

# Review: Netflix's superheroic 'Umbrella Academy' tries a little too hard to be cool

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Netflix's "The Umbrella Academy" would like you to know that superheroes are just as messed up as you are. But, like, in a cool, hip way.

The series, based on comics written by Gerard Way from rock band My Chemical Romance, offers a quirky, dark take on a genre that already has plenty of them.

The show (streaming Friday, ★★ out of four) follows a group of grown superheroes, and wonders just how much psychological and emotional damage growing up super might do to kids. Its quirky-cool tone is an attempt to subvert the genre (a lack of connection to the Marvel and DC Comics behemoths also helps), but it still finds a way to bring the story back to comic-book basics, because they've got to save the world, after all.



Ellen Page in "The Umbrella Academy." (Photo: Christos Kalohoridis/Netflix)

"Umbrella" is a [trendy take](#) on the genre that has sex, graphic violence, profanity and black comedy (Syfy's "Deadly Class" and streaming service DC Universe's "Doom Patrol," also out Friday, are two more examples).

It's a team-up show but also a family story, like "The Incredibles" but with more drugs. The super-siblings of "Umbrella" are among unexplainable phenomenon of 42 women around the globe who became pregnant on the same day and gave birth instantly, although this wild, potentially humanity-changing event is never adequately revisited after an excellent and striking early scene.

Seven of those kids are adopted by an old, eccentric rich old man, Sir Reginald Hargreeves (Colm Feore), who coldly raises them, with the help of a robot mom and a chimpanzee butler, as a super team. As adults, they're estranged, each with a different relationship to their powers and their "father," whose death reunites them.



Aidan Gallagher, Ellen Page, Emmy Raver-Lampman, Robert Sheehan, Tom Hopper, David Castaneda star in "The Umbrella Academy." (Photo: CHRISTOS KALOHORIDIS/NETFLIX)

The group includes super-strong (and super-large) Luther (Tom Hopper, "Black Sails"), an astronaut; mind-controlling Allison (Emmy Raver-Lampman), whose powers helped her become a movie star; medium Klaus (Robert Sheehan), who struggles with addiction; Vanya (Ellen Page), a shy violinist with no powers; Diego (David Castaneda), the only one who embraces the superhero call of duty; and Number Five (Aidan Gallagher), a potty-mouthed teleporter and time traveler who's an adult in a child's body for some reason.

Moments of genius enliven the 10-episode "Umbrella," especially in its first and late episodes. A scene in which the team dances to the same song in separate rooms is gorgeously shot and deeply emotional. For an unsubtle concept, "Umbrella" is at its best when it calms down.



Cameron Brodeur, Blake Talabis, Eden Cupid, Dante Albidone, Aidan Gallagher and Ethan Hwang in "The Umbrella Academy." (Photo: Christos Kalohoridis/Netflix)

But overall, the series reeks of undeveloped potential. It looks beautiful and has an incredible cast, yet often drags. After a solid first episode, the plot is excruciatingly slow, pausing in all the wrong places.

Mary J. Blige and Cameron Britton ("Mindhunter") eventually arrive as a sort of "X-Files" duo stylized like they're in "Pulp Fiction," and they feel like they're in a different show. An awkward romance between Luther and Allison, ostensibly adopted siblings, is shoehorned in, but lacks chemistry mostly due to the ick factor. Although Page does well with the small, quiet Vanya, the actress is so dynamic it feels a waste to see her lurk in scenes without much to do.

The frequent blood spatter, half-hearted hipster pop music and self-aware, winking tone will be familiar to anyone who has seen the "Deadpool" movies, and will likely satisfy that same section of superhero fandom. But when it comes to sticking out in the overcrowded marketplace, it's not enough to seem dark and weird and have a chimpanzee butler. (Even if it is a really cool chimpanzee butler.)