

TV Review: ‘Harper’s Island’ Has Great Hook But Lackluster Execution

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on April 9, 2009 - 9:09am

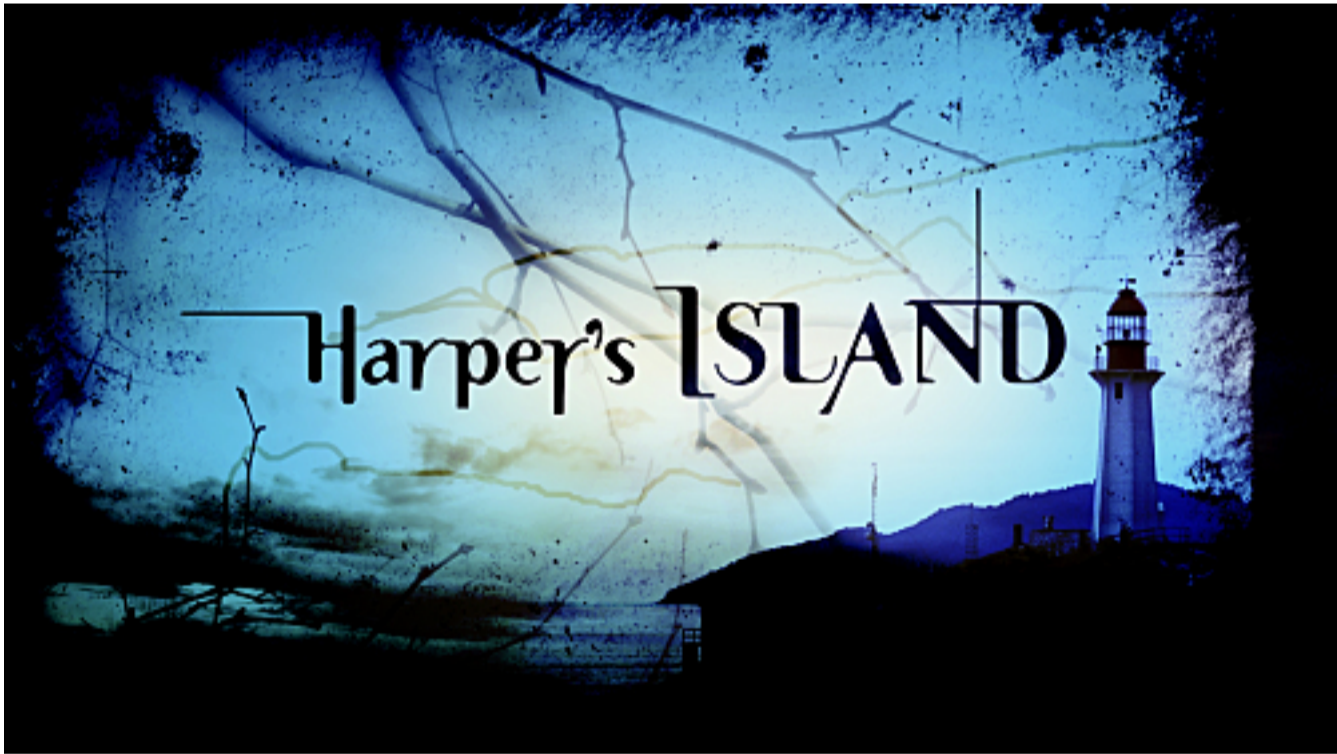
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Television Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – I’ve been looking forward to “[Harper’s Island](#) [10]” for months. Last summer, CBS sent out a brief preview with some actors who would eventually be recast (including Bill Pullman) that laid out the general idea of this modern take on Agatha Christie’s “Ten Little Indians”. The concept of a 13-week mystery featuring beautiful people getting whacked week to week was definitely intriguing. Now that I’ve seen the premiere, the bubble has burst.

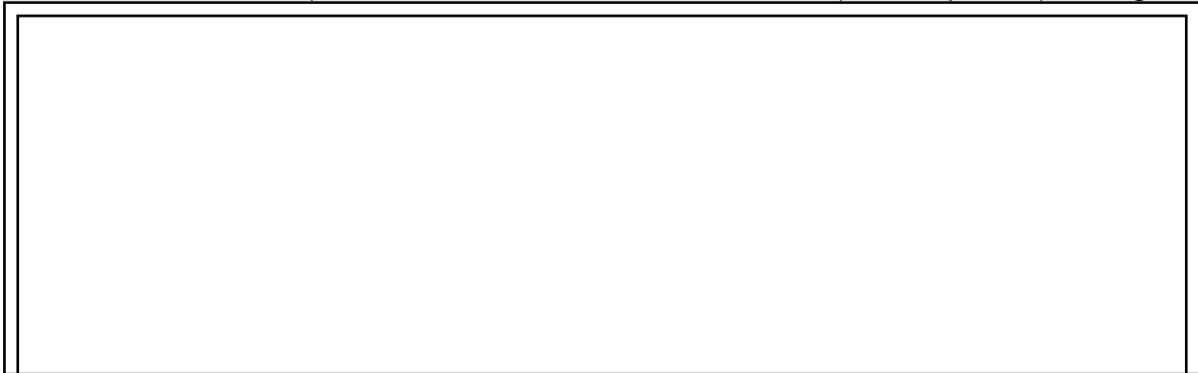
I so desperately want to recommend “Harper’s Island” because I think there should be more programs between the mystery-of-the-week shows like “[CSI](#) [19]” or “[Bones](#) [20]” and the more complex shows like “[Lost](#) [21]”. A 13-week mystery with a pre-set endpoint and solution is genius. The execution (pun intended) is another story.



Harper’s Island

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[Elaine Cassidy](#) [9] plays Abby Mills, the clear lead of “Harper’s Island”. For slasher fans, she feels like the Neve Campbell (“Scream”) or Jennifer Love Hewitt (“I Know What You Did Last Summer”) of the piece (although that could be a fake-out. Don’t take anything for granted.)





Harper's Island

Photo credit: Chris Helcermanas-Benge

Abby is a former townie of the titular island near Washington and she's returning home after seven years. Back then, a twisted soul went on a horrible killing spree and one of the victims happened to be Abby's mom. She's a little fragile as the ghosts of the island return to her and she is forced to deal with her father (Jim Beaver) again. Oh, he just happens to be the sheriff who killed the bad guy the first time around. Can he do it again?

Why is Abby back at all? Her close friend Henry (Christopher Gorham) is getting married to Trish ([Katie Cassidy](#) [14]) on Harper's Island. Henry is the poor kid and Trish is the wealthy daughter of the Wellington family (headed by the always-slimy Richard Burgi).

Some print outlets, including TV Guide and Variety, received nine episodes. Us online folks got one. So it's hard to say exactly where "Harper's Island" is going. The first episode is SO introduction-heavy. There are a lot of characters on this show (the more suspects the better) and the mystery hasn't really taken shape at all (although there will be blood).

We may have only seen one episode, but everyone knows that the premiere of a show like "Harper's Island" is going to be the most important chapter in the series. Who wants to start reading a murder mystery one-thirteenth of the way through? So, does "Harper's Island" pass the ultimate test? Will it make you watch episode two?



Harper's Island

Photo credit: Chris Helcermanas-Benge

I think it barely does just because of the strength of the concept, but I truly hope that creator Ari Schlossberg and director Jon Turteltaub iron out a few of the kinks. The pilot is presented as a socialite soap like "Gossip Girl" meets "Scream" but there's a major difference between those two creative properties and this one - they had clever, witty dialogue.

Based on the premiere, the characters and dialogue on "Harper's Island" are mediocre to awful. The premiere too often feels more like daytime soap "Passions" than the clever mystery it could have been. And it's unlikely that those issues are going to change. I imagine most of these characters and the paper-thin dialogue they've been given will stay consistently mediocre, but "Harper's Island" may keep me

coming back just to solve the mystery.

Ultimately, what was once a highly anticipated mystery has already developed into a guilty pleasure for this viewer. Like a lot of reality shows that I'm slightly embarrassed to admit I watch, I'll come back to "Harper's Island," but I don't think I'll feel too good about it in the morning.

'Harper's Island,' which airs on CBS, stars Elaine Cassidy, Christopher Gorham, Katie Cassidy, Cameron Richardson, Adam Campbell, C.J. Thomason, Jim Beaver, Matt Barr, Amber Borycki, Richard Burgi, and Harry Hamlin. The show was created by Ari Schlossberg. The series premieres on Thursday, April 9th, 2009 at 9PM CST.



[22]

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