

Who wants to be a pirate? Ask HBO Max

By TJ REID

For the *Keizertimes*

We have a tendency to heavily romanticize the Golden Age of Piracy, and this is not a new phenomenon by any means.

For proof of this, look no further than Stede Bonnet, the gentleman pirate and contemporary of other such legends as Blackbeard and Benjamin Hornigold. A lot of people say they want to be a pirate, but to Bonnet, this was more than just idle chatter; this relatively wealthy Barbadian landowner ditched his family, bought a big ol' boat and decided that he was going to live the life of a swashbuckler, despite the fact that he knew nothing about sailing.

Sounds like one of those stories that's too fantastical to be true, and also one that is ripe for comedy. *Our Flag Means Death* takes a stab at the humor inherent in the situation, and after a very rocky start it mostly succeeds with bringing the laughs while saying something at the same time.

Created by David Jenkins and executive produced by superstar Taika Waititi, *Our Flag Means Death* takes two or three episodes before it really gets going and becomes something other than an occasionally funny chore. Rhys Darby (*Flight of the Conchords*,



Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle) stars as Bonnet, and you'd be right in assuming that his being on a project with fellow Kiwi Waititi results in a whole lot of that silly type of humor that New Zealanders are increasingly famous for.

Darby's supporting cast is entertaining and capable, but it is not until Waititi joins him on screen as Blackbeard himself in the fourth episode that things actually get interesting. Laughs exist before then, but they don't come as frequently as I would have liked or expected for the creative team in question, and even after that they are not ever-present. *Our Flag* is funny, yes, but it also has a moral or two to explore as well.

Bonnet's story as portrayed on the small screen has, of course, some giant liberties taken with it, but it is surprisingly accurate when it comes a lot of the basics. He did indeed sail with Blackbeard, for instance, who took the clueless aristocrat under his wing, and he did actually pay his crew a salary and was eventually pressed into being



Stede Bonnet (Rhys Darby, center) and others in *Our Flag Means Death*.

Courtesy IMDb

a privateer. The showrunners use this story to explore the deeper theme of societal pressures, whether it be gender-, sexual orientation-, race- or class-based, and it is nice to watch a comedy that actually has something to say instead of feeling the need to be "on" all of the time. *Our Flag* is also accurate when it comes to salty language, which parents should know about beforehand, and the violence can be quite intense as well, if over-the-top and a bit cartoony.

The production values are decent if not fantastic, having that "made for TV" feel without looking bad. The script is good, the characters likeable, and there is definitely more good in *Our Flag Means Death* than bad. Just be patient waiting for Blackbeard to show up. It might be worth it.

Our Flag Means Death season 1 is now available on HBO Max.

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