

TV Review: Hilarious 'Archer' Continues Hot Streak for FX

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CHICAGO – Perhaps the highest compliment I can pay FX's new often-brilliant animated series "Archer" is that, even with several new shows on my plate to watch, I actually went back and viewed a few episodes more than once. Like a lot of great animation - the best of "The Simpsons," "Family Guy," "South Park," "Venture Bros." - "Archer" is immensely rewatchable. A future cult hit premieres tonight.



Television Rating: **4.0/5.0**

"Archer" is a daring hybrid of the workplace comedy (a la "The Office") and a spy show spoof akin to "Austin Powers." Not only does creator Adam Reed ("Frisky Dingo," "Sealab 2021") target the overall idiocy of the life of a wildly narcissistic, alcoholic, sexually daring super spy but his co-workers in the field and back at the office. The result is such a bizarre mix of styles and sources of humor that it's hard to believe that it's airing outside of Cartoon Network's Adult Swim. FX deserves credit for taking another risk that seems certain to pay off.



Archer.

Photo credit: FX

The fact is that adult-driven, primetime (or later) cartoons have become big business for cable TV, mostly evidenced by the amazing success of Adult Swim. And as much as I love "Venture Bros." and "Robot Chicken," a lot of what's out there is mediocre or worse. It's hard to believe that a show as cleverly written, conceived, and executed as "Archer" won't find an audience merely because it's on a network not known for animation but it is certainly a risk. In animation, creativity usually rises to the top and one hopes that comedy fans of FX hits like "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia" and "The League" won't be turned off to this similarly adult, raunchy, over-the-top show merely because it's a cartoon.





Archer.
Photo credit: FX

H. Jon Benjamin (an animation mainstay for years including dozens of Adult Swim guest shots and regular roles on "Dr. Katz, Professional Therapist" and the great "Home Movies") brilliantly voices the title character, suave super spy Sterling Archer, a man who likes to drink and screw in a fashion that would make Connery's 007 blush. The superstar of spy organization ISIS works for his mother (Jessica Walter of "Arrested Development"), abuses his Alfred-esque butler (George Coe), and deals with his super-spy ex-lover Lana Kane (Aisha Tyler) while coping with the self-esteem issues of awkward co-worker Cyril (Chris Parnell of "Saturday Night Live"), who happens to now be dating Lana, and the oddities of the wildly unpredictable Cheryl (Judy Greer).

With wildly inappropriate sex jokes, stylish animation, and an arguably juvenile sense of humor, I can't imagine there would be a bigger college frat house hit this season than "Archer". Like the first few episodes of "South Park," the show has that confident crudeness that elevates telling dirty jokes into an art form. The writing is often crude, the animation is purposefully low-rent but stylish, and the situations are ridiculous, but there's a confidence to it and the excellent comedians who bring it to life do a remarkable job.

With its scantily clad (and sometimes less) characters, near-obsession with hookers (a dead or presumed dead one plays a role in two episodes in a row), and violent streak, "Archer" may seem like it was written by a few horny 14-year-old boys but, like "South Park," this is much smarter and harder to pull off than its critics will give it credit for being. The simple fact is that "Archer" is laugh-out-loud funny, more so than the first hour of nearly any program I've seen in the last few years. Even the now-wildly popular "Sunny" took some time to find its rhythm. Not "Archer".

FX has taken sizable risks in their development, emphasizing risk-taking programs like "The League" and "Sons of Anarchy" and the network shows no signs of slowing down or losing steam, even as workhorse "Nip/Tuck" winds through its final season. With "The Shield" gone and "Nip/Tuck" on its way out the door, a lot of networks would be in a position where their future looked unclear. Not FX. With shows as damn funny and ambitious as "Archer," the network's future looks bright.

'Archer,' which airs on FX, features voice work from H. Jon Benjamin, Aisha Tyler, Judy Greer, Chris Parnell, Amber Nash, George Coe, and Jessica Walter from creator Adam Reed. The show premieres with back-to-back episodes on January 14th, 2010.CST.



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