

TV Review: B-Movie Thrills Live on in BBC America's 'Primeval'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on May 14, 2009 - 8:26pm

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CHICAGO – BBC America's "Primeval" is a wonderful slice of B-movie thrills on the small screen, a great piece of escapism on Saturday nights that is yet another jewel in the crown of this fantastic cable network. I like the Sci-Fi Channel as much as the next guy, but their original programming pales in comparison to what BBC America has done with just "Torchwood," "Doctor Who," "Ashes to Ashes," and "Primeval".



Television Rating: **3.5/5.0**

The first volume of "Primeval," now on DVD from BBC Home Video and Warner Bros. details the set-up that season three has already notoriously blown up. I'm going to tread lightly with spoilers, even though the season has already aired in the UK and any good BBC America series fan should know not to get too accustomed to even the lead actors on their favorite shows.



Primeval

Photo credit: BBC America

In the premiere of season three, Douglas Henshall plays Professor Cutter, a man long-interested in legends, reports of unusual fossils, and

grainy pictures of creatures in the woods. In the world of "Primeval," rifts occasionally open in the time continuum, allowing all kinds of prehistoric creatures to travel and wreak havoc. The premiere of season three features a giant crocodile-looking creature and the second a gargoyle-esque chameleon.



Primeval

Photo credit: BBC America

What's great about "Primeval" is the balance of tone. When a tranquilizer dart shoots past Cutter's face in the third season premiere, it's meant to be humorous, and the creature design is so over-the-top that it self-consciously produces joyful laughs more than actual suspense. But there are also deep "X-Files"-esque conspiracies and dark pasts that influence the overall narrative of the show. It's like "Lost" if the smoke monster was more fun.

What the BBC and the writers of "Primeval" get so right is that they know that you have to take your concept seriously but that you can't produce a show about giant prehistoric creatures without your tongue slightly in your cheek. And yet "Primeval" is never over-the-top stupid like a Sci-Fi Channel original movie. It's the balance of the B-movie escapism and likable, interesting, believable characters that sets it (and a lot of BBC shows) apart.

Now, the spoilers are about to get heavier, so don't say I didn't warn you.

Season three will feature a riveting new lead in Jason Flemyng, the talented actor who recently played Brad Pitt's father in "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button". He's introduced in episode two, airing May 26th, 2009, and I think will make a perfect fit. I loved Henshall in the first two seasons, but Flemyng is going to make "Primeval" must-see TV.

Two other new cast members, Laila Rouass and Ben Masfield, also join the crew in episode one. BBC America programming has long had a policy of revolving casts, allowing for both an interesting new injection of life into sometimes-stale shows and creating drama where you're never quite sure who's going to live or die.



Primeval

Photo credit: BBC America

The first episode of the new season details the arrival of a prehistoric creature in an exhibit at the British Museum and sets up a structure sure to vastly influence the show. Cutter latches on to the idea that perhaps the legendary creatures of myth like the Loch Ness Monster or Kraken were simply previous cases of other anomalies or rips in time and that charting their location and first occurrence can help them plan future anomalies. It's a great storytelling idea, freeing up the show to focus on something greater than mere Velociraptors and giant spiders.

The premiere of season three doesn't work as well as the best of "Primeval". It feels like a little bit of house-cleaning - introducing the audience to a major new character - and isn't as fully-developed script-wise as the show can be. Give it a week. The second is fantastic - perfectly paced, clever, and just plain fun.

And that's the key to "Primeval". It's a slice of B-movie fun on a Saturday night, something meant to take you back to the adventures of your youth and spark the imagination. With an excellent new lead and creative spark in its storytelling, "Primeval" should do just that this summer on BBC America.

BBC American even sent over a great preview to give you a taste of what "Primeval" has to offer.

The third season of 'Primeval' premieres on BBC America on Saturday, May 16th, 2009 at 8pm CST. It stars Jason Flemyng, Andrew-Lee Potts, Hannah Spearitt, Laila Rouass, Ben Mansfield, Juliet Aubrey, Ben Miller, Douglas Henshall, and Lucy Brown. It was created by Tim Haines and Adrian Hodges.



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