writer Sean Lincoln and his wife Beverly (Tamsin Greig) watch as their program “Pucks!” with Matt LeBlanc (who brilliantly plays himself) gets destroyed in the ratings by a show with a talking dog. While the first season of “Episodes” was about the pre-production process of getting a show from the U.K. to an American pilot, the second season is about what happens next as producers start to meddle in an attempt to stop eroding ratings before the cancellation axe swings.



Episodes
Photo credit: Showtime

It’s also, of course, about the soap opera behind the scenes. If you haven’t seen season one of “Episodes,” recently released on DVD in a very-disappointing set with no real special features and no Blu-ray release, then you should correct that error and stop reading because I’m going to start spoiling. At the end of season one, thinking that Sean had slept with “Pucks!” star Morning Randolph (Mircea Monroe), Beverly slept with Matt LeBlanc. When Sean discovered the betrayal, he naturally severed his friendship with LeBlanc and separated from Beverly. And then the show got picked up, meaning that the three would be forced to work together.





Episodes

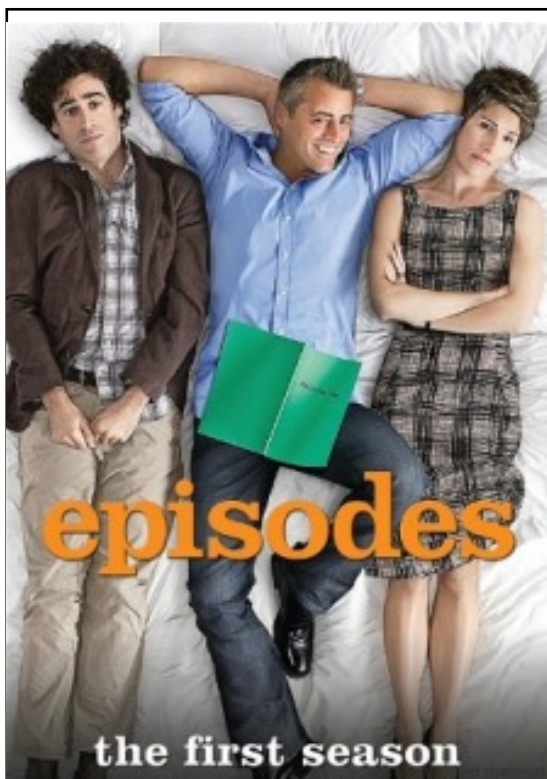
Photo credit: Showtime

I'm happy to report that the second season of "Episodes" doesn't just hit the "reset button" as often happens in shows like this. It's not like the infidelity is just forgotten. In fact, it's the main focus of the second season as Beverly & Sean move closer to divorce than reconciliation. Beverly develops a very nice friendship with Carol (Kathleen Rose Perkins) while Sean continues to ignore Matt and even get closer to Morning. Matt wants everyone to be happy but he's got some behind-the-scenes drama of his own brewing with Merc's (John Pankow) wife.

Some of the material in the first five installments of the new season of "Episodes" is a bit disappointingly broad. Handjobs during screenings, business calls during funerals, misunderstandings about trips meant for the mistress instead of the wife — this is the kind of material that we've seen before in Hollywood satires and it's actually where I think "Episodes" is at its weakest.

Where it's at its best is in the characters and the actors who perform them. LeBlanc was nominated for the Emmy and won the Golden Globe for season one and I imagine he'll be in the same consideration for season two. His reaction to approaches by Merc's wife, his response when producers start meddling with his character, his honest disappointment at the loss of his friendship with Sean — he's simply great here. And Greig is one of my favorite comedy actresses on TV. It's a solid ensemble all around.

Halfway through the second season of "Episodes," I have to say that my hope that the show would truly take off and build on season one has not fully been realized. It's a good show but it's certainly no better than the first outing and is arguably less consistent. However, there's still a ton to like here from LeBlanc & Greig's performances to those moments of true insider insight that haven't been done this well on TV since the prime of "Entourage." At least something good came out of "Free Agents."

Episodes: The First Season was released on
DVD on June 12, 2012*Photo credit: Showtime*

As for the DVD, the one-disc (leading to purely average video transfers) release of the first season of "Episodes" is a true disappointment. You've got a Golden Globe winner from a major cable network and you can't release it on Blu-ray? Or give us a single special feature? It's total nonsense and an oversight that one hopes is corrected for season two.

Synopsis:

It's the hilarious first season of Episodes from Showtime. A husband-and-wife writing team gets the opportunity of their lives - to bring their successful British television series across the pond and make it big in America. But in true Hollywood fashion and a few script changes later, it quickly becomes a laughable, clichéd sitcom starring none other than ex-television star and Golden Globe winner, Matt LeBlanc. Matt not only messes with their beloved show, he rocks the foundation of their relationship. So now, even if they survive the absurdity of show business in Hollywood, can their marriage survive Matt LeBlanc?

Special Features:

- o Biographies
- o First Two Episodes Of The Borgias
- o First Two Episodes Of House Of Lies
- o First Two Episodes of Dexter: Season 6

"Episodes" stars Stephen Mangan, Tamsin Greig, Mircea Monroe, John Pankow, Kathleen Rose Perkins, and Matt LeBlanc. The second season premieres on Showtime on Sunday, July 1, 2012 at 9:30pm CST. The first season DVD was released on June 12, 2012.



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