

REVIEW**DVD Review: *Puppets Who Kill: The Complete Second Season***

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Puppets have a long history. From the medieval Punch and Judy shows of the English marketplace to modern times as cute fluffy teaching aids on *Sesame Street*, marionette shows with their complicated string-articulated puppet participants have long been things of amazement for people of all cultures. In recent years puppets' very innocence has been used against us and them in a series of cheesy horror movies, where the puppets have become demonic creatures set on destroying humanity. Usually their emotionless, painted-on features have worked against them in these situations to increase the sense of evil; smiles and brightly painted red cheeks in contrast to the slashing knife and the hacking axe.

But these movies haven't been able to really change people's image of puppets and stuffed animals as cuddly and cute. Walt Disney and Jim Henson, with Pinocchio and Kermit, have shaped the almost indelible impressions we all have of puppets. While Henson's Muppets may have been invested with some of humanity's less admirable characteristics, they were still presented in a manner that made them seem cute and harmless.

It's that belief in the general innocence of all things fuzzy, cute, and puppet-like the creators of *Puppets Who Kill* have exploited to make their venture so successful. The

juxtaposition of harmless, cute and fluffy innocence and foul-mouthed, sexually depraved, murderous characteristics is the key to the comedic success of the show. Cuddles the Comfort Doll (sort of like a Cabbage Patch Doll), Buttons the Bear, Rocco the Dog, and Bill the ventriloquist dummy are down to their last chances for social redemption. They have been placed in the care of social worker Dan Barlow (Dan Redican) at a half-way home for one final shot at being reformed.

The DVD of their complete second season not only shows just how unsuccessful Dan has been at his attempts to rehabilitate the boys, but how they have begun to weaken his own, already suspect, grasp on right and wrong. It also reveals how side-splittingly funny this show can be. No cow is too sacred to be messed with, as everything from necrophilia to victims' rights is fair game for the foul-mouthed miscreants to fold, stab, mutilate, and dismember. Bill's attempts to sue the family of one of his murder victims for damages due to the emotional duress he undergoes reliving the crime, while his victim is safely dead, is merely the tip of the nefarious iceberg.

While occasionally Dan makes a stab at making his charges accountable for their actions, too often he finds himself either their unwilling accomplice, or utilizing their rather unique talents to his own advantage. When Buttons kills a priest, a custodian, and the police officer who showed up to investigate the incident and threatens to implicate Dan, the solution is to pretend it never happened and never talk about it again.

These aren't puppets that are ever going to become real boys by being good like Pinocchio, or even cutely smart-ass like the Muppets. When was the last time you saw a cute little teddy bear dry humping someone's leg as Buttons is reduced to doing to Dan when he is denied sex for three days? Or how about a demonically possessed doll who threatens to defile a male virgin? (Dan again) How about a dog with a serious cigarette habit (Rocco) and a ventriloquist dummy (Bill) cutting up a body in their tub looking for a diamond in his intestinal tract, and calmly discussing the contents of its bowel?

These are not your average family entertainment puppets. There is a reason they are on the Comedy Network and not mainstream television. Aside from half the dialogue having to be bleeped, I don't think prime-time North America is ready for the sight of a teddy bear going down on his yoga instructor. This show would not get past George Bush's new decency law. But the humor is not just in the shock value of the puppets and their behavior. That would wear thin after a while, no matter how funny it is. Some times sitting and watching repeated episodes of one show for the length of one DVD's worth of material starts to get tedious as the premise gets stale.

You would think this would be the case with a show like this, but while shock value is part of the appeal; these are very intelligent and well-written scripts that manage to make fun of male sexual fantasies, religion, social workers, and a host of other subjects, while exploiting the obvious humor of a serial-killing puppet.

It never seems like the characters are being foul-mouthed or deviant in order to milk an extra laugh from the audience. If that were the case it would develop into a one-note series that would quickly become tiresome. But they've escaped that trap by ensuring that everything the characters do stays within their boundaries of believability.

There is a certain illogical logic to everything happening on this show which justifies everybody's actions. When Bill has lost all reason for living because he no longer is able to kill, it only makes sense he will regain his joie de vivre when he leaves a couple of heads in the fridge. It's also acceptable for Dan not to turn him in because of his need for Bill to be happy in order to be awarded a grant for \$25,000 from the government.

I'm not familiar with how television shows are normally packaged for viewing in DVD format, so I don't know if it is usual to run the opening for each segment, but that was the only thing I found tedious. It would have been nice if there were some special features that

included outtakes or background on how they work with puppets. Each episode's closing credits are accompanied by some outtakes that are hysterical, but they only whet your appetite for more.

The one special feature, aside from written biographies of the cast and crew, is an appearance that Dan Redican, Rocco, and Buttons made on a Canadian morning show, which is cute, but not really informative about the show itself. If you have the patience to read the bios you'll see that the talent collected for this series is quite amazing and features Tony award-winning writers, and multi-award-winning performers. It's no wonder the script quality is so superior to most of what's on the air that passes for adult comedy these days.

Puppets Who Kill: The Complete Second Season is scatological, obscene, blasphemous, and brilliant. If you are a fan of this show, or have never seen it but love wicked, witty humor, you need to own this DVD. You'll never look at your stuffed bear collection the same way again.

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Richard Marcus is a long - haired Canadian iconoclast who writes reviews and opines on the world as he sees it at [Leap In The Dark](#) and [Desicritics](#)

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