

TV Review: 'Bored to Death' Has Title More Truthful Than Ironic

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on September 20, 2009 - 2:13pm

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CHICAGO – Maybe it's an ironic, surreal joke but the most common thought that I kept having during the first three episodes of "Bored to Death" was, well, "bored". Only the immensely talented supporting cast, including great turns from Zach Galifianakis, Ted Danson, Olivia Thirlby, and Kristen Wiig save the show from achieving the threat promised by its title.



Television Rating: **2.0/5.0**

"Bored to Death" is essentially about a writer so bored with his own predictable, lovelorn life that he pretends to be a private investigator and stumbles into actually solving crime. The humor comes from the stuck-up, snobby delivery of star Jason Schwartzman traveling in a Chandler-esque setting where his ordering of a white wine in a seedy bar is greeted with a raised eyebrow. There is a bit of interest in seeing Schwartzman's intellectual awkwardness in an atypical world, but it grows stale much more quickly than the creators of the show probably envisioned.



Episode 103 Scene 23: Jonathan walks up to Emily's with the skateboard.

Photo credit: Paul Schrialdi/HBO

Schwartzman is good and the supporting cast is excellent, but "Bored to Death" exists only in the weird world of overly intellectual television. It's constantly winking at the camera, trying to point out its cleverness. Schwartzman admonishing a kidnapper for smoking meth because "it's all chemicals" and having a conversation about trouble with girlfriends in the middle of a rescue scene practically screams its clever intentions without actually being nearly as smart as it thinks it is.



Episode 106 Scene 08: Jonathan, Ray and George wait in Leah's car. They are watching Sophia's motel room.

Photo credit: Paul Schiraldi/HBO

Imagine if the world that this pretentious writer had been dipped in was genuine and emotionally relatable or incredibly stylized like something out of "The Singing Detective". It's the middle ground that leads to the boredom. "Bored to Death" is a show about a writer that constantly comes across as over-written by its lead character. It's as if we're living in his head, a world where even the kidnapping, meth smoker sounds like a pretentious douche.

How clever does "Bored to Death" think it is? Its creator is named Jonathan Ames, the same as the writer/detective lead. In the third episode the creator of the show gets to present a half-hour where "Jonathan Ames" is going to work with the great Jim Jarmusch. It seems a bit self-aggrandizing. The whole thing plays like a half-assed effort at something that might have intrigued Charlie Kaufman, but with tones of noir and Schwartzman's quirky delivery.

Only the great Zach Galifianakis and Ted Danson break free from the predictable tone and snobby dialogue. Zach, star of "The Hangover," has a couple of great scenes in the premiere and honest chemistry with Schwartzman and Danson is typically great. Their delivery is so different from Schwartzman's that scenes with them are easy highlights just for the oil-and-vinegar chemistry missing from the rest of the show.



Episode 104 Scene 15: Ray comes up with some fake issues, but are they fake.

Photo credit: Paul Schiraldi/HBO

As for the mysteries of the week, "Bored to Death" isn't remotely about them. No one is asking the writers to come up with yet another show like "The Mentalist" or "Bones" but they could put an ounce of effort into the cases that come from Jonathan's Craigslist posting looking for detective work.

Most of my negative feelings surrounding "Bored to Death" are directed at the premiere. Episodes two and three show improvement, even if the Jarmusch plotline in episode three feels more narcissistic than anything else.

The second episode features more screen time for the great Thirlby (she only has a brief moment in the premiere) and brings in Kristen Wiig as the client of the week. Overall, the second episode works significantly better than the first, as the addition of more talented actresses in the ensemble pays off. Every show or movie could be made stronger by a guest appearance by Wiig. The scene where she hires Jonathan is the highlight of the first trio of episodes.

The dialogue and characters also seem more well-defined in the second episode. Even if none of the characters ring remotely true and the show still can't decide between stylish realism and actual characters, the awkward tone is much more consistent in episode two and I think the show would work better as an uninterrupted viewing. In other words, the eventual DVD or Blu-Ray is the way to go, spending one or two nights in this weird world instead of a weekly, frustrating appointment. Although so many people will be bored to death by the premiere that they're unlikely to give it a second chance.

'Bored to Death,' which airs on HBO, stars Jason Schwartzman, Ted Danson, Zach Galfianakis, and Olivia Thirlby. The show was created by Jonathan Ames. The series debuts on Sunday, September 20th, 2009 at 8:30PM CST.



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