

TV Review: Clunky, Inconsistent ‘Sleepy Hollow’ Lacks Brains

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on September 16, 2013 - 9:46am

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CHICAGO – And so it begins. The first new show of the 2013-14 broadcast network season premieres tonight, September 16, 2013, as FOX unleashes yet another update of a classic legend in “Sleepy Hollow.” Does this hip variation on “Once Upon a Time” connect with both audiences who know the source material (and, no, it’s not the Tim Burton movie...even if the tone here is closer to the Johnny Depp vehicle than the Washington Irving short story) and those who have never heard of it? Sadly, neither.



Those who know the potential of an update of the original will be disappointed and even those who know not of the headless horseman will find this clunky and strange. It’s a show that moves in fits and starts, lurching like a beheaded beast when it should flow smoothly. It’s all concept, no character, and it’s not slick or well-done enough to even serve as Monday night eye candy.



Sleepy Hollow
Photo credit: FOX

A totally reimagined Ichabod Crane (Tom Mison), now a hunky fighter instead of the common portrayal of the character as a meek bookworm, dies in combat for George Washington in the 1700s. Before he croaks, he lops off the head of his greatest foe, essentially creating The Headless Horseman when both Crane and his darkest enemy awaken over two centuries later.





Sleepy Hollow
Photo credit: FOX

Yep, Crane and the Headless Horseman, who is now possibly also one of the Four Horseman of the Apocalypse because you can't make a show like this with only one legendary character in 2013, are brought kicking and screaming into modern times, where they will battle each other as Crane also works to stop other cases of supernatural activity and occult behavior. It's "The X-Files" with Mulder recast as Ichabod Crane.

The Scully of this dynamic is the charming Nicole Beharie as Abbie Mills, the new sheriff of the small town on which all of this time travelling chaos descends. Partnering a Revolutionary War era soldier with a young, black sheriff could be the most oil-and-water buddy dynamic in TV history, and Mills and Mison have some strong chemistry. Sadly, the rest of the cast feels kind of clunky as the show bounces back and forth between the 1700s and the 2000s. We also learn that Ichabod's wife Katrina (Katia Winters) may be caught in between eras, fighting a battle of her own. And finally there's the poorly cast Orlando Jones as Captain Frank Irving, the true skeptic who will be forced to discount evidence of the supernatural in increasingly unbelievable ways as the fight for the safety of humanity takes place in Sleepy Hollow.

Alex Kurtzman and Roberto Orci have a lot of geek credit in reserve for their clever reboot of "Star Trek" in 2009 and even a bit in some circles for the "Transformers" franchise but this messy piece of work feels closest to the tonally inconsistent "Cowboys & Aliens" on their resume. Our greatest hope for the show is that it could stabilize into a Gothic, supernatural variation on the duo's "Fringe," but the production values, writing, and overall concept don't seem strong enough to make that creative goal a reality. Instead, we're left with a program with a lot of ideas that feel like darts thrown at a board instead of anything coherent enough to engage audiences.

"Ichabod Crane and one of the Four Horseman of the Apocalypse in modern times with flashbacks to the the Revolutionary era and weekly supernatural crimes to solve" — it's a pitch that clearly got some network attention but that also needed a lot more finetuning to result in something coherent and entertaining. One needs to give Orci, Kurtzman, and the rest of the crew credit for even trying something so unusual (and the oddity of the whole affair could draw some viewers for a few weeks) but the execution leaves something to be desired. It's a program that bounces around tonally and narratively, never feeling like its head is in the right place to know where it wants to go.

"Sleepy Hollow" stars Tom Mison, Nicole Beharie, Katia Winters, and Orlando Jones. It premieres on Monday, September 16, 2013 at 8pm CST.



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