

Warehouse 13 TV Series

By C. E. Woollen (10-1-2010)

This show has a risky concept - it's about a special branch of agents who must guard objects, which come to gain supernatural powers. Their job is defensive, so except for a couple of joke stunts, they aren't allowed to use anything in the big scary warehouse under their command. Their missions generally revolve around retrieving these dangerous objects and filing them away.

With its odd mix of present day semi-realism and the completely incredulous nature of the artifacts, the first duty of the viewer is to treat this as a serious-comedy. In other words, there isn't much slapstick, but the entire show is an existential comedy, because with that much mayhem under one roof protected only by obscurity, if the viewer gets drawn into the trap of poking holes in the premise there is no return to enjoyment - sorta like the Escher Room.

One fascinating element is that very few people themselves have special powers. The artifacts do it all, and reliably, like Magical Bearer Bonds. Basically, any four of the artifacts harnessed together can end the world as we know it, with a Trident to rule them all and in the madness bind them, you'd wonder why the whole shebang is in plain sight and not in a secret underground complex. Right. Comedy.

Once disbelief has been suspended, the show clicks along merrily with the warehouse secret agents trying to retrieve the artifacts under the radar before the world at large gets word of them. They usually succeed, but a few nasty items remain unaccounted for.

Another review elsewhere correctly remarked that the show is about fun characters. Even here the show struggled a little and just barely made it. Myka Bering (Joanne Kelly) and Peter Lattimer (Eddie McClintock) try to find character space that wasn't covered by the X-Files at the same time that the scriptwriters are trying not to make each episode wholly about the Artifact of the Week. They spend several episodes milking the "we have a really strange job" arc, after which they finally seem to settle into their roles.

What I feel saved the show from early oblivion is the scene stealing backing ensemble. Saul Rubinek is cranky but brilliant Artie, the Warehouse manager. He gets handed all the "don't touch that - you wouldn't like life if you touched that" lines. Claudia Donovan (Allison Scagliotti) gets brought in as the young hotshot girl. She's every bit as strong a researcher as Artie, so the two of them enjoy trading theories in the thick of each episode while Pete and Myka essentially stand by waiting for the conclusion to act upon. Claudia was drawn a little too harshly early on, and the scriptwriters clearly softened the character

as the show progressed. Then there's eerie Mrs. Frederic, portrayed to perfection by C. C. H. Pounder.

In the Season 2 finale, the show ends with a Destroy the World story arc. The shock factor works because until that point, the body count was indeed quite low. Artifacts tended to cause a few injuries and a couple deaths, but were generally detoxed and hustled back to the Warehouse before anyone truly clever could set big plans properly in motion. For the third season, if renewed, they might do well to follow the trick that the Chuck series used, which was to make dramatic alterations to the overall timbre of the show. Chuck's spy abilities were restricted to verbal knowledge only, and he was treated like an unfortunate accident. For Season 3, he gained the ability to tap actual skill sets. The Warehouse 13 show producers may decide a big change is in order for them as well if ratings begin to slip.