

TV Reviews: *The Sternberg Report* Mid-Season Recap

By Steve Sternberg



This season, *The Sternberg Report* began a monthly series, where I review TV shows and label them *The Good*, *The Too Bad*, and *The Ugly*.

The Good is a show you should enjoy if you like that particular genre. ***The Too Bad*** is a show that could have (or should have) been better, or simply doesn't live up to expectations set by previous seasons – but that doesn't necessarily mean it's bad. ***The Ugly*** is a show that completely misses the mark or is just an ill-conceived mess.

Some reviews include more entries in one category than another, while some may exclude a category or two altogether. I try to cover a variety of genres.

Between January and July 2024, I reviewed more than 20 TV series on a variety of platforms – broadcast, cable, and streaming. For the purpose of this report, I've assigned a letter grade to each show.

Here are brief summaries those reviews.

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The Good

Grade A



Lessons in Chemistry (Apple TV+)

Based on the novel of the same name by Bonnie Garmus, this brilliantly written and acted series somehow manages to combine science, romance, tragedy, feminism, single-parenthood, the civil rights movement, and workplace comedy (and drama) into a cohesive and compelling story in just eight episodes. It's also beautifully shot, with the 1950s and '60s costumes and sets transporting the viewer to a different, if not simpler, time.

[Brie Larson](#) gives a captivating performance as Elizabeth Zott, a lab technician in the late 1950s and early 1960s, who is severely limited in what she's allowed to accomplish because she's a woman (despite being a better chemist than virtually any of her male colleagues). She also happens to be a superb cook – as she points out when someone compliments her scrumptious meals and desserts, "it's all a matter of chemistry."

Through an unlikely, but strangely believable string of events, Elizabeth takes America by storm with a 1960s feminist (and chemistry-based) TV cooking show, *Supper at Six*, which inspires women across the country to challenge the prevalent notion of the time that a woman's place in society was in the home. She ends every show with, "Children, set the table, your mother needs a moment to herself."

There won't be a second season. As Brie Larsen, who also executive produced the limited series said, "We finished the book."

Grade A



The Veil (Hulu)

[Elisabeth Moss](#) is riveting as high-level undercover MI6 agent, Imogen Salter, in this international spy thriller. She has an uncanny ability to assume new identities and personas at the drop of a hat, which makes her a key asset for the most important (and dangerous) missions.

Her new assignment is to extricate a woman, Adilah El Idrissi ([Yumna Marwan](#)), from a refugee camp on the border of Turkey and Syria, and determine if she is who she claims to be, namely a normal French citizen caught up in the chaos of the region, or whether she is actually a brutal ISIS leader with knowledge of an imminent attack on the West.

The two women play a dangerous cat-and-mouse game throughout much of the six-part miniseries, as their real motives remain a mystery. Each tries to unravel the other's web of half-truth, lies, and secrets, while narrowly escaping one dangerous situation after another.

While designed as a limited series, the finale sets the stage for a potential second season. At this writing, it hasn't been renewed, but its star, [Elisabeth Moss](#), has said she would reprise the role "in a heartbeat." It seems to have all the makings of a new *Jack-Ryan*-style franchise.

Grade A-



3 Body Problem (Netflix)

What would we do if we knew a superior alien race was on their way to conquer Earth but it would take them 400 years to get here? What would this alien race do if they thought that the historically unpredictable and rapid advance of human technology might result in humans actually being superior to them by the time they get here? How could we prepare for the invasion if, even from that distance, the aliens can see and hear everything we do?

In the 1960s a Chinese physicist discovers an alien signal. Her reply causes repercussions 60 years later that threatens all of humanity. The series jumps back and forth from the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, to the present, when mysterious goings on are unfolding: decades of scientific research is suddenly found to be wrong; an event occurs

that defies the known laws of physics; some scientists on the brink of technological breakthroughs start to see mysterious countdowns that no one else can see (which only stop when they discontinue their work), and some scientists and gamers are being sent futuristic headsets with invitations to join an intense and addictive virtual reality game whose real purpose is initially unknown. A group of young scientists, partner with a detective and an intelligence agency to try and figure out what's going on and what to do about it.

This is the type of sci-fi series where my ultimate determination of just how good it is will depend on how it all ends. Until then (there will be two more seasons), it's a fascinating and worthwhile ride.

Grade A-



The Gentlemen (Netflix)

This humorous crime thriller (I hesitate to call it a comedy), created by Guy Ritchie, stars the charismatic [Theo James](#) as Edward “Eddie” Horniman, who unexpectedly inherits his father’s 15,000 acre estate in England. Along with the estate, Eddie inherits the title of 13th Duke of Halstead. Initially Eddie thinks the property is more trouble than it’s worth, and plans to sell, but changes his mind when he meets Susie Glass ([Kaya Scodelario](#)), who reveals the existence of a large marijuana farm beneath the estate. She is the daughter of mob boss Bobby Glass ([Ray Winstone](#)), and is running his crime syndicate while he’s in prison. It turns out Eddie’s father took in about £5 million a year leasing the farm to the weed-growing mobsters, who make it part of their cannabis empire – and they have no intention of leaving.

Eddie now has to navigate an often deadly world where hidden agendas and shifting alliances abound (there are also Columbian, Albanian, and Russian gangsters lurking about). Yet no matter how chaotic the situation, Eddie always seems in control and confident he will come out on top. But so does Susie, whose calm demeanor belies a willingness to be brutally violent when she deems it necessary. And so do the numerous other shady characters in their orbit.

Stylish, fast-paced, with a strong cast, and just the right blend of humor and thrills (and a cool soundtrack), [The Gentleman](#) makes for a fun and entertaining binge (if you’re not put off by the often sudden and jarring violence).

Grade A-



All the Light We Cannot See (Netflix)

A four-part limited series based on Anthony Doerr's 2014 novel, with [Aria Mia Lomberti](#) giving an extraordinary performance as Marie-Laure LeBlanc, a blind French teenage girl who has a radio broadcast in a Nazi-occupied French coastal town in 1944. Working for the Resistance, Marie-Laure reads stories over the air containing secret codes that provide bombing targets for the Americans and British. Lomberti, who is herself blind, more than holds her own with the superb supporting cast, which includes [Mark Ruffalo](#) and [Hugh Laurie](#).

In a parallel storyline, a brilliant young German orphan, Werner Pfennig ([Louis Hofmann](#)), is separated from his sister ([Luna Wedler](#)) by a Nazi officer, and forced to join the Hitler youth because of his skills with radio technology. He eventually becomes a soldier who specializes in detecting and tracking radio frequencies (so the SS can find and kill the broadcasters). The two storylines converge, as Werner is ordered to track down Marie-Laure so the SS can kill her. Werner and grew up listening to the same radio frequency on which she is now broadcasting, and secretly listens to Marie-Laure's broadcast (listening to foreign broadcasts in Nazi Germany was punishable by death). They meet and become allies,

The series is powerful, cinematic, thrilling, poignant, and riveting from start to finish (even though you may well guess how it ends).

Grade B+



Masters of the Air (Apple TV+)

Courage, heroic sacrifice, brotherhood, and spectacular visuals – hallmarks of a Steven Spielberg/Tom Hanks World War II production – are all on display in this limited series about the U.S. Air Force's 100th Bomb Group, whose “flying fortresses” were tasked with conducting extremely dangerous bombing raids against the German Luftwaffe over Berlin and Nazi-occupied Europe.

Just as its companion pieces before it – [Band of Brothers](#) (2001) and [The Pacific](#) (2010) – [Master of the Air](#) portrays the deadly missions undertaken by a tight-knit group of fighting men, along with the friendships and bonds that develop

through their common goals, common enemy, and common hardships. The series does not shy away from the harrowing experiences of the airmen who flew bombers against the often overwhelming numbers of German fighter planes – the losses they suffer are staggering, sometimes more than 100 men in a single day. Those who survive often have to bail out by parachute over German-occupied Europe before their planes are destroyed, and then rely on local resistance groups to help them escape. Otherwise they are captured by the Germans and put in special POW camps designed for allied pilots.

Tensions mount as the allies prepare for D-Day. [Austin Butler](#), [Calium Turner](#), [Nate Mann](#), [Anthony Boyle](#), and [Ncuti Gatwa](#), head up an excellent ensemble cast.

Grade B+



Sugar (Apple TV+)

[Colin Farrell](#) stars as L.A. private detective John Sugar in this eight-part neo-noir mystery drama. While we start out thinking he's an [L.A. Confidential](#)-style (or is it [The Big Sleep](#)?) hard-boiled detective, complete with the appropriate voiceover exposition, we soon learn there's a lot more to him than meets the eye.

Sugar reports to a mysterious woman named Ruby ([Kirby Howell-Baptiste](#)), and they both seem to be part of a clandestine organization (of spies, or something else?).

John Sugar's specialty is finding missing people. When he's contacted by a wealthy movie producer ([James Cromwell](#)) to find his missing granddaughter Olivia ([Sydney Chandler](#)), he takes the job despite Ruby warning him not to (ostensibly because he's been working too hard, but there seems to be another reason we're not yet privy to). There are some twists and turns, and secrets harbored by several of Olivia's family members. There's a big reveal at the end of episode six (that you may or may not see coming) that could have completely changed the direction of the series, but fortunately doesn't. It just adds a fascinating new element without interfering with the story propelling forward as Sugar tries to rescue Olivia from a potentially horrible fate.

We haven't had a good film-noir series in a while, and John Sugar is the perfect protagonist – slick, stylish, and exuding confidence. He sports a flashy car and impeccable suit, to boot. It's a tribute to both the writing and acting that this doesn't slide into cliché-ridden parody territory. No word yet on a potential second season.

Grade B+



True Detective: Night Country (HBO, Max)

The always terrific [Jodie Foster](#) and newcomer [Kali Reis](#), star in this fourth installment of the *True Detective* franchise. The opening theme song, Billie Eilish's *Bury a Friend*, along with the snowy landscape cryptic, dream-like images, and constant Alaskan December darkness, set an appropriately dark and eerie tone for this dark and eerie drama.

The series opens on the last sunset before six months of night in the fictional town of Ennis, Alaska, where a brutal crime is about to take place. Eight men who are working in an isolated arctic research station disappear and are discovered naked and frozen in the snow (their clothes neatly piled nearby).

Police Chief Liz Danvers ([Jodie Foster](#)) is called in to investigate. She's joined by her former partner, state trooper Evangeline Navarro ([Kali Reis](#)), an Alaskan Inupiat (native). Reis's understated but intense demeanor is the perfect counterpoint to Foster's aggressive, scowling, and equally intense style. Both are strong, fiercely independent women – relentless investigators, unwilling to back off when ordered to by their possibly corrupt male superiors (or when they disagree with one another).

There are also possible supernatural elements involved, as some of the town's residents see and hear visions of the dead (are they hallucinations, or something real?). One such vision led a local woman ([Fiona Shaw](#)) to discover the bodies of the missing men. While Navarro is spiritual and has visions of her own, Danvers is just the opposite, believing everything must have a rational explanation.

As Liz and Navarro try to put the puzzle pieces together, secrets, coverups, and corruption are revealed, and their lives are in danger right up to the thrilling finale.

Grade B+



Loki season 2 (Disney+)

In the 2019 blockbuster film [Avengers Endgame](#), the Avengers go back in time seven years to when they were fighting Loki ([Tom Hiddleston](#)) in the “Battle of New York” (from the first [Avengers](#) movie in 2012). They need to get the Infinity Stones before Thanos uses them to wipe out half the universe. In the ensuing chaos, Loki gets his hands on the powerful cosmic energy cube known as the Tesseract, and escapes. This did not happen in the events we saw in the original movie, thus creating a new timeline, and setting into motion the events in the first two seasons of [Loki](#).

Loki’s disappearance catches the attention of the Time Variants Authority (TVA), a powerful bureaucratic organization that exists outside of normal time and space. The TVA is designed to make sure people stay in their set timeline. Any “variants” are put on trial and either reset into their expected timeline, or simply “pruned” (erased from existence). This Loki is now considered a variant.

In season one, just as the TVA judge, Ravonna Renslayer ([Gugu Mbatha-Raw](#)), declares Loki guilty and is about to have him “pruned,” TVA chief detective Mobius ([Owen Wilson](#)) steps in. He wants to use Loki to help them capture a dangerous variant who has been traveling through time and killing TVA agents. Given no choice, Loki agrees. In the process, he meets various versions of himself from different timelines – including a female Loki who calls herself Sylvie ([Sophia Di Martino](#)). They eventually become wary allies.

In season two, all of the various timelines are in danger of collapsing. With the assistance of Mobius, Sylvie, and some new allies, Loki helps save multiple realities and finds his “glorious purpose,” as he journeys from villain, to anti-hero, to actual hero, to something beyond – and in the process, helps create a new multiverse.

While Loki may appear in future Marvel movies, there are no current plans for a third season of the Disney+ series.

Grade B+



Griselda (Netflix)

Sofia Vergara (unrecognizable from her role in the comedy, *Modern Family*) gives a bravura performance in this heavily fictionalized miniseries about real-life drug lord, Griselda Blanco, referred to as “Godmother,” during what was known as the “cocaine cowboys” era of the late 1970s and ‘80s. This quote appears on the screen leading into the first episode and sets the stage for what is to come – “*The only man I was ever afraid of was a woman, Griselda Blanco.*” – Pablo Escobar (drug kingpin).

The series (in Spanish with subtitles or dubbed in English) chronicles Griselda’s stunning and violent rise (and fall) from an abused former brothel worker married to a drug trafficker in Medellin Columbia, to one of the most feared and brutal members of the drug underworld, controlling the Miami cocaine trade.

At the same time, a parallel storyline is unfolding, where another woman, June Hawkins (*Juliana Aiden Martinzez*), a Latina police officer, is investigating the murder of several top drug dealers. She the first to figure out that there is a new player in town, a woman who might be more than just a “girlfriend.” A female witness tells her, “she doesn’t walk like a girlfriend...she walks like a boss.” Like Griselda, June has to put up with the misogyny and sexism of the time, and male colleagues who don’t take her seriously. She gets involved in Griselda’s case basically because she’s the only one in the police station who speaks Spanish. She soon becomes obsessed with bringing Griselda and her criminal empire to justice.

Grade B+



Shōgun (FX/Hulu)

Epic historical fiction based on James Clavell’s 1975 novel of the same name (which was previously adapted into a popular 1980 miniseries). The story takes place in feudal Japan at the start of the 17th century, when events are unfolding that will lead to a potential civil war and the rise of a new Shōgun to rule the country.

When the brilliant military and political strategist, Lord Yoshii Toranaga (the regal [Hiroyuki Sanada](#)), is betrayed by fellow members of the ruling Council of Regents, it sets the plot in motion. The embattled Toranaga, with the help of some key allies, parries all the moves of his conspiring enemies.

Thrust into this turmoil, is John Blackthorne ([Cosmo Jarvis](#)), a Protestant English sailor, serving on a Dutch ship, seeking to establish trade with Japan. He and his crew are shipwrecked on the coast of Japan and captured by local samurai. He must survive in a land whose culture is vastly different from his own and whose people see him as a “barbarian.” Blackthorne and Toranaga become unlikely allies, as each sees the other as being key to his own survival.

[Anna Sawai](#) gives a remarkable performance as Lady Toda Mariko, a highborn mysterious female samurai from a disgraced family. She is fiercely loyal to Toranaga, and serves as translator between Toranaga and Blackthorne, with whom she develops a bond (much to the chagrin of her husband). A decision she makes in episode nine reverberates throughout both sides of the conflict.

A combination of a superb casting, political intrigue, colliding ambitions, clashing cultures, and heroic sacrifice, make [Shōgun](#) one of the most distinctive series to come to linear television in years. While designed as a miniseries, there are now reportedly plans for two additional seasons.

Grade B+



The Walking Dead: The Ones Who Live (AMC)

Rick ([Andrew Lincoln](#)) and Michonne ([Danai Guirira](#)), are back – and their chemistry hasn’t faded one bit. The two stars left the long-running hit series, [The Walking Dead](#), in seasons 9 and 10, respectively (it ran for 11 seasons and 177 episodes). They were the driving forces of that show (along with Daryl and Carol, who have their own [TWD](#) spin-off). Fans of the franchise should love their reunion in this action-packed series. There are also a couple of guest stars [TWD](#) viewers will appreciate seeing again.

For those who don’t recall, in Rick’s final [TWD](#) episode, he blew up a bridge he was on, apparently sacrificing himself to save his friends and family from a massive horde of walkers. But viewers know he survived and was rescued/kidnaped by Jadis ([Pollyanna McIntosh](#)), the enigmatic one-time leader of the Scavengers, and taken by helicopter to the mysterious military group known as CRM (Civic Republic Military).

Suspecting Rick might still be alive, and not resting until she sees evidence one way or another, Michonne went off on her own to find him (which she does here).

[Terry O'Quinn](#) is the reasonable sounding but ultimately unhinged leader of the CRM, Major General Beale, a self-righteous leader who thinks he is the only one who knows how to save the world, and is willing to sacrifice (slaughter) others so his community can thrive. Rick and Michonne have fought tyrants like him before, and are committed to bringing him down. Jadis, knowing from experience how formidable Rick and Michonne are together, tries to stop them at all costs.

The series concludes in thrilling fashion, Michonne attempts to help Rick escape, they confront Jadis who is bent on killing them, and then face off with General Beale and his soldiers. The door is left open to future stories and reunions.

Grade B



The Brothers Sun (Netflix)

As this action crime comedy gets underway, Charles Sun ([Justin Chien](#)), a leading member of the Jade Dragons triad gang, fights off a group of unknown assailants in his Taiwan apartment (while he's watching his favorite baking show on TV). His father, Big Sun ([Johnny Kou](#)), the head of the Jade Dragons, is also attacked and shot, putting him in a coma. Charles goes to L.A. to protect his younger brother Bruce ([Sam Song Li](#)) and his mother, Eileen "Mama" Sun (the wonderful [Michelle Yeoh](#)), whom he fears will be the next targets.

Eileen had taken Bruce to California years earlier, when he was a young boy, to be safe from the dangerous world of the triads. While Charles looks the part of the weapon wielding, hard-fighting triad soldier he is, Bruce has been living a vastly different life for the past 15 years. He's a shy, pre-med student who drives a Lyft on the side for extra cash. Bruce has no idea his father, mother, and brother are among Tapei's most feared gangsters. He is now thrust into a world he knows nothing about, with none of his brother's well-honed fighting skills. He must adapt fast if he's to survive.

The series has a good mix of humor, drama, and action (some of the fight scenes are spectacular), as the family faces multiple threats. When Eileen kills an assassin, Charles says to Bruce, "I didn't know she could fight," to which Bruce replies, "I think there's a lot about mom we don't know."

Despite strong reviews and viewership, Netflix canceled the series after a single season. While this caused some consternation among fans of the show, another season is not really needed. The story came to a satisfying conclusion.

Grade B



Elsbeth (CBS, Paramount+)

The character of quirky (but brilliant) attorney Elsbeth Tascioni ([Carrie Preston](#)) originated with recurring roles in CBS's [The Good Wife](#) and later in the Paramount+ spin-off, [The Good Fight](#). Now headlining her own show, Elsbeth moves from Chicago to start over in New York City, where she becomes a civilian consultant

to the NYPD. I had some concerns about whether the character could carry her own hour-long show, but those were quickly put to rest.

Elsbeth's unique investigative skills and unconventional style are instrumental in helping the NYPD solve crimes, much to the chagrin of police Captain Wagner (the always good [Wendell Pierce](#)), who is forced to work with her, and detective Smullen ([Danny Mastrogiorgio](#)), who is initially dismissive of Elsbeth, and finds her to be nothing more than a nuisance – until he starts to realize how adept she is at spotting clues that even he has missed. [Carra Paterson](#) is officer Kanya Blanke, who is assigned by Captain Wagner to keep an eye on Elsbeth, but quickly sees how insightful she is, and becomes sort of a Watson to Elsbeth's Sherlock.

[Elsbeth](#) is witty and well-written, and most importantly, fun. Somewhat reminiscent of [Columbo](#) (and Peacock's wonderful [Poker Face](#)), Elsbeth manages to win the day often because both the police and the criminals constantly underestimate her. As is often the case with crime-of-the-week comedy-dramas, the series has an excellent cast of weekly guest stars.

Grade B



Tracker (CBS, Paramount+)

CBS manages yet another successful spin on the procedural drama. [Justin Hartley](#) (*This is Us*) is Colter Shaw, a lone-wolf survivalist who travels across the country in his truck (with an Airstream trailer attached). If someone posts a reward for finding a missing person or object, or solving some mystery, he uses his extensive tracking and survivalist skills to get the job done. He tells prospective clients in virtually every episode, “I only get paid upon success.”

Each week finds Colter in a new locale, with a new mystery to solve, and facing a new batch of bad guys who don't know who they're messing with. While Colter works alone in the field, he has a small team to assist him remotely. Teddi and Velma ([Robin Weigert](#) and [Abby McEnany](#)), a wife-and-wife couple, provide him with potential clients and do basic research on cases he is working on. Bobby ([Erc Graise](#)) is an expert hacker, who gets key information to help him each week.

No award-winning writing or acting here, just comfort food for fans of CBS procedurals. You know Colter is going to come out on top and find or rescue the missing person each week. Viewers know exactly what to expect and they keep coming back for more. It's the definition of a situation drama. Some critics have compared this show to Prime Video's [Reacher](#), but the two really have virtually nothing in common.

The Too Bad

Grade B-



Parish (AMC)

Based on the BBC One British series, *The Driver*, this six-episode crime thriller stars [Giancarlo Esposito](#) as Gray Parish, a good man with a bad past who gave up a life of crime to become a family man. Years ago, he was a high-end car thief with his own well-respected crew. His masterful skills behind the wheel gave him the nickname, *The Driver*.

While still grieving his son Maddox ([Caleb Baumann](#)), who was shot and killed under mysterious circumstances, Parish now runs a struggling car service. Strapped for cash, he's lured back into the New Orleans criminal underworld by the

prospect of one more well-paying job. But past associates, threaten to kill his wife ([Paula Malcomson](#)) and daughter ([Arica Himmel](#)) if he doesn't help them with something much more dangerous, which thrusts him in the middle of a gang war.

This is a prime example of a magnetic lead actor elevating a show above its generic and derivative material (how many times have we seen a former criminal who's trying to go straight forced to do one more job?). [Giancarlo Esposito](#) brings the same simmering intensity he demonstrated in [Breaking Bad](#) and [Better Call Saul](#), but here he is able to occasionally explode into emotional outbursts and action. He plays a tough guy gangster, a cool professional, and a vulnerable family man with equal believability.

Unfortunately, even his compelling performance isn't enough to place this in *The Good* category. The Parish character has enough potential that with crisper writing (and better bad guys) a second season might have been a significant improvement. But a second season is not in the cards.

Grade C+



[Apples Never Fall](#) ([Peacock](#))

Mystery drama limited series based on Liane Moriarty's novel of the same name about Joy Delaney ([Annette Bening](#)), who suddenly goes missing, her husband Stan ([Sam Neill](#)), who is suspected of killing her, and their four screwed-up adult children ([Jack Lacy](#), [Alison Brie](#), [Conor Merrigan](#), and [Essie Randles](#)), who try to figure out what really happened.

Joy's disappearance launches two timelines, conveniently labeled "Then" and "Now," which show the family's lives before Joy went missing and after, when Stan's strange behavior leads both the police and his family to suspect him of killing her.

In the "Then" time, we see that Joy and Stan take in a woman named Savannah ([Georgia Flood](#)), who knocks on their door and claims to be fleeing an abusive boyfriend. A lonely and neglected Joy quickly bonds with Savannah, in a sort of mother-daughter dynamic. Joy's children become suspicious of Savannah's motives and are clearly jealous of her relationship with their mom, whom they have consistently dismissed and taken for granted. In the "Now" time, Savannah is long gone. Did she have something to do with Joy's disappearance? No one can seem to locate her.

There are a few key problems with this series that place it in the *Too Bad* category. Unlike the far superior [Big Little Lies](#), which was based on another Liane Moriarty novel, all of the characters here (except for [Annette Bening](#), whom we see mostly in flashbacks) are one-dimensional cliches, none of whom are even remotely likeable (or interesting).

While the show does have some moments (and I'm not saying you shouldn't check it out), with this cast and subject matter, it could have been so much better.

Grade C



Mr. and Mrs. Smith (Prime Video)

Inspired by the hit 2005 theatrical movie of the same name (with [Angelina Jolie](#) and [Brad Pitt](#)), this series, while not bad, does not live up to the original. In this version, John and Jane ([Donald Glover](#) and [Maya Erskine](#)), are hired by a mysterious organization and assigned to act as husband and wife on various missions (in the movie, they were actually married and worked for competing agencies).

Part of the problem with this TV version is that if you are expecting the star swagger, non-stop action, and sexual tension of the original, none of that is present here. The first few episodes have little action, and it never really ramps up. None of their missions are very exciting (or even interesting). Making it more frustrating is that because [Donald Glover](#) and [Maya Erskine](#) are so appealing, there's some witty dialogue, the soundtrack is good, and it has a string of strong guest stars ([Ron Perlman](#), [John Turturro](#), [Sarah Paulsen](#), [Billy Campbell](#), [Parker Posey](#)), you keep expecting something to happen, so you keep watching. But nothing happens (until the final episode) and it doesn't get any better. They also try to include scenes that replicate specific situations from the movie, but they seem haphazardly thrown in to little effect. It's almost as if they couldn't decide whether to make an action thriller or a rom-com, so it wound up being neither.

But if you haven't seen the movie, you might think this is a decent distraction. Check it out for yourself.

Grade C



Reacher season 2 (Prime Video)

Jack Reacher ([Alan Ritchson](#)) is a loner who roams the country going from town to town by bus, where he invariably runs into trouble. In the first season, we were introduced to the 6 foot 5 highly-skilled former head of an elite army investigative unit who's brimming with muscles (and confidence). Yet despite looking like the immovable mountain of a man he is, a surprising number of people still try to mess with him.

In season one, Reacher teams up with the only two competent law enforcement officers in a small southern town – chief detective Finley ([Malcolm Goodwin](#)), a Harvard educated, buttoned-up Black man from Boston and officer Conklin ([Willa Fitzgerald](#)), the only female cop in town – to investigate a string of brutal murders. His initial conflict with them turns into grudgingly mutual respect as they face down a slew of bad guys. There's lots of action (and some romance) as Jack Reacher saunters into one dangerous situation after another, confident he can face down (and beat up) any opponent, which, of course, he does.

Unfortunately, season two has little of what made the first season fun. While season one earned a solid B+, season two only gets a C. Focusing so much time on the investigation (more than the action) and the backstory, flashing back to Reacher's team of army investigators, slows the series down and makes it less entertaining.

The supporting cast, which played so well against his type in season one, are too similar to him here – there's none of the conflict that made the first season so humorous and entertaining. He's just like them, only more so – they're all former members of the same team, and see him as their infallible leader. And unlike the first season, the generic plot has few twists and turns – how many times have we seen a former elite special military unit have their members killed one by one while their near invincible leader fights to discover the bad guy's identity and save the remaining team members?

It's been renewed for a third season, which I hope goes back to what made season one so enjoyable.

Grade C-



Echo (Disney+)

Alaqua Cox reprises her role from *Hawkeye* as Maya Lopez, aka Echo, a deaf Native American Choctaw, and former leader of the Tracksuit Mafia, a gang working for master criminal Wilson Fisk (The Kingpin), who was the main villain in Netflix's *Daredevil* (now airing on Disney+).

What should have been a great series, unfortunately falls flat. The slow-moving plot never ramps up. There's a brief fight with Daredevil, which seems to have no purpose other than to help promote the show and mislead viewers into thinking he will be a meaningful part of the series. The sequence is so poorly lit, I'm not even sure if *Daredevil* star, Charlie Cox, played him here.

The Native American historical and mystical elements lack any emotional depth and seem haphazardly slapped on (just so Marvel can point to its continued diversity efforts). The series might have been less meandering if there were more than just five episodes, which would have provided more time to adequately tell Maya's backstory.

Even the few fight scenes are missing any real drama. And they do the one thing you simply cannot do to a major supervillain – make him look weak. Vincent D'Onofrio's Kingpin, so fearsome and powerful in *Daredevil*, is a ghost of his former self here – highlighted by the absurdity of Maya so easily defeating him in battle.

There probably won't be a second season, but the Echo character could appear elsewhere.

Grade C-



A Man in Full (Netflix)

Based on Thomas Wolfe's 1998 novel of the same name, Jeff Daniels stars as Atlanta real-estate mogul, Charlie Kroker, who is forced to fend off predators from within his empire and without, as he struggles with pending financial disaster in this limited-series created by David E. Kelley and directed by Regina King and Thomas Schlamme.

I had high expectations for a show with this pedigree and cast (which includes [Diane Lane](#), [Tom Pelphrey](#), [Bill Camp](#), [Sarah Jones](#), [Aml Ameen](#), [Jon Michael Hill](#), and [Lucy Lui](#)), but the series never takes off. It could just be that any *Succession* or *Billions* wannabee requires more than six episodes for the character development needed to make us care about the protagonist, or even decide who the real protagonist is.

A Man in Full has none of the biting satire of those two great series. Shows about bad people (especially rich, bad people) need strong villains who are even badder, so we have someone to root for. But Charlie Koker's foes are too one-dimensional to make us care about them, and so too, unfortunately, is Charlie Koker himself.

It's too bad, because a longer series might have better served this excellent cast. But if you like [Jeff Daniels](#) and have a little time to waste, check it out for yourself.

The Ugly

Grade D+



Feud: Capote Vs. The Swans (FX, Hulu)

For those unfamiliar with Truman Capote (most people under 60?), he was an American novelist, screenwriter, and playwright, who wrote *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1958) and the great true crime novel, *In Cold Blood* (1966), both adapted into a feature films. The flamboyant, openly gay, often witty (and just as often, downright mean) Capote was a darling of New York high society in the late 1950s and 1960s, and was a regular on the TV talk show circuit during the 1970s.

He became friends and confidantes to many wealthy female socialites of the time (whom he dubbed "the Swans") – until he committed social suicide by betraying them in a 1975 *Esquire* article titled, *La Cote Basque 1965* (named after the restaurant they all frequented), in which he exposed many of their secrets in a thinly fictionalized version of their lives (after which they vowed to ruin him).

Being ostracized from New York society and abandoned by many of his former friends was the beginning of Capote's downfall, as he spiraled further into alcoholism and self-destruction, which ultimately led to his death from liver failure in 1984 at the age of 59.

Even this fantastic ensemble cast, which includes, [Tom Hollander](#), [Naomi Watts](#), [Diane Lane](#), [Chloe Sevigny](#), [Demi Moore](#), [Calista Flockhart](#), [Molly Ringwald](#), [Jessica Lange](#), and the late [Treat Williams](#) (in his last performance), can't rise above the material – which alternates between boring and confusing (as it jumps back and forth in time), and lacks any dramatic or emotional depth. None of the characters as portrayed here are even remotely likable, there's no one to root for, and you're left thinking what could have been a fun ride is just a jumbled mess.

Grade D



Secret Invasion (Disney+)

Loosely based on the epic 2008 Marvel comic-book series, [Samuel L. Jackson](#) reprises his role as Nick Fury, as he uncovers a conspiracy by a group of Skrulls (shape-shifting aliens) who have been infiltrating Earth for years as they scheme to take over the planet from humanity.

This is the type of Marvel series that does not lend itself well to television, where the studio can't come close to satisfying fans of the comic series. In the comic-book event, the Skrulls spent years replacing numerous superheroes with impostors prior to their invasion. Here, since they obviously didn't have the budget to hire a cast of heroes or have more than one or two cinematic battle sequences, they replace various world leaders and government officials (which significantly dilutes the drama).

I almost stopped watching when a well-known and liked S.H.I.E.L.D. agent is killed off early on for no apparent reason other than shock value. It left a bad taste in my mouth for the rest of the series.

[Samuel L. Jackson](#) seems to be sleepwalking through the role of Nick Fury, showing none of the energy or charisma he displays in the various [Avengers](#) movies. Despite having Fury fight the Skrulls without calling in any of his superhero buddies (which is kind of ridiculous), there is no real sense of danger, and the Skrulls are defeated way too easily (and suddenly) after seeming unbeatable for five of the series' six-episodes.

Worth watching only for the hardest core of Marvel fans or those who enjoy bashing shows online.

Grade D-



The Regime (HBO, Max)

[Kate Winslet's](#) considerable talents are wasted in this humorless satire (two words that seldom go well together). She plays Chancellor Elena “Lenny” Vernham, an unstable, paranoid, impulsive, know-nothing, autocratic leader of a fictional Central European country. Everyone in her administration knows she is incompetent, crazy, and damaging the country beyond repair, but are afraid to speak up lest they be arrested and tortured – like the previous chancellor ([Hugh Grant](#)), who is secretly being held prisoner in a cell under the palace.

A disgraced and volatile former soldier, Herbert Zubak ([Matthias Schoenaerts](#)), accused of massacring civilian protestors, becomes her chief advisor/lover as the country spirals out of control and Elena’s regime starts crumbling around her.

While Elena believes her own propaganda that the country is economically sound and her subjects love her, the people are on the verge of a violent uprising. I would provide more detail, but then I'd be giving this mess more time than it deserves. The ending was even less satisfying than the beginning and middle.

I suppose if you're a big [Kate Winslet](#) fan you might want to give this a chance. Otherwise, don't waste your time.