

TV Review: ABC's Tense 'Last Resort' Delivers on Amazing Set-up

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on September 27, 2012 - 11:27am

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CHICAGO – It may not look as post-apocalyptic as “Revolution” or “The Walking Dead,” but Shawn Ryan's excellent “Last Resort,” debuting tonight, is just as much about the end of the world as those programs. It's about what happens when training fails, structure collapses, and human emotion betrays. With stellar performances all around, Hollywood production values, razor-sharp dialogue, and complex themes, “Last Resort” could quickly become not just the best new drama of the season but one of the best shows on TV, period.



Television Rating: **4.5/5.0**

An Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine named the Colorado has received orders to fire. The orders have come through a back channel that's designed for use only when the front channels are gone. In other words, it's clearly meant for when the U.S. has been attacked and can't give orders on its own. Almost immediately, a “Crimson Tide”-esque conflict ensues on the sub. Why not raise an antenna and see how the world is doing before firing a nuclear missile on a foreign country? Or should the men merely follow orders as they've been trained for so long to do?



Last Resort
Photo credit: ABC

Caught in this moral and practical dilemma are Captain Marcus Chaplin (Andre Braugher) and XO Sam Kendal (Scott Speedman). They question the order through the channel, and before they can even deal with the mutiny about to take place aboard their sub, they are almost immediately fired upon by an unknown enemy. Chaplin and Kendal navigate to a nearby NATO base on a remote island as the planet succumbs to World War III. They have their nuclear weapons. They're not surrendering. They're not moving until they get some answers and clear their names.



Last Resort

Photo credit: ABC

And they're not alone. Chaplin and Kendal are merely the two most prominent figures in a very interesting extended cast that also includes Daisy Betts as a nervous Lieutenant, Dichen Lachman ("Dollhouse") as a local on the island, Daniel Lissing as a SEAL Officer, and Robert Patrick as Master Chief Joseph Prosser, a by-the-numbers soldier who can't believe the insubordination of Chaplin and Kendal and takes action to correct it. There are also stateside scenes involving Kendal's new wife (Jessy Schram) and a woman (Autumn Reeser) who clearly holds some of the keys to explain just what's going on with the Colorado and how the men and women aboard it are being used in an international chess game.

If it sounds like a lot of plot for one show, it undeniably is just that but co-creator Shawn Ryan ("The Shield," "The Chicago Code") knows how to balance multiple characters and plot arcs with the kind of deft ease that have made him one of the most important voices in the medium. There's a juggling act to the plotting of "Last Resort" as the show transitions quickly from action to drama to thriller to political intrigue and even casual viewers can easily spot where most writers would drop the ball. While you're watching the series premiere of "Last Resort," try and count the place where it could have gone wrong. It's a concept that's admittedly fantastic but it could have quickly become melodramatic or unbelievable. It's never either.

The first episode of "Last Resort" is, understandably, heavy on plot and action but I was curious to see where it would go in episode two. I couldn't be happier with the second episode of this show or more optimistic for the third. The premiere is all about acting — doing what's right in the moment. The second episode is about what comes after that — repercussions, hindsight, regret — and taking the next step. Most importantly, it's about personal connections lost and how we use those to give us strength, to make it matter.



Last Resort
Photo credit: ABC

One of the main reasons for the show's remarkable navigation of the dramatic highwire between the genuine and the melodramatic is its incredibly strong cast. From "Homicide" to "Men of a Certain Age," Andre Braugher is simply one of the best actors in the history of television. The man carries a gravity that makes him easily believable as a nuclear submarine Captain but he also has a relatable quality that makes one want to sit and have a beer with him. And Braugher plays both halves — the leader and the regular guy — brilliantly. He has an emotional scene in the second episode with Speedman that is simply amazing. There's a new challenger in the Best Actor in a Drama categories.

However, Ryan smartly doesn't just turn this into a star vehicle for Braugher. There are great performances throughout. Scott Speedman has long been an underrated actor and he's very, very good here, as are Betts, Schram, and Reeser. It's interesting to me that a show that could have been so macho and so centered around male characters and their egos has such memorable female characters right from the very beginning. That's just one of many unexpected things in "Last Resort."

And that's the best word for "Last Resort" — unexpected. The best TV takes turns that we don't see coming but navigates them in confident enough ways that we find them believable. We don't want predictable television but we also don't want nonsense in the guise of unpredictability. The best storytellers walk that line and create shows where we just give in and trust in the journey of where the program is taking us. Ryan's show is in a brutal time slot up against two of the biggest comedies on TV. Don't let it fall in the ratings because I can't wait to see where the journey goes on "Last Resort."

"Last Resort" stars Andre Braugher, Scott Speedman, Daisy Betts, Dichen Lachman, Daniel Lissing, Sahr Ngaujah, Camille de Pazzis, Autumn Reeser, Jessy Schram, and Robert Patrick. It was created by Shawn Ryan and Karl Gajdusek. It premieres on ABC on Thursday,

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