

## Patrick Swayze, Chicago Setting Work Together in Promising ‘The Beast’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on January 8, 2009 - 5:16pm

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Television Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Patrick Swayze shines in A&E’s down-and-dirty “The Beast,” a show about deep undercover agents that uses its Chicago setting as well as any show in recent memory. Chicago is regularly the setting for television and film productions, but rarely has it been as much a part of the overall fabric of the show as it is on “The Beast,” one of the more promising dramas of the new year.

A&E’s new drama is about going so deep undercover that not only does identity get blurry but so does motive and even sanity. The pilot script from writer William Rotko (“Breach”) and Vincent Angell occasionally stretches credulity, but Swayze and the excellent quality of the production make for an immensely watchable thriller.



Patrick Swayze in The Beast.  
*Photo credit: Michael Muller*

Swayze plays FBI veteran Charles Barker, an expert undercover agent with some hazy boundaries, and newcomer Travis Fimmel plays his rookie partner, Ellis Dove. In the pilot, Barker essentially hazes Dove in his process, pushing him deeper and deeper into his undercover role as the two work on infiltrating a weapons smuggling ring. The “gritty” intention of the show’s creators is clear from the get-go as Barker shoots Dove (the younger agent is wearing a vest, of course) to keep his cover.





Patrick Swayze and Travis Fimmel in The Beast.  
*Photo credit: Michael Muller*

Life with a reckless agent like Barker as your partner would be bad enough but Dove has a few other problems. First, it's hard to keep dates with the cute girl in your building, Rose (Lindsay Pulsipher), when you're pretending to be someone else for a living. Second, poor Ellis is approached by Internal Affairs because they think that Barker has gone completely off the grid and is engaged in illegal activity. He's allowed "The Beast" of being undercover to eat him alive. So, now, Dove is "undercover squared" - an undercover agent suspicious of his own undercover partner, lying to absolutely everyone in his life, and kind of going crazy in the process.

So much of the brunt of the storytelling of the first two episodes of "The Beast" falls on the shoulders of the two agents that the supporting cast has yet to really be developed. Having said that, Pulsipher seems like an interesting romantic lead and Larry Gilliard Jr. ("The Wire") and Kevin J. O'Connor ("There Will Be Blood") shine in small roles.

Some elements of the script for the pilot of "The Beast" feel overplayed. I refuse to believe that any FBI agent, no matter how deeply undercover, would go to some of the extremes that Barker does in the first episode, including launching a missile launcher at a parked car in Chicago. There's also something a bit too "twitchy" about Fimmel's performance in the premiere, but he seems more confident in his character's shoes by the second episode and will probably only grow more so with time.

The flaws of the writing on "The Beast" are easily overlooked due to the strength of the concept, the technical execution, and the excellent lead performance by Swayze. Time and the tragedy of Swayze's real life have clearly hardened this romantic leading man. Barker is a damaged, dark individual and Swayze nails the character. He's going to be the main reason that most viewers tune in to the premiere and he's the reason they'll probably keep watching for the rest of the season. It is arguably the best performance of his entire career.



Patrick Swayze and Travis Fimmel in The Beast.  
*Photo credit: Michael Muller*

The most notable element of the production is the team's use of the windy city. I can't remember the last time Chicago was used this effectively on the small screen. "The Beast" takes place all over the city from Merchandise Mart to Bucktown and it makes Chicago feel like an actual character in the story, not just another set. A major scene near the end of the pilot takes place on an elevated train and it's a perfect choice of setting.

Flash Taco, Intelligentsia, The Daley Center, Lake Shore Drive, and many more local landmarks/locations play major roles in the premiere episode, and it doesn't feel like the predictable directorial choices of Sears Tower and Wrigley Field. Chicago has rarely been used as

effectively in film or television.

It’s just one part of a show that’s technically accomplished overall. It may not sound like something important, but with so many programs on the air with lackluster production value, it’s so refreshing to see a show that feels much more like a short film than just another episode on just another network.

If the writing can be tweaked and the believable emphasized over the extreme cases or characters, “The Beast” could become one of the best shows of 2009. Despite some flaws, it has more going for it in just the pilot episode - Chicago, Swayze, a great concept, clever dialogue - than most entire seasons. It’s too early to say for sure if the show can maintain this level of quality - and the second episode is slightly less interesting than the first - but the pilot is one of the best hours of television to air in the lackluster ‘08-‘09 television season. All drama fans, especially everyone in the Chicagoland area, should check out “The Beast”.

*‘The Beast,’ which airs on A&E, stars Patrick Swayze, Travis Fimmel, Larry Gilliard Jr., Brette Taylor, Lindsay Pulsipher, and Kevin J. O’Connor. The premiere airs on Thursday, January 15th, 2009 at 9PM CST.*



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