

TV Review: Great Cast, Clever Concept Carry ‘Hostages’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on September 23, 2013 - 9:37am

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CHICAGO – CBS’s “Hostages” is the first interesting new drama of 2013 (well, tied with NBC’s “The Blacklist,” which airs at the same time tonight, Monday, September 23, 2013). It’s not an instant hit creatively but there’s a lot to like here, particularly in its great cast and clever concept, one that engages the viewer enough with the promise of excitement for all fifteen weeks of this shortened season. It’s got the feel of a great action movie, a piece of escapism that doesn’t necessarily challenge you mentally but offers a nice break from reality after a long Monday.



Television Rating: **3.5/5.0**

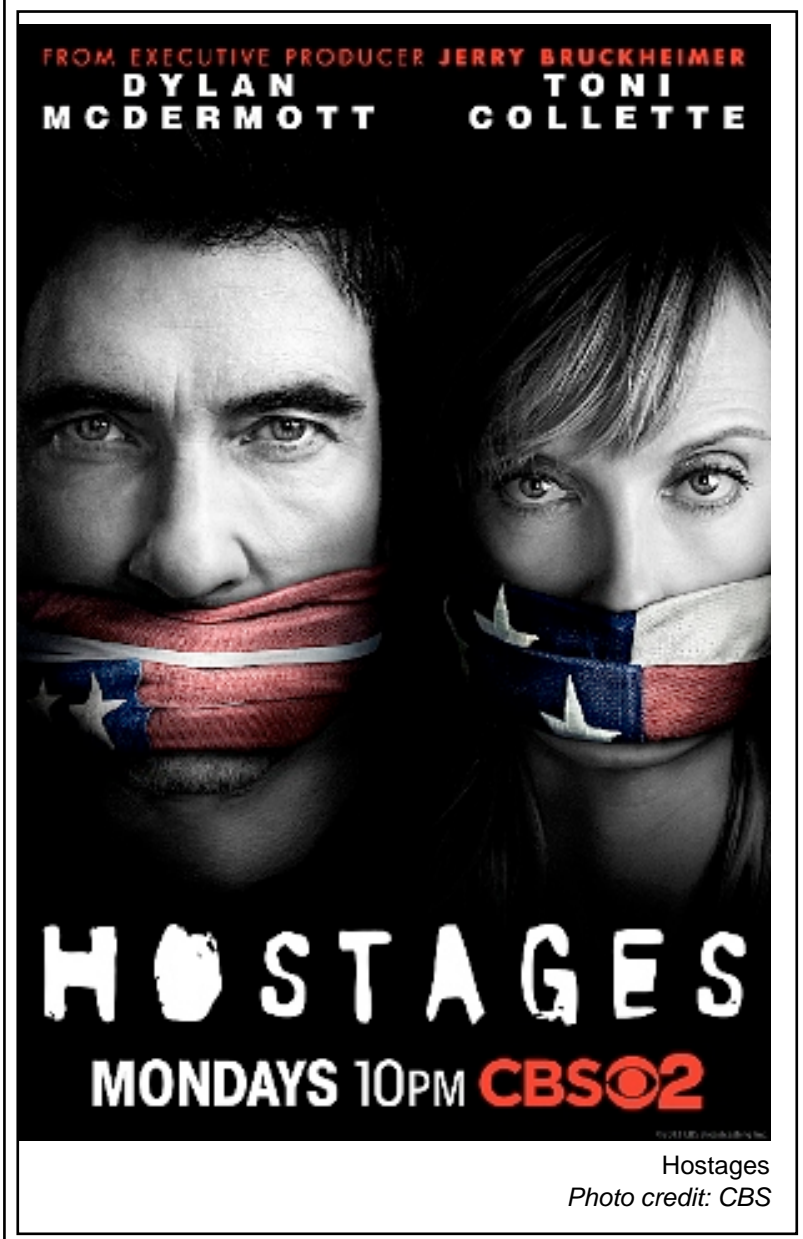
TV veterans Toni Collette (Emmy winner for “The United States of Tara”), Dylan McDermott (Golden Globe winner for “The Practice”), Tate Donovan (“Damages”) bring their notable ability to create engaging, believable characters in not-necessarily-believable situations to “Hostages.” That’s a warning. The plot is ridiculous. But it’s the actors that ground it, much like Kiefer Sutherland did on “24.” Even when that show shattered the suspension of disbelief, we went with it for pure entertainment value because we believed in Jack Bauer. I’m not saying Dr. Ellen Sanders is the new Jack Bauer but it’s the skill of Collette and her co-stars to make this silly plot feel real that makes it effective.



Hostages

Photo credit: CBS

Sanders is one of the most important surgeons in the world. How important? She's about to operate on the leader of the free world, the President of the United States. Before the biggest day of her medical career, Ellen and her family are taken hostage and she's ordered to "make a mistake" the next day. Led by the charismatic Duncan (McDermott), the team of kidnappers includes Duncan's brother-in-law Kramer (Rhys Coiro), the muscle Archer (Billy Brown), and the mysterious Sandrine (Sandrine Holt). They take Ellen's whole family hostage, including father Brian (Donovan), and children Jake (Mateus Ward) and Morgan (Quinn Shephard).



The story of "Hostages" jumps around a bit but much of it will clearly take place in the Sanders home with eight distinct characters to maintain the melodrama. Tension brings secrets to the surface and the marriage between Brian and Ellen may have a few cracks in its surface. Even the children hold secrets that could matter to the standoff in the end. "Hostages" nicely sets up a number of characters instead of focusing purely on the battle between Ellen and Brian. The supporting cast is strong.

But the show belongs to Collette and McDermott. Toni Collette has long been underrated, always finding a way to feel completely in the moment. You don't see the rigging with her. She is such a genuine actress that her ability to convey this situation as real is the show's greatest asset. McDermott nicely plays against type as he's not often the bad guy. He works here, as it's clear that Duncan's motives may be more complex than sheer murder.

One of my biggest concerns with "Hostages" was that it would drag its feet. 15 weeks with one kidnapped family? That could get tiring quickly. Without spoiling anything, the premiere of "Hostages" not only zips by but gets to a concluding point that I think most viewers would expect to see in a month or two. It's well-paced and tightly constructed. Yes, some of it feels overdone and silly, which is a problem considering they have to turn up the dial over the next 14 episodes and I'm worried that they won't have any room to go up without getting totally ridiculous. But, to start, "Hostages" satisfies the most important test of a pilot better than any new show this year — it ends on a nice turn of events that make me really want to see what happens next.

"Hostages" stars Toni Collette, Dylan McDermott, Tate Donovan, Sandrine Holt, Rhys Coiro, Billy Brown, Quinn Shephard, Mateus Ward, and James Naughton. It premieres on Monday, September 23, 2013 on CBS at 9pm CST.



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