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REEL WORLD



The Outsider

Boogeyman television

A finicky viewer looking for shows that kill

I am not a good TV buddy. My wife will vouch for this. If something new or “binge-worthy” doesn’t grab me in the first episode, I probably will abandon her and the pets on the couch.

by
Jason Cassidy

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John Oliver—I’ll get up and go play my guitar, pay bills, or get involved in some other hobby/distraction/chore that I’m not able to do at any other time of the day.

As a rule, I allow myself only one or two regular shows a week, and lately there has been only one show permitted on the schedule: *The Outsider* on HBO. And it is awesome.

I also tried HBO’s new *McMillions* docuseries on the McDonald’s Monopoly game scam, but it was just too slow. I can’t slog through six one-hour episodes when one two-hour documentary would’ve sufficed.

And Amazon’s *Hunters*, with Al Pacino and his Nazi-killing superteam? Meh. It has a fun premise, impressive violence and dead Nazis going for it, but most of the characters are flat stereotypes and the dialogue is tedious. I’m out. (I even gave it two episodes!)

So, *The Outsider* is it for now. Which fits what’s become my profile for acceptable night-time distraction: detectives looking for monsters who’ve done bad things to people, aka “murder porn” (not to be confused with “informative murder porn” from the *South Park* episode of the same name). Typically, the show will be British—some of my faves include *Broadchurch*, *The Fall* and *The Missing* (which I just found out has a spin-off featuring the main detective, called *Baptiste*, that’ll

be streaming in the U.S. starting May 5)—but this miniseries is all American (with a couple of Brits and an Aussie playing key roles) and is based on Stephen King’s 2016 novel of the same name.

The set-up: A little league baseball coach named Terry Maitland (Jason Bateman) is arrested for the brutal murder of a young boy. Hard evidence—eyewitnesses, security camera footage, DNA—points to his guilt. Other hard evidence—eyewitnesses, security camera footage, fingerprints—points to his innocence.

Since it’s a King story, the truth behind the apparent mystery isn’t limited to “real world” possibilities, and right away a monster hiding in plain sight enters the story.

And it is a deliciously slow-moving story, one that follows a loose team of interested parties—cops, private detectives, a lawyer and others touched by the killer—that comes together to track down the monster. The pace is a large part of its appeal, helping build a tension that’s made manifest in the slow-burning intensity of detective Ralph Anderson (the fantastic Australian actor Ben Mendelsohn), a man of logic who struggles mightily with not only his personal demons, but also the notion that monsters might exist outside of our imaginations.

The whole cast is incredible—most especially English actress Cynthia Erivo as Holly Gibney, a private detective with a photographic memory and enhanced powers of perception, who is the first to discover the killer’s true nature. She is quirky, unflaggingly earnest and as endearing as hell. But she, like the detective and most every other character, also has demons. And the fact that the monster feeds on people’s pain means that the closer they get, the more their fears are drawn to the surface.

It all comes down to a final showdown—airing this Sunday (March 8) at 9 p.m.—between that which we love and that which scares us the most. Stream the whole miniseries on either HBO or Hulu. □