

TV Review: Great Cast But No Reason to Care About ‘Red Widow’

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CHICAGO – While the broadcast networks midseason continues to set records for overall incompetence and ABC’s “Zero Hour” appears to be the latest casualty (as it was pulled from this week schedule in advance of a likely cancellation), the newest attempt to revive flatlining numbers comes in the form of ABC’s “Red Widow.” This new thriller has a great cast and strong production values but no reason to expect that it will turn this season around.



Television Rating: **2.5/5.0**

Marta Walraven (an effective Radha Mitchell) has a nice house, three kids, and a happy life that is shattered when her husband Evan is murdered in their driveway. It turns out that Evan made his fortune in somewhat unscrupulous ways that had just gotten significantly more deadly with the theft of a shipment of drugs from notorious crime lord Christian Schiller (Goran Visjnic). Evan and his partners — Marta’s brother Irwin (Wil Traval) and their best friend Mike (Lee Tergesen) — were infighting over what to do with the drugs and Evan was about to make a major decision when he was shot. Was he killed by the drug dealer he wronged? Was he killed by his best friend or brother-in-law who wanted to keep the business going and feared his apprehension regarding the drug theft?



Red Widow

Photo credit: ABC

Marta is not only stuck with these questions but the remaining loose ends her husband's business created. While she tries to keep her family strong, she also enters the dark world in which her husband made their fortune. Although it's not completely unfamiliar to her as Marta comes from a long line of shady characters, including the kind but Tony Soprano-esque Andrei Petrov (Rade Serbedzija), her father who Marta's son points out is wealthy despite not appearing to do much work. Will Marta turn to Andrei for muscle? What about Andrei's mysterious right-hand man Luther (Luke Goss)? And what role will FBI Agent James Ramos (Clifton Collins Jr.) play in the drama?



Red Widow
Photo credit: ABC

There are clearly a number of plot threads to keep unraveling on "Red Widow" and yet the show never feels like it has enough momentum to maintain the viewer interest needed to turn it into a much-needed hit for the network. It doesn't have the soap opera sleaze of the similar "Revenge" and doesn't have the spy intrigue to capture a different audience. Who does "Red Widow" appeal to? The action isn't strong enough to grab that audience. The mystery is slightly intriguing but not enough to really engage.

Which leaves the characters, which clearly drew the most talented cast of the midseason by some stretch but aren't well-crafted enough by Melissa Rosenberg ("Dexter," "The Twilight Saga") to really resonate. One of the problems is the scope of the piece. While Mitchell is a charismatic, engaging lead, the fifteen or so other major roles don't have enough time to click outside of the plot. It's through no fault of the cast, which includes great character actors like Collins, Serbedzija, and Tergesen along with memorable young performers like Goss and Jaime Ray Newman. I kept thinking while I was watching the two-hour premiere of "Red Widow," "I really like this cast, why don't really like this show?"

Because TV will always come back to writing. And the writing on "Red Widow" just isn't interesting. It never gives the viewer a reason to engage long-term. Why should we care about these characters? Why is this mystery more engaging than the many others on TV? These questions aren't answered and so "Red Widow" will go the way of "Deception," "Zero Hour," "Do No Harm," and more in the great disaster of the 2012-13 midseason.

"Red Widow" stars Radha Mitchell, Sterling Beaumon, Clifton Collins Jr., Luke Goss, Suleka Mathew, Erin Moriarity, Jaime Ray Newman, Lee Tergesen, Wil Traval, Rade Serbedzija, and Goran Visjnic. It premieres on ABC on Sunday, March 4, 2013 at 8pm CST.



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