

TV Review: Confident, Clever ‘Chuck’ Returns With New Energy

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on January 8, 2010 - 6:51pm

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CHICAGO – After a second season that saw already-low ratings decline, NBC took a chance by bringing “Chuck” back for a third, shortened season. As the network has struggled this year due to a number of horrible decisions (most of them related to Jay Leno), most of its lineup has been hit. Let’s hope “Chuck” bucks the trend because this cult hit has arguably never been better.



Television Rating: **3.5/5.0**

The second of “Chuck,” recently released on DVD (which we’ll get into in more detail later), felt a bit like a show spinning its wheels. The series failed to pick up any new fans and lost a few, although I imagine a number of “Chuck” fans are watching in that space that doesn’t get reflected in ratings - On Demand, online, etc. No matter the reason for the ratings slide, “Chuck” needs to grab fans quickly with the third season or there very likely won’t be a fourth.



Chuck vs. the Angel de la Muerte Episode 303 — Pictured: (l-r) Yvonne Strahovski as Sarah Walker, Zach Levi as Chuck Bartowski

Photo credit: NBC/Greg Gayne

In a very smart move, “Chuck” has undergone something of a reboot in an attempt to find a wider audience although it’s by no means a sell-out of the original concept of the show. Chuck Bartowski (Zachary Levi) is no longer just a nerd with a database of spy information inside his head - he’s a deadly nerd with a database of spy information inside his head.



Chuck vs. the Pink Slip Episode 301— Pictured: (l-r) Yvonne Strahovski as Sarah Walker, Zach Levi as Chuck Bartowski
Photo credit: Mike Ansell/NBC

In the first of three new hours of “Chuck” to air over two nights (a pair of new eps air back-to-back), “Chuck Versus the Pink Slip,” our hero is forced to deal with life as the new upgraded Intersect while wondering what could have been if he hadn’t chosen being a spy over spending the rest of his life on the run with the hottest woman on television, Sarah (Yvonne Strahovski). Meanwhile, Morgan comes home from Benihana School to help Chuck get over what happened with him and Sarah.

The “getting over” becomes more difficult when Chuck flunks out of spy school. It turns out that just because Chuck now has all of the ass-kicking abilities buried deep in his conscious, they won’t always come to the surface when he needs them. For example, he might have the kung fu skills to defeat the enemy, but not the zip line knowledge to escape before the building explodes. The mix of tough and terrified makes for a blend of action hero and Buy More schlub that’s even more effective than the first two years when Chuck was ahead of the game but rarely in ways that really helped him all that much.

The second hour of the first night, “Chuck Versus the Three Words” features a new mission when Carina (Mini Anden) returns into the life of Sarah with her fiancé Karl (guest star Vinnie Jones). Morgan lies about being romantically entangled with Carina and the Buy More gang, including Jeff (Scott Krinsky) and Lester (Vik Sahay), find themselves stuck in the middle of the operation. This episode features a strong mix of the “two halves” of “Chuck” - the spy show and the office comedy.



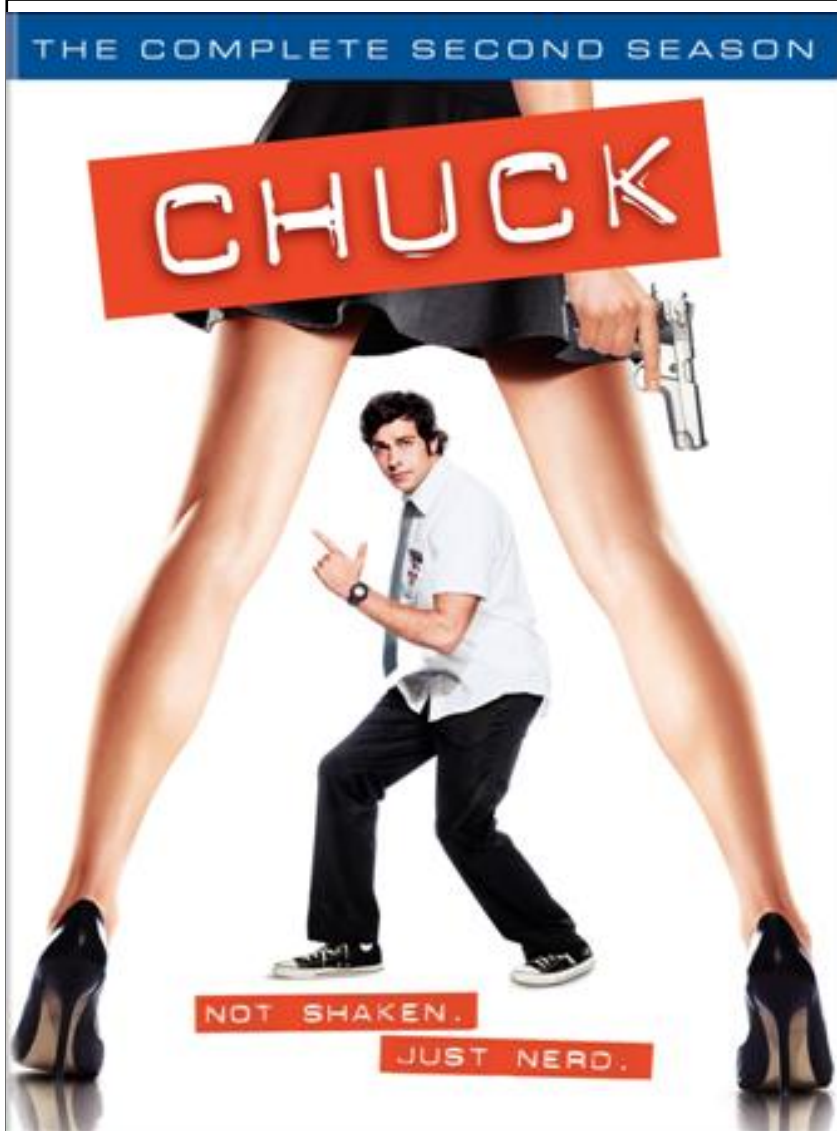
Nip/Tuck.
Photo credit: FX

Finally, the third new hour of “Chuck,” airing in the show’s regular time slot on Monday nights, “Chuck Versus the Angel de la Muerte,” features a subplot for Awesome (Ryan McPartlin), who gets involved with Chuck on a mission involving a visiting dictator (guest star Armand Assante). Future guest stars include a recurring role for “Superman Returns” star Brandon Routh, and guest spots by Angie Harmon, Kristin Kreuk, and Stone Cold Steve Austin.

“Chuck” has had some issues managing tones and styles in the past. I often felt that the action half of the show, featuring great work from Strahovski and Adam Baldwin worked more consistently than the Buy More comedy. It’s not that the Buy More ensemble is bad (and it

certainly helped to get an infusion of comedy skill from Tony Hale in season two) but the comedy there often felt forced and overly familiar, like the writers were trying too hard to please.

That criticism is gone in the opening arc of season three. Unlike a lot of shows who tweak their concept, the new and improved "Chuck" actually seems to have lit a fire under the writing staff and the cast seems reinvigorated too. The main problem is that Adam Baldwin goes more under-used than ever but the always-good Levi has never been better than in these opening episodes. More importantly, the overall pace and tone of the show has never been more confident nor more clever. A lot of programming has been lost in the wave of horrible NBC decisions. Let's not let "Chuck" be one of those programs.



Chuck vs. the Pink Slip Episode 301— Pictured: (l-r) Zach Levi as Chuck Bartowski, Yvonne Strahovski as Sarah Walker
Photo credit: Mike Ansell/NBC

As I mentioned, the second season of "Chuck" was recently released on DVD and Blu-Ray. We were hoping to have an HD review for you but WB sent over the standard edition, a six-disc set with a pretty impressive collection of special features. The episodes themselves are somewhat disappointingly transferred in a lackluster matted widescreen picture that is a noticeable step down from the original HD broadcast. If you have the BD capability, you clearly should buy the season in that format.

As for special features, the season includes "Truth, Spies and Regular Guys: Exploring the Mythology of Chuck," "Dude in Distress," "Chuck Versus the Webisodes," "Chuck: A Real-Life Captain Awesome's Tips For Being Awesome," "John Casey Presents: So You Want to Be a Deadly Spy?," Declassified Scenes, and Gag Reel.

'Chuck,' which airs on NBC, stars Zachary Levi, Yvonne Strahovski, Joshua Gomez, Ryan McPartlin, Mark Christopher Lawrence, Vik Sahay, Scott Krinsky, Julia Ling, Sarah Lancaster, and Adam Baldwin from creator Josh Schwartz. Season three premieres on January 10th, 2010 at 8PM CST.

'Chuck: Season Two' is released by Warner Brothers Home Video. The show was released on DVD and Blu-ray on January 5th, 2010. It is not rated. It runs 1,034 minutes.



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