

'Space Force' provides a few laughs, but feels toothless

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «« out of «««««

Running Time: 10 episodes (27 – 36 minutes each)

This series is currently airing on Netflix.

Netflix has pulled out comedy's biggest guns with the new series *Space Force*. Executive producer Greg Daniels is also responsible for *King of the Hill*, the U.S. version of *The Office*, as well as *Parks and Recreation* and other hit shows. The show also has an intriguing concept and fantastic comic performers, leading one to imagine that the end result might be incredible. *Space Force* does provide a decent number of laughs and will provide some entertainment value, but the launch isn't quite as spectacular as hoped for.

The show is based around a fictional version of the recently announced new branch of the U.S. Armed Forces. General Mark Naird (Steve Carell) is tasked with leading a team of officers,

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international scientists and engineers in the hopes of creating a permanent base on the moon. The lead quickly finds himself butting heads with Chief Scientist Dr. Adrian Mallory (John Malkovich), as well as other hostile parties within the government itself. On a personal level, his daughter Erin (Diana Silver) is none too pleased about moving to remote Colorado.

The family dynamic is further strained after Mark’s wife Maggie (Lisa Kudrow) is given a 40-year prison sentence for an undefined crime. As if all these issues weren’t enough, the Space Force soon finds itself competing against a Chinese space program.

The first two episodes are engaging as the various protagonists are introduced and come into conflict with one another. Of course, Carell’s natural onscreen presence makes his character very likable, presenting him as a man who simply wants to do something groundbreaking for his country. However, Malkovich is the series stand-out as an annoyed scientist who hates dealing with military leaders. He delivers several funny verbal jabs as bad suggestions, as well as impossible task after impossible task is placed upon him.

This leads to funny scenarios early in the series. When damage is done to a U.S. satellite, an ill-tempered chimpanzee is tasked with fixing the hardware. It’s extremely funny to watch Naird try to coach the primate into doing the necessary repairs. The arrival of an irritating media consultant (Ben Schwartz) also results in some amusing comments.

As mentioned, when exaggerated types of space-related events are occurring, the show delivers laughs. The testy relationships and arguments between military figures and scientists also provide plenty of opportunity for humor. Yet the show starts to falter a few episodes in. It isn’t long before the relationship between Mark and Adrian softens and the two start to understand each other’s different points of view.

The intent is noble, but much of the tension and humor derived from the conflict between them starts to evaporate. Later shows focus on teenager Erin adapting to life near the base, Space Force budget meetings, program hiccups and the like. The pacing slows and fewer of the gags land. When Space Force finds itself sending a team to the moon and dealing with a competitive team from another nation, it adds a bit more spark to the final two episodes.

One also gets the sense that the writers are hedging their bets a bit. By the close of the show,

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the creators do make a point or two about the upper levels of government. Still, the series tries very hard to listen to all sides and poke fun at everyone, even suggesting that there may be some benefit to having this outlandish organization. In fact, it is clear from the onset that the show doesn’t want to offend any U.S. demographic who may be watching.

So, rather than delivering a truly biting satire of the program or the executive branch of the government, the show comes across as a bit toothless.

There is plenty of talent on display in *Space Force* and the show does provide some chuckles here and there thanks to its excellent cast. Still, it never reaches the manic or satirical heights one would hope for. Instead, viewers will have to endure plenty of dead space in the middle of their journey before they arrive at their final destination.

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