

Percy and the Oil Painting

Written by Abi Grant

After getting two dud episodes in series eight, Percy finally gets a fair degree of justice with this episode. I can understand him getting frustrated with the artist when he complains about a location Percy chooses until the little green engine finally calls him out for being picky. If someone complained too much about the little things over something I loved, I'd get pretty upset too. Not much else to talk about here, other than it's a pretty solid start to series nine, and the lesson was a good one for children to learn.

Rating: Good (8/10)

Thomas and the Rainbow

Written by Abi Grant

Why would Thomas want to try and find the end of the rainbow? Trying to do so is just impossible; there is no end to a rainbow, despite what the episode shows. To be fair, the lesson about friends being the best thing to have was a good one, but that's pretty much the only true highlight to an otherwise weak episode.

Rating: Bad (3/10)

Molly's Special Special

Written by Paul Larson

When I was younger, I had a particularly soft spot for Molly, and it was to the point she was one of my top ten favorites. Since then, my interest in her has waned, largely due to far more interesting characters introduced since then, but even then, I still think she could have a role in the show as a mixed-traffic engine. Molly's personality has been described as proud of her strength, but also as a sensible peacekeeper and rather sensitive. While the sensitive part of her character is on display here, we don't see the rest of her traits either in this episode or future appearances. In fact, she was the first character introduced under the Hit Entertainment banner to set the standard for characters introduced for the sake of merchandising, starring only in one episode and making background cameos thereafter (and maybe a speaking role if they're lucky). Not only that, the episode seems to establish that even back then, the show had an issue with representing female characters; Molly only proved herself useful with the help of Thomas, which doesn't send a good message to little girls. This episode could've been a great step forward with better female representation on Sodor, but the execution feels half-baked.

Rating: Okay (5/10)

Thomas' Milkshake Muddle

Written by Marc Seal

Talk about an okay episode salvaged by two really strong lessons here; taking your time and improvising solutions to problems. It's also a nice touch that they show that milk, if churned hard enough, will turn into butter. Not much else to talk about here.

Rating: Good (7/10)

Mighty Mac

Written by Paul Larson

After being absent for a series, the Skarloey engines make their return to the show, and they're joined by Mighty Mac, a double fairlie engine, and the TV series expy of the Thin Controller, Mr. Percival. (Why they didn't do so for series four, I'll never understand.) I think Mighty Mac has potential to return to the CGI series - you even get a bit of a taste as to what their individual personalities are like - especially since a double fairlie could provide some muscle power to the Skarloey Railway. Ignoring the issues with railway realism, the lesson both ends learned about teamwork and cooperation was a good one, and their fighting during the journey provided a lot of entertainment value.

Rating: Good (7/10)

Thomas and the Toy Shop/Workshop

Written by James Mason

Normally, I'm willing to suspend some disbelief when it comes to the show, but if Cranky dropped some crates in front of Henry, why didn't the big green engine just move onto another line instead of just waiting for the workmen to clear them up? There would've been no story if that had been the case, unless he was trapped in a siding, then that would've been more believable. And how was Thomas unable to climb Gordon's hill when he did so in *Thomas and the Circus* and later episodes? You do have to admire his determination, however, and the late autumn/early winter scenery looks lovely. The illustration of Thomas from *Tank Engine Thomas Again* inside the toy shop was also a nice little Easter egg.

Rating: Okay (6/10)

Respect for Gordon

Written by James Mason

Even in one of the worst eras of the show, Gordon seems to get some of the better starring roles, and this is one of them. He gets upset when the engines tease him about the rattle in his firebox and then he demands that the engines give him respect, even throwing his weight around. This eventually leads to Gordon getting into an accident and Henry and Emily taking the express in his place. Again, there's two great lessons on display here; there's a limit to how much teasing one can take, and respect should be earned. You can't ask for much more.

Rating: Excellent (9/10)

Thomas and the Birthday Picnic

Written by Sharon Miller

The very first episode to be written by Sharon Miller, and compared to what she would later write for the CGI series, this was rather tame, but it was nice that she brought back Dowager Hatt, who has become one of the most entertaining characters in the CGI series. That being said, fans really need to stop attacking her for the quality of the writing during this era; she wasn't the only person involved, you know! It's also been eight years since the Miller era ended,

so let it go already! But this episode was a pretty decent start for her, and the moral wasn't too bad either. But starting from series 10, it's all downhill from here.

Rating: Good (7/10)

Tuneful Toots

Written by Sharon Miller

For this episode and *Duncan and the Old Mine*, Rusty was referred to as female in the American dub, but was afterward referred to as male again. Did the show accidentally form a headcanon that Rusty was transgender? That aside, the episode was okay, but the sound of Rusty's horn being constantly repeated got a bit annoying after a while. Also, why did Rusty say that he'd never feel shy about his horn again at the end? He was being very expressive about his horn beforehand!

Rating: Okay (5/10)

Rheneas and the Dinosaur

Written by Paul Larson

Ten episodes in, and finally, series nine enters into really bad territory. Paul Larson has never had a very consistent track record when it comes to writing for the show (even Laura Beaumont can't seem to get his writing problems under control), and this episode is a prime example as to why. Skarloey and Rheneas, who are the oldest and wisest engines of the little railway, are reduced to acting petty and childish. I mean, Skarloey would never be this reckless in shunting trucks, nor would Rheneas be selfish in wanting to take the dinosaur skeleton by himself. *Emily Saves the World* may have made Rheneas' special job canon, but to me, this episode is "canon in name only", and the first episode of the Barlow era that destroyed two fan favorites until *Blue Mountain Mystery*. And this is not even as awful as it gets for them in this era...

Rating: Terrible (0/10)

Thomas and the New Engine

Written by Marc Seal

This episode introduces Neville the Q1 engine into the show, supposedly a gentlemanly, enthusiastic and kind engine, but all he says in this episode is "hello" twice and "thank you" once. That's it. He doesn't even show any personality in this episode, making him come off as a plot device. Nor does he prove himself to the other engines that he's not a bad engine; at least Harvey proved himself useful after the other engines made fun of his looks! Even Hugo has more of a personality than Neville did! What makes it worse is that the other engines spreading rumors about him don't come off as sympathetic at all, especially Edward, who's supposed to be the voice of reason in the Steam Team. At least Toby had common sense, but that doesn't salvage this episode from being awful, nor does Neville actually do anything of note after this episode; he's the worst of the series nine newbies and probably the most useless. Shame because the Q1s are an interesting class of engine...

Rating: Terrible (-2/10)

Toby Feels Left Out

Written by Simon A. Brown

...as if *You Can Do it, Toby!* didn't mess up the tram engine's character enough. This episode just makes him look even more pathetic, and the message about your elders not being useful at all was simply awful. Maybe not what the episode was intending, but it's still a typical Toby episode from the Barlow era - as awful as his personality from that era.

Rating: Terrible (0/10)

Thomas Tries His Best

Written by James Mason

Finally, after three awful episodes, we come back to a good one. At first glance, it seems to be a "Thomas does something stupid" episode, but it's a lot smarter than that. Thomas wants to see the fair for himself, but he remembers that he has a job to do, and decides to put up with waiting for Farmer McColl and his chickens. Then he tries rushing with the chickens on board, but after scaring them, Thomas remembers to give them a safe journey. As a reward for his good work, Thomas gets to see the fair after all when he delivers a new generator for the fair. That is a fantastic message for children to grasp; work before play. Perhaps the title is most fitting as it's the best episode of series nine.

Rating: Excellent (9/10)

The Magic Lamp

Written by Sharon Miller

This episode marks Proteus' sole physical appearance in the show, and he's basically a recolored Sir Handel with Peter Sam's cylinders. Then again, he may have had a part in Sir Handel's return to the show, so I can't be too harsh. However, Peter Sam's character just feels... off. I mean, it isn't like him to disbelieve stories like Proteus', nor for him to act so bluntly when it comes to doing his job. That sounds more like a Duncan story if you ask me, almost like the Railway Series story *Peter Sam and the Prickly Problem*. It was nice seeing Peter Sam's old model with Harold; it probably would've been too expensive to make a large scale model of the latter, I imagine. This episode was average and needed some rewriting to better fit Peter Sam's character.

Rating: Okay (5/10)

Thomas and the Statue

Written by Marc Seal

There wasn't really a lot regarding the statue of the Steam Team; it only appeared once and was never seen again. Character wise, however, after seeing Thomas acting cocky thinking that the statue was of him, and getting called out by Percy for his attitude, it was nice to see him make up for it by willingly clearing the snow despite hating his snowplough. Even though that hasn't carried over onto later episodes, it was nice to see that bit of character development on Thomas' part, and the message that the world does not revolve around you was a good one.

Rating: Good (8/10)

Henry and the Flagpole

Written by Paul Larson

Henry's already got a spotty track record when it comes to starring roles, and this episode can be added to that pile. I'm sorry, but who has a favorite tree? That's almost like asking someone what their favorite Walmart is. Not only that, but why couldn't Henry have stopped and noticed the flagpole on the flatbed? Another bad episode from this season, and Thomas' role just felt shoehorned to hammer the message home.

Rating: Bad (2/10)

Emily Knows Best

Written by Marc Seal

An episode that doesn't feature Thomas in a starring role, but instead just a cameo at the start? That's actually very surprising, and a bit of a relief. Even more surprising is that Toby actually feels like he's in character for once, and this is from the same reason that gave us *Toby Feels Left Out!* Seeing him call out Emily for her silly idea feels rather cathartic, and she even gets called out by Sir Topham Hatt at the end for causing trouble. Emily had wanted to help Percy by giving him advice, but it turned out to be the wrong advice, and she had to tell the stationmaster (through Toby's advice) about the mess. Overall, another good episode.

Rating: Good (7/10)

Thomas' Day Off

Written by Sharon Miller

Out of the series nine newbies, Dennis is probably the best of the bunch, likely because he had the strongest personality and character arc. He started off by manipulating Thomas into helping him out, but when Dennis landed himself in trouble, he realized that being lazy would not do him any good in the long run. Honestly, I feel that Dennis left more of an impact in one episode than Norman did in ten series; out of the Barlow era newbies, I think Dennis has the best chance of returning to the show in CGI if the writers give him the chance. I mean, Dennis almost did make a return in *Day of the Diesels*, so that feels like a missed opportunity.

Rating: Good (8/10)

Thomas' New Trucks

Written by Paul Larson

When do engines have their own trucks to own? Sure, Oliver (or Douglas, if you go by the Railway Series) has Toad, but he's a brakevan and he's essential to any goods train either engine would take. Thomas' and James' new trucks look nice, but they haven't been seen since (except as generic trucks), which made the story kind of pointless. The moral that you can't keep everything clean all the time was fine, but again, it may be inappropriate for me to say given that there's a health crisis pandemic going on.

Rating: Okay (6/10)

Duncan and the Old Mine

Written by James Mason

Out of the Skarloey Six, Duncan seems to have better luck when it comes to starring roles, likely because out of them, he's the easiest to write a conflict for; Skarloey and Rheneas are very much wise characters, Peter Sam is happy-go-lucky, and Rusty is somewhere in between. Sir Handel is the only other member that's easier to write conflict for given that he can get moody and sulky at his worst (not for series 10 onward, but that's beside the point). The episode itself makes for an interesting conflict about Duncan wanting some more excitement but he gets more than he bargained for when he gets trapped in the mine. Well, at least until he shunts into the old trucks and finds a way out, which very much makes the mine a tunnel instead of... well, a mine. But overall, it's an episode that's just fine. Nothing spectacular or amazing, but fine.

Rating: Good (7/10)

Bold and Brave

Written by James Mason

Thomas and Ben should've known better than to believe silly stories from Diesel, but other than that, it's just a painfully average episode with nothing really standing out much.

Rating: Okay (5/10)

Skarloey the Brave

Written by Paul Larson

Just as awful as *Rheneas and the Dinosaur*, if not more so. Perhaps it's no coincidence that this was also written by Paul Larson. Skarloey letting himself be dragged up the incline like that was outright dangerous and irresponsible of him, especially since he tried proving himself a brave engine all because some trucks broke loose, right after teasing Rheneas for being scared himself! Episodes like this and *Rheneas and the Dinosaur* are probably part of the reason why the Skarloey engines haven't had starring roles that much in the Brenner era; they're pretty difficult to write a convincing story for, probably even more so than Henry, Toby and Edward! Speaking of which...

Rating: Terrible (0/10)

Saving Edward

Written by James Mason

Another episode that feels mandated just to give Edward a lead role. In the past, he would have taken a train of passengers to their destination despite being crippled, but here? He's not feeling well enough to take a train of fruit and vegetables and has Thomas take his train for him. Granted, it was rather sweet of Thomas to try and help his friend out, but what if Edward had tried hiding the fact he was unwell so as not to seem weak in front of Thomas? And when Edward does break down, that would've taught Thomas that those you look up to are anything but invincible, which would've been a heartwarming message in and of itself. But as it stands, it's weak, but compared to Edward's next starring role, it's on par with *Edward's Exploit*.

Rating: Bad (2/10)

Thomas and the Golden Eagle

Written by Abi Grant

The model work on the golden eagles is very well done, I'll give the model crew that, but good modeling skills are pretty much the default setting throughout series 1-12. To give the story itself some credit, it was nice of Thomas to try and share his duties with Percy, knowing that both want to see the golden eagle, even though he did end up forgetting his half of his job. But other than that, it's just not the most interesting of episodes.

Rating: Okay (4/10)

Keeping Up with James

Written by Abi Grant

Back in 2011, Hilary Fortnam criticized the episode and even said her father would've hated it if he saw it... because "winter holiday" was used instead of "Christmas". Even though it was the only Christmas-themed episode on a UK DVD, *Little Engines Big Days Out*, which also featured an interactive segment calling a Christmas tree a "tree with decorations". Seriously? Out of all the problems she had with the show at the time, she focused on that rather than the nature of the storytelling? Not only that, it was released back in 2006, so why didn't she call Hit out then? Granted, it led to Christmas being reinstated for series 17 onward, but all it just shows is that the Awdry family seemingly has skewed priorities.

As for the episode itself? I don't really see what the fuss was all about. Rarely do we see James and Edward star together these days, and their interactions are fun to see. Probably because of Michael Angelis' line delivery whenever he voices James; he always seemed to have fun doing him, and in turn, I have fun watching. The message about taking care in icy conditions was also pretty good, and while not related to this episode, I recall that Angelis once did voiceover for [a commercial about advising drivers to think when driving in icy conditions](#), and [a fan later played footage from this episode over it](#) following Angelis' death.

Rating: Good (8/10)

Flour Power

Written by Abi Grant

This episode has a similar story to *Bold and Brave*, except we see Diesel getting his comeuppance for trying to scare Thomas, and I think that alone makes the episode stick out better. That being said, flour would never have been dumped into open wagons like that, but then I guess we'd have no climax with Thomas getting his own back at Diesel. I could be wrong, but this is probably the last episode to date that's set on Halloween, and it went out on an above average attempt.

Rating: Okay (6/10)

Episode Rankings

1. Thomas Tries His Best - Excellent (9)

2. Respect for Gordon - Excellent (9)
3. Thomas' Day Off - Good (8)
4. Keeping Up with James - Good (8)
5. Percy and the Oil Painting - Good (8)
6. Thomas and the Statue - Good (8)
7. Emily Knows Best - Good (7)
8. Mighty Mac - Good (7)
9. Thomas and the Birthday Picnic - Good (7)
10. Duncan and the Old Mine - Good (7)
11. Thomas' Milkshake Muddle - Good (7)
12. Flour Power - Okay (6)
13. Thomas' New Trucks - Okay (6)
14. Thomas and the Toy Shop - Okay (6)
15. Molly's Special Special - Okay (5)
16. The Magic Lamp - Okay (5)
17. Tuneful Toots - Okay (5)
18. Bold and Brave - Okay (5)
19. Thomas and the Golden Eagle - Okay (4)
20. Thomas and the Rainbow - Bad (3)
21. Henry and the Flagpole - Bad (2)
22. Saving Edward - Bad (2)
23. Toby Feels Left Out - Terrible (0)
24. Rheneas and the Dinosaur - Terrible (0)
25. Skarloey the Brave - Terrible (0)
26. Thomas and the New Engine - Terrible (-2)

Final Series Rating: 132/260 (5.1/10)

Series Rankings So Far

1. Series 2 (Excellent; 233/260 - 8.9/10)
2. Series 3 (Good; 211/260 - 8.1/10)
3. Series 1 (Good; 208/260 - 8/10)
4. Series 7 (Good; 174/260 - 6.7/10)
5. Series 8 (Good; 171/260 - 6.6/10)
6. Series 6 (Good; 170/260 - 6.5/10)
7. Series 5 (Okay; 165/260 - 6.3/10)
8. Series 4 (Okay; 159/260 - 6.1/10)
9. Series 9 (Okay; 132/260 - 5.1/10)