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"A sinister cabal of superior writers."

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DVD Review: *Portlandia* - Season One

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Author: Dusty Somers — Published: Dec 11, 2011 at 5:48 pm

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As a satire, IFC sketch comedy series *Portlandia* says all it needs to with its very first bit — a musical number extolling the utopia of Portland, Oregon, where the ideals of the '90s live on, "the tattoo ink never runs dry," and "young people go to retire." It's an affectionate, only semi-mocking ode to milieu of the city, tinged with abstract absurdity.

In the six episodes that make up the series' first season, the satire never advances past that, and sketches about a feminist bookstore and bird-emblazoning artsy types are subject to diminishing returns. But the season remains fitfully successful because of the easy chemistry between Fred Armisen and Carrie Brownstein and its willingness to push the material into truly absurdist territory.

Some of that is the result of Jonathan Krisel, who co-created the show with Armisen and Brownstein, and brings a familiar *Tim and Eric* vibe to some sketches, like one that features a hyperactive pair of Japanese tourists. What works better is when the show heads for a brand of more amiable absurdity, like a series of sketches involving [Aimee Mann](#) as Fred and Carrie's housekeeper. The two are simultaneously star-struck and annoyed with her inability to clean things the way they want them, and the dissonance makes for great comedy.

Also successful are sketches that are ostensibly poking fun at a subset of Portland culture, but mine their true laughs from the increasingly bizarre actions of the characters, like a pair of dumpster divers who make an outrageously disgusting stew or friends whose one-upmanship of cultural knowledge leads them to a violent end.

The show's deft use of guest stars like Mann, [Sarah McLachlan](#), Aubrey Plaza and a roguish Kyle MacLachlan as the mayor of Portland works to its advantage much of the time. Armisen seems much more engaged here than he generally is on *Saturday Night Live*, and Brownstein proves she's got the comic self-awareness to match.

The Season One DVD comes with all six episodes on a single disc. Extras include commentaries by Armisen, Brownstein and Krisel for every episode, a five-minute blooper reel and a handful of extended and deleted scenes. Two videos from Armisen and Brownstein's pre-*Portlandia* sketch group ThunderAnt reveal some of the origins of the show's sensibility. Also included is Armisen's commencement speech for the Oregon Episcopal School's high school graduation. A promo for season two, including glimpses at guest spots from Jeff Goldblum, Andy Samberg and Kristen Wiig rounds out the disc.

Season Two of *Portlandia* premieres on IFC Jan. 9.

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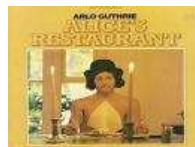
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