

A Dozen Binge-Worthy TV Shows You May Have Missed

By Steve Sternberg



In today's video landscape, there are so many series on so many platforms that numerous shows that already finished multi-season runs have not been seen by many viewers – I'm sure there are quite a few that people don't even know exist. I've been analyzing and reviewing television programming for more than 30 years and subscribe to all the major streaming services, and I'm still discovering top-notch series that debuted several years ago and within the past year or two.

Just a few years ago, the average household in this country had two streaming services, now it has more than four. Apple TV+ and Disney+ both launched in November 2019, with HBO Max following in May 2020. There are a bunch of great shows on Netflix, Prime Video, and Hulu, that those who subscribed in the past few years may not be familiar.

A recent issue of *The Sternberg Report* looked at my list of the 40 best TV shows of 2022.

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As a reminder, my top TV shows of 2022 were, [Peaky Blinders](#) (Netflix), [Better Call Saul](#) (AMC), [Severance](#) (Apple TV+), [The Bear](#) (FX/Hulu), [Barry](#) (HBO), [Stranger Things](#) (Netflix), [Ozark](#) (Netflix), [Succession](#) (HBO), [Killing Eve](#) (BBCA/AMC), [Evil](#) (Paramount+), [1883](#) (Paramount+), [A League of Their Own](#) (Prime Video), [Bosch: Legacy](#) (Amazon Freevee), [Yellowjackets](#) (Showtime), [The Good Fight](#) (Paramount+), [Billions](#) (Showtime), [For All Mankind](#) (Apple TV+), [Tulsa King](#) (Paramount+), [Andor](#) (Disney+), [Wednesday](#) (Netflix), [The Walking Dead](#) (AMC), [House of the Dragon](#) (HBO), [Slow Horses](#) (Apple TV+), [The Flight Attendant](#) (HBO Max), [The Old Man](#) (FX, Hulu), [The Boys](#) (Prime Video), [Only Murders in the Building](#) (Hulu), [Ms. Marvel](#) (Disney+), [Yellowstone](#) (Paramount Network), [Under the Banner of Heaven](#) (Hulu), [Harley Quinn](#) (HBO Max), [The Offer](#) (Paramount+), [Abbott Elementary](#) (ABC), [Hacks](#) (HBO Max), [Tehran](#) (Apple TV+), [Industry](#) (HBO), [The Gilded Age](#) (HBO), [The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel](#) (Prime Video), [Star Trek: Strange New Worlds](#) (Paramount+), and [Reacher](#) (Prime Video).

On the following pages are a dozen more excellent TV shows, most of which are not as well known – all finished their runs in 2020 or earlier and all are still available to stream.

I'm not including such great shows as [The Queen's Gambit](#), [GLOW](#), [Money Heist](#), [The Expanse](#), or other well-publicized series, but am instead focusing on shows that may be under your radar.



Altered Carbon (Netflix 2018-2020): In a dystopian future about 360 years from now, new technology has transformed society by making human bodies interchangeable, and death no longer necessarily permanent. A person's

memories and consciousness are recorded onto a disk-shaped storage device called a *cortical stack*, which is implanted in the vertebrae at the back of the neck. Stacks can be implanted into a new body, or “human sleeve,” after death – only the very wealthy can afford to have their stacks backed up via satellite and choose their new body. A person can only be permanently killed if their stack is destroyed or corrupted.

In season 1, [Joel Kinnaman](#) is Takeshi Kovacs, lone survivor of the Envoys, a group of elite interstellar rebel warriors. They were defeated in an uprising against the new world order, known as the Protectorate. His mind was imprisoned for 250 years until one of the world's wealthiest and most ruthless men offers him a chance to live again, with a full pardon – but only if he can solve the murder of the man's previous sleeve. Kovacs takes the job and charges head first into a world of unbridled power, violence, and political conspiracies.

Kovacs was of Asian descent in his original life (played in flashbacks by [Will Yun Lee](#)). [Renee Elise Goldsberry](#) is terrific as always as Envoy leader, Quellcris Falconer, who trained Kovacs and was also his lover. She was presumed killed in the uprising when the Envoys were defeated, and is shown in season 1 through flashbacks. Kovacs discovers she may have actually survived, and sets out to find her.

The second season opens 30 years after the season 1 finale. [Anthony Mackie](#) takes over as Kovacs (the same character in a new, upgraded human sleeve). He continues searching for his lost love, while fighting the Protectorate and uncovering a whole new conspiracy – picking up a number of allies and enemies along the way.

The fight scenes throughout both seasons are brutal, bloody, and often spectacular. *Altered Carbon* is a sophisticated, compelling, and action-packed drama, and among the best of the cyberpunk genre you're likely to find.

I would have liked to see a third season, but the high production cost (reportedly about \$9 million per episode), combined with season 2 viewership declines, resulted in Netflix pulling the plug.



Bordertown (Netflix 2016-2019): Kari Sorjonen, (*Ville Virtanen*) is an eccentric, socially awkward, idiosyncratic but brilliant detective from Helsinki, Finland. He takes a job leading the Serious Crimes Unit in a small town near the Russian border

so he can spend more time with his sick wife (*Matleena Kuusniemi*) and teenage daughter (*Olivia Ainali*). Of course, he doesn't have much more time for his family, as he gets pulled into investigating one disturbing crime after another. The snowy Nordic landscape is beautifully shot, and becomes an integral part of the series.

This is more serialized than most U.S. procedural police dramas – each crime is solved in two-or three-episode story arcs, allowing for more detailed storytelling than the typical broadcast network “crime of the week,” which usually has to be resolved in one episode. The clues are investigated at a more gradual pace, as Kari meticulously solves each crime – often several steps ahead of his colleagues and bosses.

It is interesting to see how cultural differences impact law enforcement's approach to crime and criminals, where protocols on how to investigate and treat suspects can be substantially more nuanced than in the United States.

Bordertown was Finland's most popular TV show when it debuted in 2016 (the premiere was watched by one-fifth of the country's population). There has been no official word on whether there will be a fourth season, but it seems season 3 was its last.



Dark (Netflix 2017-2020): Netflix's first original German series is riveting, twisty, and often mesmerizing. It is one of the best science fiction series ever (certainly the best one I've seen incorporating time travel). It's thrilling (and rare) to watch a television series with such lofty ambitions achieve them so brilliantly. But over the course of three seasons, this meticulously well-crafted masterpiece can be as confounding as it is compelling.

In the fictional German town of Winden, with a nuclear power station at its center (and a wormhole in a cave beneath the facility), two children disappear in similar fashion 33 years apart. A sinister time-travel conspiracy and hidden connections among four families are slowly uncovered in this mystery thriller that spans four generations.

It is difficult to describe what *Dark* is about to someone who hasn't seen it because it isn't linear storytelling. It jumps back and forth across time, and it takes a while before you realize what's going on. It's not always easy to follow who's who, as different characters and versions of characters at different ages and in different realities interact with one another. At the show's center is at-once a tragic and hopeful love story.

It starts out in 2019, but gradually expands to include several other time periods – first 1986 and 1953, then 1920, and eventually 2052 and 1888 (there's an explanation as to why time travel is only possible in 33-year increments – it has to do with the lunar-moon cycle, when the sun and moon align).

While debating the existence of God, and fate versus free will, one of the characters declares, “God is time, and time is not compassionate,” which describes this series as well as anything. As does the Albert Einstein quote that appears onscreen during the first episode: “The distinction between past, present, and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion.”



As the philosophical pendulum swings back and forth between fate and free will, some characters do horrific things, justifying them by “knowing” they are necessary for events to unfold the way they are “supposed to.” Others are determined to stop the cycle of events that seems to keep repeating. Most have no idea they are being manipulated by some sinister master plan to bring about an apocalypse (which may or may not have already happened).

I often dislike time travel storylines, because they typically follow one of two tracks. Either you can't change the past because if you could, there would be no reason for you to go back in the first place (and if you are able to change some detail, it inevitably leads to causing the event you wanted to prevent). Or, if you do change the past, it simply creates an alternate timeline, rather than affecting the timeline you originated from. So I expected a familiar, unsatisfying ending, which would leave many of the complex web of mysteries unresolved.

Yet the writers somehow managed to pull it all together into a satisfying conclusion that makes perfect sense and is close to perfect. It's an ending that elevates the series from great to greatest. I watched the entire series again a few months later, which I recommend. Once you know what's going on, a repeat viewing will enable you to appreciate *Dark* even more, and pick up on clues you missed the first time.



Harlots (Hulu 2017-2019): Period drama with [Samantha Morton](#) as the owner of an up-and-coming brothel who is trying to secure a better future for her two daughters ([Jessica Brown Findlay](#), [Eloise Smyth](#)) in 18th century London. When her business

is attacked by a ruthless rival madam ([Lesley Manville](#)), who runs an established and elite brothel with a long list of wealthy and powerful clients, it sets off a war over the sex trade. At the same time, religious zealots are demanding the closure of all brothels, and the police start launching brutal raids.

This is a story of how every class of woman navigates and tries to survive and thrive in a world where wealth and social standing mean everything, one in five women works in the sex trade, and good fortune or disaster is just a deception away. The show has a number of sex scenes, although not as much nudity as you might think – they wore so many layers of clothing back then. Most of it not for pleasure, but for power or to gain some political advantage.

What in lesser hands could have easily been *Dynasty*-style high camp, instead becomes a gritty look at the realities of 18th century life without regard for 21st century sensibilities. *Harlots* isn't for everyone, but if you like this sort of thing, this is top of the line.

The series is created, brilliantly written, and directed by women, and it shows. The point of view is refreshingly from the female gaze. All three seasons are entertaining, gritty, and insightful.



Jessica Jones (Disney+ 2015-2019): This is the best Marvel series on television. *Jessica Jones* has the distinction of being Marvel's first female lead and title character (on the big or small screen). [Krysten Ritter](#) shines as the reluctant hero, who's haunted by her past (she was given super strength in a medical experiment that saved her life after a car crash killed her family).

Darker and more noir-ish than other Marvel TV series (or movies), *Jessica Jones* turns standard noir elements upside down. More hard-boiled detective than femme fatale, Jessica swears, drinks too much, has meaningless sex, and thinks nothing of breaking the rules if it suits her idea of the greater good – the type of woman you virtually never see on television (or in the Marvel universe). And it's not just [Krysten Ritter's](#) title character – most of the strong, independent characters here are women – including [Rachael Taylor](#) as her adopted sister and best friend Trish “Patsy” Walker, [Carrie-Anne Moss](#) as a high-powered attorney who has helped Jessica out of several jams, and [Janet McTeer](#) as her mom (in season 2). Notably, roles often played by women, the assistant and the girlfriend (in this case boyfriend), are reserved for men.

The first season is a surprisingly strong commentary on male/female relationships and the abuse of privilege and power, focusing on topics such as addiction, rape, retaliation, revenge, and redemption – subject matter seldom dealt with on television, and not at all in the Marvel universe at large. The show is brutal in its depiction of violence, and has one of the great supervillains of all time in the mind-controlling Kilgrave ([David Tennant](#)).

Season 2, which was released two years after the first season, is more introspective, as Jessica searches for the origins of her power and discovers some shocking truths. In the first episode of the season, a new male rival investigator who wants to take over her business tells her “I don't take no

for an answer.” Jessica responds, “How rapey of you.” New terrain on television to be sure. All 13 episodes of season 2 were directed by women – another first.

Season 3 is a fitting end to Jessica’s journey as she not only has to fight a serial killer, but her sister/best friend as well (who has acquired enhanced abilities of her own), as she struggles with what it means to be a hero. Marvel will be hard-pressed to develop another television series with comparable grittiness and social significance.

Jessica Jones, originally on Netflix (along with other “street-level” heroes, *Daredevil*, *Luke Cage*, and *Iron Fist*), was canceled when Marvel owner Disney decided to launch its own streaming service (all have shifted over to Disney+). There are unconfirmed rumors that *Krysten Ritter* might reprise her character in Disney+’s upcoming series, *Echo*, but that could just be wishful thinking.



Lilyhammer (Netflix 2012-2014): Netflix’s first original scripted series (debuting in 2012) stars *Steven Van Zandt* (*The Sopranos*) as a New York mob underboss, Frank “The Fixer” Tagliano, who is given a new identity after testifying against the

Mafia head who ordered a hit on him. He asks to be relocated to Lillehammer, Norway, which he fell in love with while watching the 1994 *Winter Olympics* (and where he believes no one will look for him). In his new life, he is a Norwegian-American immigrant known as Giovanni “Johnny” Henriksen.

As he tries to settle in to this peaceful, rules-conscious, town, Johnny uses his mob talents to deal with bullies, bad guys, and bureaucrats alike. He purchases a bar and befriends and corrupts several of the town’s locals, a colorful and quirky cast of characters who come to his aid when the mob finally tracks him down.

It's not easy to successfully combine comedy and violence, but it is expertly handled here. The show is also notable for the way it deals with immigration and racism. The dialogue switches back and forth between subtitled Norwegian and English (which Johnny apparently understands, but can't speak).

When *Lilyhammer* debuted in Norway, it was watched by one-fifth of the country's population. Since the series premiered well before Netflix was a major streaming force (a year before *House of Cards*), it never received the accolades it deserved in this country. But you can enjoy bingeing all three eight-episode seasons.



Narcos (Netflix 2015-2017): The rise of Columbian drug cartels during the 1980s Reagan/Bush “war on drugs,” led by cocaine kingpin Pablo Escobar (*Wagner Maura*), is chronicled in this riveting drama. The story is narrated by DEA agent Steve Murphy (*Boyd Holbrook*), who, along with his partner Javier Pena (*Pedro Pascal*) try to capture the drug lord. The legal system, honest and corrupt politicians, as well as the Columbian police and military, are all involved in either helping or hindering their efforts. Conflicts between the infamous Medellin and Cali cartels, and the DEA/CIA lead to massive battles in the streets of Columbia and many ruthless murders of cartel members, police, DEA agents, and innocent civilians alike.

The rise and fall of Pablo Escobar, the real-life gangster that put most fictional ones to shame, covers the first two thrilling seasons. The ruthless Cali cartel, one of Escobar's main rivals, is the subject of the equally good third season. While based on real life, many of the events and characters in the series are fictionalized. The planned fourth season became a companion series, *Narcos: Mexico* (also worth checking out).



Queen of the South (USA 2016-2021): The first three seasons of this slick and violent crime drama focus on Camila Vargas ([Veronica Falcon](#)) and her former protégé, Teresa Mendoza ([Alice Braga](#)), as they battle for supremacy of a drug cartel run by Camila and her husband, Don Epifanio ([Joaquim de Almeida](#)). Both are seductive, conniving, captivating, and occasionally vicious. [Hemky Madera](#) is wonderfully menacing as a Camila's former cartel lieutenant who becomes Teresa's most loyal ally and protector.

Teresa's rise from low-level dealer in desperate straits and on the run to becoming in charge of her own drug empire stretches credulity to its limit, but is nonetheless enjoyable to watch. Teresa is a bold, clever (and lucky) survivor in a world where women are often relegated to being drug mules or sex workers. She refuses to be a victim, and often risks her own safety to help others who face the same fate she escaped. But her altruistic tendencies do not mean she won't be brutal and merciless when it comes to protecting her friends, her family, and her business.

Season 4 sees Teresa and her crew move to New Orleans and try to expand her fledgling empire, while facing a whole new level of threats and enemies. The fifth and final season pits Teresa and her allies against enemies from within and without her organization, as she tries to escape the drug life and live happily ever after with her makeshift family. Twists and turns, betrayals and competing drug cartels, as well as the CIA's involvement, puts her fate in doubt up to the very end.

No awards or brilliant writing here, just a gritty and entertaining guilty pleasure. You can watch all five seasons on Netflix. Given it originally aired on USA, I'm surprised Peacock hasn't grabbed it. During the series run, [Alice Braga](#) was the only Latina actress to be the lead in a TV drama.



Reprisal (Hulu 2019): The always good [Abigail Spencer](#) (*Timeless*, *Rectify*) is compelling as a woman who was left for dead by her ruthless brother and his gang after discovering he committed a brutal crime. She undergoes a long recovery, changes her identity, and re-emerges seven years later seeking revenge. She recruits her own crew and sets about on her task of going after everyone who betrayed her.

Smart and taut, this relentless femme fatale goes on her dark mission, narrowly getting out of one jam after another until the final showdown. The series is pulpy, soapy, chaotic, and visually engaging. And the soundtrack rocks. It's more style than substance, but it's a fun escape from reality. Most of the interesting characters are women – with a couple of key exceptions, most of the men are interchangeable, beer-drinking gearheads. The story could have been told in six episodes, instead of stretching it out to 10, but it's still a fun ride.

[Ron Pearlman](#) has a meaty role as a menacing mob boss. It was canceled after one season, but this should have been a limited series anyway. Her mission completed, a new season would have been an entirely different show.



Sense8 (Netflix 2015-2018): Some of the best sci-fi series are canceled too soon – sometimes because they are too niche to find a broad enough audience to justify high production costs, sometimes because they do not fit into the easily promotable “western in space” or “post apocalypse” genres. Unfortunately,

[Sense8](#) fits both categories. It was canceled after two seasons, which caused such an uproar among its loyal fans that Netflix took the unusual step of returning the show two years later with a two-hour finale to finish the story (the second season ended with a cliffhanger).

The series grabs you from the get-go and never lets up. Created by Lana and Lilly Wachowski, [Sense8](#) follows eight strangers from different parts of the world, who discover they are mentally and emotionally linked. They can sense and communicate with one another, and when needed can occupy one another's bodies to use their own knowledge and skills to help escape danger. The danger comes from a secret organization that is trying to hunt them down as they try to live their everyday lives and figure out how and why they are all connected.

These eight were all born on the same day, so are considered part of the same "cluster." There are other clusters out there, some become allies, some adversaries. It has a diverse cast (including a trans character) and explores issues related to sexual identity, politics, and empathy.

[Sense8](#) is innovative, suspenseful, thought-provoking, and has excellent performances by its strong international cast.



Sneaky Pete (Prime Video 2015-2019): [Giovanni Ribisi](#)

is spot on as a slick con man (and ex-con) on the run from some very bad people. He assumes the identity of his still imprisoned cellmate Pete, and tries to hide out with Pete's family (who hasn't seen him in 20 years, since he was a kid). They have a bail bonds

business in Connecticut and their own set of problems and sinister characters to deal with, so it takes a while before any of them start to question his story.

All three seasons have multiple cons and obstacles to solve that are handled in a crisp, keep-you-guessing manner. There are short cons, long cons, and double crosses, as "Pete" cleverly navigates

the new world he finds himself in, while trying to avoid the old, as certain family members become increasingly suspicious.

The excellent cast includes [Margo Martindale](#) and [Peter Gerety](#) as Pete's grandparents, and [Marin Ireland](#), [Shane McRae](#), and Libby Barer as his cousins. [Bryan Cranston](#) is executive producer, and has a role as a gangster who is after Pete in season 1. Intelligent, gritty, and a good mix of drama and humor. Definitely worth a look.



Vida (Starz 2018-2020): Two vastly different and estranged Mexican-American sisters Lynn ([Melissa Barrera](#)) and Emma ([Mishel Prada](#)) – both perfectly cast – are forced to come together to deal with the death of their mother (nicknamed Vida) and the discovery that she had a secret wife, Eddy ([Ser Anzoategui](#)). They also have to deal with the apartment building and bar Vida owned in her East L.A. neighborhood, which is in the process of undergoing gentrification.

Emma is a buttoned-down Chicago lawyer (and closeted lesbian), while Lyn is more fun loving, hopping from one job and sexual partner to another. They are both insiders and outsiders, having left the neighborhood, but still intimately familiar with the life on these streets. Their friend and anti-gentrification activist, Marisol ([Chelsea Rendon](#)), calls them “chipsters,” Chicana hipsters who traded their Mexican roots for more snobbish and stereotypically white personas.

This half-hour dramedy has all Latinx writers (a first). LGBTQ characters fill the writer's room and supporting cast as well, and queer communities are dealt with in a casual matter-of-fact way you never see on television. The sex scenes, of which there are many, are shown from a female

perspective – they are often graphic, but treated with a certain gentleness and care. There's nothing else like *Vida* on television.

It was canceled following its third season. All three seasons are available to stream on Hulu.