

tv previews MICHAEL IDATO

Rescue: Special Ops

Nine, 8.30pm

👍 First episodes are notoriously challenging because the storytelling and production are new, yet they set the tone for everything that follows. It's not unlike asking first-year medical students to perform brain surgery – a risky venture by any measure.

Rescue: Special Ops, a modern spin on the Southern Star classic *Police Rescue* with some subtle but noticeable changes, is shrewdly played, putting character development to the side momentarily and diving headfirst into the action. It's a smart strategy, taking the pressure off some aspects of the show and rendering it more accessible to the audience than most new television dramas.

Les Hill and Andrew Lees play Dean and Chase Gallagher, sibling rivals who work as a pair of "G.I. Joes" in the *Rescue: Special Ops* team, which works under the ambulance service's chain of command. Their teammates are played by Daniel Amalm (Jordan), Katherine Hicks (Heidi) and Gigi Edgley (Lara), working under the supervision of a couple of veterans – Peter Phelps's Vince Marchello manning the office and Libby Tanner's Michelle LeTourneau in the field, with the action neatly switching between the two.

Hill as a prime-time action man is a no-brainer, given the powerful work he did in *Nine's Underbelly*. Of his teammates, former *Farscape* star Gigi Edgley is the standout, seeming both curiously unfamiliar to the viewing eye and yet moving with all the ease of a known quantity. Lees is equally intriguing but for different reasons. His slower, more complex sensibility is an engaging counterpoint to Hill's emotionally driven personality and both will undoubtedly benefit when the show shifts into more in-depth character storytelling in coming weeks.



Rescue: Special Ops

The first episode is beautifully assembled, courtesy of the director, Peter Andrikidis, and the director of photography, Russell Bacon, two of the slickest hands in the game. The rescue crew are searching for missing schoolchildren who vanished during a mountain camp.

It's an action-focused episode with a crashed plane, a rescue chopper and a gripping sequence in which Dean promises not to leave badly wounded Amanda (Sacha Horler) behind – with potentially devastating consequences. How Dean, the team's experienced hand, and Edgley's less-experienced Lara deal with their predicament is compelling – a credit to the actors and the fine work of creator-writers Sarah Smith and Julie McGauran.

Wall of Death

ABC1, 7.30pm

👍 A compelling wildlife documentary that visits the punishing, barren terrain of a brutal wilderness

sitting on the fringe of the Dead Sea, populated by hyenas, wolves and leopards. As if that wasn't enough, you can chuck earthquakes into the mix. This is billed as "life on the edge" and it really is – feuding animals who somehow survive in a situation where the master plan surely had nothing earmarked.

Medical Emergency

Seven, 8pm

👍 The rigid jigsaw-assembly structure of the production and the highly predictable pace of the storytelling both slightly disadvantage this series. It's one of several *RPA* clones across several genres: law enforcement, medicine, vet science and more.

Christopher Gabardi narrates and the package of stories is nicely balanced: a young man attacked while walking a woman to a taxi, a man suffering a series of heart attacks after waterskiing, a child who has swallowed a metal ball and a young woman who, when the ambulance collects her, is in the final stages of labour.