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FEATURED

## 'True Detective': New season captivates, thanks to star Mahershala Ali

Casey Gillis  
Jan 17, 2019



Mahershala Ali, left, and Stephen Dorff star in the third season of "True Detective," which premiered over the weekend and returns with a new episode this Sunday. The new installment is very much in the vein of the incredibly popular first season, which starred Matthew McConaughey and Woody Harrelson as a pair of detectives looking back on a case that changed their lives. HBO photo

*Spoiler warning: This column features plot developments from the first two episodes of “True Detective” season three. If you don’t want to know what happens, stop reading now.*

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A sense of foreboding looms large in the latest iteration of “True Detective,” much like the seasons that came before it.

The first episode, which aired over the weekend, begins with siblings Will and Julie Purcell riding their bikes through their Arkansas neighborhood after promising their father they’d be home before dark. Nearly everyone they pass appears suspicious, from the local man who collects trash and lugs it around on a trailer to the trio of high school boys who stare at them creepily from their car.

It isn’t long before darkness falls, and the pit will form in your stomach right alongside their father, Tom (Scoot McNairy, “Godless”), as he realizes Will and Julie haven’t made it home.

They never will.



The new season's central mystery involves the disappearance of siblings Julie and Will Purcell (Lena McCarthy and Phoenix Elkin), who go missing one evening in their small Arkansas town.

HBO photo

Season three, which premiered with two episodes and returns with a new one at 9 p.m. this Sunday, is very much in the vein of season one. Featuring Matthew McConaughey and Woody Harrelson as a pair of detectives looking back on a murder case that changed their lives, it was a brilliant piece of television, with amazing performances and a mystery that set the internet on fire. Everyone had a theory.

There was no way the second season would live up to the first and, well, it didn't. So you can't blame creator Nic Pizzolatto for returning to the roots of what made season one so intriguing.

The new season follows Detective Wayne Hays (the magnetic Mahershala Ali) through three timelines: 1980, when he and his partner, Roland West (Stephen Dorff), investigate the disappearance of Will and Julie; 1990, when the yet-to-be-revealed person they

arrested for the crime is trying to get his conviction overturned; and 2015, when an aging, dementia-afflicted Hays is being interviewed for a true crime show about the case.

Ali is captivating as Wayne, unsurprisingly. He is an Oscar winner, after all, for 2016's "Moonlight."

Wayne is a Vietnam vet who worked as a tracker, often disappearing into the jungle for long stretches of time. Now back home, he's continued that solitary existence. In one exchange with a suspect who also served in the war, he talks about punching in and punching out, putting on a suit every morning.

But "I'm being honest," Wayne says, "I don't have much of a life."

Much like McConaughey's "True Detective" character Rust Cohle, Wayne is a loner. But where Rust often alienated those around him, Wayne has an innate charm, whether he's getting to know Will's pretty English teacher or making light saber sounds while talking to a friend of the missing children.

He and Roland have an easy rapport and trust each other, unlike the contentious relationship between McConaughey and Harrelson's characters in season one.

But the Purcell case will surely put them through their paces. By the end of the first two episodes, the body of Will Purcell had been found, while Julie remained missing.

Over those first two hours, the action toggled among the three timelines in seamless fashion, at least to this viewer. There were even times when the dialogue would overlap between future Wayne and one of his younger selves.

The episodes also played with perception. Thinking back to the night they caught the case, Wayne says he and Roland were finishing up another investigation. Cut to the actual scene, and they're sitting in an abandoned lot, drinking beer and target shooting.

In the 1990 scenes, Wayne is giving a deposition for the wrongful conviction case and learns a key bit of new information: Julie's prints have turned up at a drug store that's just been robbed. They don't know if she was the one who broke in, or just a customer.

But they do know she's alive, and Wayne, now married with two young children of his own, is immediately sucked back into the case.

His wife, Amelia (Carmen Ejogo), that pretty English teacher he met during the initial investigation, has written a book about the case that's about to be published; in 2015, we're told it later became a classic of true crime nonfiction.

Clues are doled out in each timeline. In 1980, suspects include Will and Julie's uncle, who lived with the family the summer before the disappearance; a recently paroled pedophile whom Wayne and Roland rough up; and even their unhappily married parents.

In 1990, Wayne appears to agree with prosecutors that they got the wrong guy the first time around.

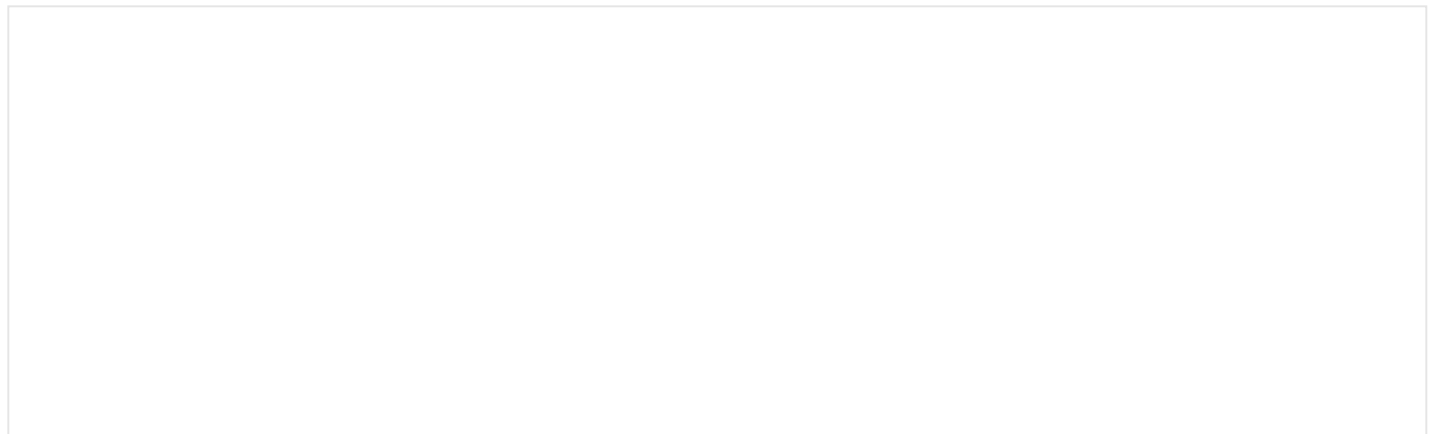
In 2015, he's not sure of much of anything, as he struggles with his failing memory. He records a new message to himself each day, trying to maintain his grasp on reality. His grown son appears to be his primary caretaker (Amelia has died) and you can see the weariness in his eyes as his father revisits the case. Mom would have wanted you to move on, he tells Wayne.

Everything about the season is heartbreaking, from the Purcell family's agony over their missing children to Wayne's over what's happening to his mind.

All in all, it's a worthy successor to that first season.

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Contact Casey Gillis at (434) 385-5525 or [cgillis@newsadvance.com](mailto:cgillis@newsadvance.com). Find her on Twitter: [@tvcouchpotato](https://twitter.com/tvcouchpotato).





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## **Couch Potato: Some thoughts on 2019 TV**

By Casey Gillis  
Dec 26, 2019



Casey Gillis is the features editor at The News & Advance and editor of weekly entertainment publication The Burg. Reach her at (434) 385-5525.



So I have a confession to make: The Couch Potato might just be dead.

I've been incredibly lucky to write this TV column for more than a decade (though I still have a hard time believing I've done anything in my life for that long).

As I sat down last week, I couldn't quite remember the exact year it started but did recall two of the first shows I ever wrote about: "Heroes" and "Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip," both of which debuted in 2006.

So, 2006. Thirteen years, and one of my favorite exercises has always been the end-of-year top 10 list.

As the idea of what exactly TV is has expanded thanks to streaming, and our airwaves have filled with more and more options, I eventually changed my annual list from the best TV of the year to my favorite watches of the year.

There were only so many hours in the day and, while this has always been a fun part of my job, it's not the only thing I do. I don't even know how full-time TV writers do it.

Then I went and had kids, and any available free time was suddenly filled with much more important things.

All this is to say that I watch less TV now than I ever have in my life. While you might think that's something to be proud of, this nearly lifelong Couch Potato — going all the way back to my first favorite show, “My So-Called Life” — mourns all the TV I'm not watching.

When I sat down to think about what would be on my top 10 list this year, I couldn't even come up with five.

I have an endless list of shows I wished I'd watched: Apple TV's “The Morning Show;” Netflix's “Unbelievable,” “When They See Us” and “Russian Doll;” Amazon Prime's “Fleabag” and “The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel;” and Disney Plus' “The Mandalorian.”

A slew of series also sit on my DVR, just waiting for a view: the final season of HBO's “The Deuce” and the first for its highly acclaimed “Watchmen;” CBS's new comedy “The Unicorn;” and, I'm embarrassed to admit, episodes of long-gone series like Fox's “New Girl” and FX's “The Americans,” which both ended their respective runs in 2018.

The list goes on.

Because of this, I just don't feel right compiling a “best of” list this year — unless you want it to include guilty pleasure watches like MTV's “The Challenge” and “Ridiculousness,” or HGTV's “Bargain Mansions” (it's like “Fixer Upper,” minus Chip and Jo).

So I'm sitting this year out, in hopes of somehow redeeming myself in 2020 (maybe there's a New Year's resolution in there somewhere).

Here, I'll discuss some of the TV I enjoyed this year, just not in list form.

Well, here goes, starting with a trio of Netflix series:

My favorite show of the year was “**GLOW**,” which continues to be so many things, all wrapped up in one funny, touching, charming package. It also boasts one of the best ensembles on television, from headliners Alison Brie, Betty Gilpin and Marc Maron to



unsung heroes like Chris Lowell, whose character Bash struggled with his sexuality this season, and Kia Stevens, whose Tammé dealt with the toll wrestling takes on a performer's body.

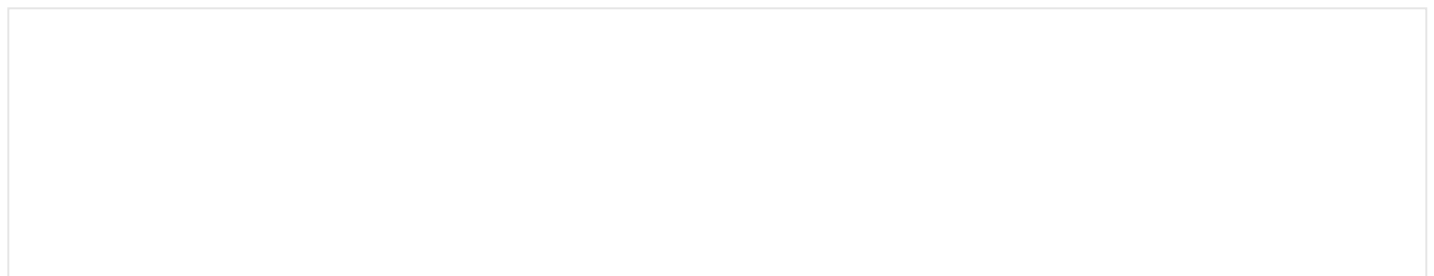
“**Stranger Things**,” which also aired its third season in 2019, comes in at a close second.

Sure, the show struggled a bit this time around; the kids are getting older, the stories a bit repetitive and, really, how often can creatures from the Upside Down menace poor Hawkins? (Well, “Buffy the Vampire Slayer” made it work for seven seasons in Sunnydale, I’d like to point out, and I think we could argue that the Upside Down is this generation’s Hellmouth.)

But throw all those characters together — from Eleven, Hopper and Steve all the way down to newcomers like Steve’s partner-in-crime Robin and sweet, doomed Alexi (with a special shout-out to Bret Gelman’s Murray) — and I’m going to be there every time.

“**Mindhunter**” also returned in 2019 for a highly-anticipated second season, which followed Jonathan Groff’s Holden, Holt McCallany’s Bill and Anna Torv’s Wendy as they continued their research into the psyche of serial killers. It was as captivating as the show’s first run of episodes (even with that cringe-worthy plotline involving Tench’s son, which was far too on the nose for me). I continue to be amazed at how much suspense they can create around people sitting in rooms talking.

Elsewhere in the TV landscape — up north as it were — I actually enjoyed the first few episodes of the “**Game of Thrones**” swan song, especially its second, “A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms,” which found many of our favorite characters preparing to fight the Army of the Dead, and then the following episode, which featured that epic battle. Things went sideways immediately after that, so I prefer to pretend the story concluded at Winterfell after the Night King fell.





'Game of Thrones': The night is long ... and full of plot holes?

A few more parting thoughts:

» The long-awaited return of HBO's "**True Detective**" did not disappoint, mostly thanks to Mahershala Ali's haunting, heartbreaking performance.

» HBO's "**The Righteous Gemstones**" was outrageously over-the-top and mostly hilarious in a way that only Danny McBride, creator of "Eastbound and Down" and "Vice Principals," can nail.

» It was probably time for another HBO series, "**Ballers**," to end but boy will I miss some of those actors and characters, including John David Washington's Ricky, Rob Corddry's Joe and maybe even Russell Brand's Lance.

» There is no better duo than Amy Poehler and Nick Offerman, whether they're channeling their "Parks and Recreation" characters Leslie and Ron, or just being themselves in NBC's charming "**Making It**," which returned earlier this month for a

quick run. The show, which finds artisans and crafters competing in a series of challenges for the title of Master Maker, is so much fun.

» **“The Good Place”** always put a smile on my face and, while I’m sad it’s ending this season, I’m so happy to have had it for this long.

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Casey Gillis

[https://www.newsadvance.com/entertainment/features/the-passage-fox-series-an-intriguing-tale-about-vampires-just/article\\_6e758abf-90f9-5082-8778-d3e8251d8e99.html](https://www.newsadvance.com/entertainment/features/the-passage-fox-series-an-intriguing-tale-about-vampires-just/article_6e758abf-90f9-5082-8778-d3e8251d8e99.html)

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## 'The Passage': Fox series an intriguing tale about vampires — just don't call them that

Casey Gillis  
Feb 11, 2019



Mark-Paul Gosselaar, Saniyya Sidney and Caroline Chikezie in "The Passage," which airs at 9 p.m. Mondays on Fox. The relationship between Gosselaar's Brad and Sidney's Amy is a high point of the series.

Erika Doss / FOX

Fox's new drama "The Passage" revolves around a group of bloodthirsty creatures that are very clearly vampires.

Just don't call them that.

Although several characters point out their obvious nature, the doctors presiding over them at an isolated government facility in Colorado are reluctant to label them as such, preferring to call them "virals."

All but one of the virals are former death row inmates who were offered a way out of their impending executions if they'd agree to participate in a top-secret government drug trial.

The series, which premiered in mid-January and is based on books by author Justin Cronin, begins with one such hard sell, delivered by war-vet-turned-government agent Brad Wolgast (Mark-Paul Gosselaar) to an inmate named Anthony Carter (McKinley Belcher III).

Carter is suspicious but ultimately agrees to the deal (more on that in a bit).

It's Brad's next assignment that changes everything for him and puts the experiment in jeopardy. He's tasked with bringing in not a convicted murderer but an orphaned girl, Amy (Saniyya Sidney).





Vincent Piazza, Mark-Paul Gosselaar and Saniyya Sidney

ERIKA DOSS

He has reservations from the beginning, which quickly grow as he embarks on a road trip with the 10-year-old. Amy reminds him of his daughter, who died a few years earlier, and pretty soon they're on the run together, evading teams of agents led by his old Army pal Clarke (Vincent Piazza).

There is all kinds of secrecy surrounding the program, but ultimately it boils down to this: A team of doctors working for the government thinks the drug can cure all of the world's diseases. If only they can figure out a way for it *not* to turn subjects into vampires (but don't call them that!).

The experiment began with Dr. Jonas Lear (Henry Ian Cusick, "Lost"), who convinces an old colleague to help him track down the legend of a 250-year-old man in South America, thinking the man's blood could cure his wife's early-onset Alzheimer's.

You know things aren't going to end well when, in the first episode, their quest leads them to a cave deep in the jungle. What they find there is a vampire (I'm calling it that!) who quickly bites Jonas' colleague, Tim Fanning (Jamie McShane) — now officially Patient Zero.



Jamie McShane as Tim Fanning, aka "Patient Zero."

Erika Doss / FOX

After Fanning is bitten, he's taken back to the states and is quarantined. Cut to three years later, and Jonas and a team of docs have been injecting various strains of the virus, synthesized from Fanning's blood, into one convict after another, trying to keep the vampirism at bay.

The closest they've come prior to the arrival of Anthony and Amy is Shauna Babcock (Brianne Howey). While the rest of the "virals" look like straight-up monsters (think pointy teeth, yellow eyes and bulging veins), Shauna has retained her angelic appearance but doesn't seem to have any cognitive ability — more on that in a bit, too.

Another doctor comes up with a theory that the younger the test subject, the more likely they are to remain human. Enter Amy, who winds up at the facility with Brad, whom she calls “The Agent,” by episode three (I’d seen four episodes as of press time).

The clock is ticking, too; there’s been an outbreak of the avian flu in Asia and it’s only a matter of time before the disease, which kills those infected within 12 hours, makes it stateside.



Caroline Chikezie and Henry Ian Cusick

Fox photo

It took me a little while to get into the series, which can be cheesy and overwrought at times (often when Brad and his ex-wife, played by Emmanuelle Chriqui, are together).

But the performances, for the most part, are engaging, and the bond between Amy and Brad has become a high point. I was glad the show pivoted so quickly from them being on the run to their arrival at the facility, because that’s really where all the intrigue lies.



We soon learn that because Fanning's blood was used to create the other virals, he has a psychic connection with them. They communicate with each other telepathically, and it seems they all have the ability to enter the dreams of the humans working in the lab, from Clark, the facility's head of security, to a janitor named Lawrence.

Soon, Brad is having the dreams too, and Lawrence is warning him that "he" — i.e., Fanning — will be coming for Amy.

Fanning the vampire is creepy, of course, but he's just as scary when he appears as his human self in the dreams.



Brianne Howey, McKinley Belcher III and Jamie McShane

Fox photo

Both Carter and Shauna are given backstories that make them more sympathetic than the other inmates. Carter was wrongly convicted of killing his girlfriend, while Shauna committed the crime she's accused of — killing her abusive stepfather and complicit mother — but it's hard to argue she wasn't justified.

Shauna is already a monster by the time we meet her, but not Carter. He spends a good part of the early episodes fighting the lure of Fanning, who appears in his dreams, and bonding with Amy through a series of notes they slip back and forth underneath a locked door that connects their rooms.

But he finally succumbed in the Feb. 4 episode, as he died and came back full-on vampire. The hour ended with him attacking a nurse, a transformation all the more heartbreaking because we've been conditioned to like him from the beginning.



Henry Ian Cusick as Jonas and McKinley Belcher III as Anthony Carter

Erika Doss / FOX

I'm interested to see how much of him remains now, and what will happen to Amy as the virus takes its toll on her. Previews have made it seem like she'll get super powers while staying the cute, precocious girl we've come to love.



Let's hope so — she and “The Agent” are going to need all the firepower they can get to defeat Fanning, who is plotting something big that will threaten not just the doctors at the facility (who maybe deserve it?) but the world at large.

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Contact Casey Gillis at (434) 385-5525 or [cgillis@newsadvance.com](mailto:cgillis@newsadvance.com). Find her on Twitter: [@tvcouchpotato](https://twitter.com/tvcouchpotato).



'True Detective,' 'A Discovery of Witches' among midseason premieres