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Excuse Me, This Is Usually Our Spot: 'Portlandia: Season Two'

By [J.M. Suarez](#) 26 September 2012

The second season of IFC's *Portlandia* continues the comedy series' focus on poking fun at the hipsters, hippies, and activists of the Pacific Northwest, always to great effect. Fred Armisen and Carrie Brownstein do a brilliant job of inhabiting a wide array of recurring and one-off characters, with very specific jobs and interests, who often find themselves in ridiculous situations of their own making.

Portlandia excels in using comedy as not only a way to highlight the absurdity in such specificity, but also in doing so in such a way that it never seems mean spirited. In fact, the series shows a great deal of affection for these fringe characters that make up a place as dedicated to inclusion as Portland. Armisen and Brownstein are the perfect pair to walk that fine line as they effortlessly become a part of that world, yet are somewhat removed from it at the same time.

The second season brings back some familiar characters from the first season, such as Toni and Candace, the feminist bookstore owners and Kyle MacLachlan as the Mayor. Toni and Candace are perhaps the greatest encapsulation of *Portlandia*, in that they are so particular and vocal. Armisen and Brownstein have created such a level of detail about what these characters find offensive, and their inability to handle any change, that they can't help but be hilarious. The arrival of an air conditioner repairman is really funny, especially because the repairman doesn't really know what to make of them.

The Mayor is another character that fits in well with the series, because as different as he is (a reggae-loving environmentalist taken to the extreme), he interacts with Fred and Carrie (playing themselves as fairly normal friends) in a way that makes him seem less strange than if they all played their characters in an over-the-top way. In other words, by playing the weirdness of the Mayor as something totally normal and accepted, it extends to the viewer's perception, as well. His willingness to allow Fred and Carrie to design new police uniforms leads to predictably silly options that are even more absurd when actually worn on the job.

Many of the characters on *Portlandia* are successful because they tend to take an idea rooted in



Portlandia: Season Two

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truth and through the use of repetition it's taken to another level. For example, one of the most perfectly captured scenes deals with an inadvertent *Battlestar Galactica* marathon that takes over their lives and soon devolves into a search for creator Ronald D. Moore in order to get him to write more episodes. The concept of being sucked into hours upon hours of watching a television show when only intending to watch one episode is pretty relatable, these days. Here is where *Portlandia* shines. The series knowingly plays with current pop culture so well that it brings real humor to familiar situations, but with a twist.

The series also makes excellent use of guest stars as varied as Edward James Olmos, in the previously referenced *Battlestar Galactica* scene, Kristin Wiig, playing a deranged fan of the fictional bad Cat Nap; Eddie Vedder, as himself; Jeff Goldblum, as an artisanal knot salesman; and Penny Marshall, as an original partner at the feminist bookstore; among others. Though they sometimes play themselves and sometimes play completely different characters, *Portlandia* incorporates them seamlessly. The Eddie Vedder bit is especially strange and hilarious as it centers on an Eddie Vedder tattoo come to life.

What makes *Portlandia* such an enjoyable take on sketch comedy is that Armisen and Brownstein pick characters and situations that ring true, all the while bringing a slightly warped sensibility that makes it feel fresh and exciting. In focusing so precisely on Portland and its culture, the series has created something instantly recognizable and immediately engaging. Although much of what makes *Portlandia* so funny is its specificity, it still manages to point out types that are somewhat familiar and identifiable, regardless of geography.

The Blu-ray release comes with quite a few bonus features that include commentaries with Armisen, Brownstein, and director, co-writer, and co-creator Jonathan Krisel; as well as some footage from a Seattle appearance of *Portlandia Live*, a director's cut version of the excellent finale, "Brunch Village", a featurette entitled "Inside Portlandia"; an excerpt from the book, *Portlandia: A Guide for Visitors*, and a very funny deleted scene from the feminist bookstore characters starring Mary Lynn Rajskub. They make a welcome addition to the episodes.

Rating: **Extras rating:**

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