

LA WEEKLY

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GOING TO THE Grid

BY MICHELE STUEVEN

ANTI-HERO COMPLEX: UNBINGED PICKS THE BEST TV SHOWS OF 2024

BY ERIN MAXWELL



Shogun

COURTESY OF FX ON HULU

There is nothing better than getting behind an underdog and watching a scrappy underachiever achieve the impossible. But what if that underdog is less than scrupulous? Perhaps a little devious? How about downright evil? Will audiences still root for the dark horse to win?

The best television shows of 2024 were mostly character-driven pieces that seemed to focus on ambiguous figures who occupied morally gray areas. Enigmatic individuals whose story arcs were far from normal, these were a complex group of antiheroes who played against archetypes to create a series of perplexing character portraits — but goodness, were they entertaining.

A good example of this was found in the many multifaceted characters that made up FX's *Shogun*, one of the very best shows of 2024. Most of the characters — at least of the ones who are not outright scheming and murdering scoundrels — make morally questionable choices in an

effort to further their own agendas. John Blackthorne (Cosmo Jarvis) sailed to Japan to disrupt Portuguese trade missions, inserting himself and his politics into foreign affairs with little thought to the disruption it would cause. In turn, Lord Toranaga (played by the outstanding Hiroyuki Sanada) then used Blackthorne as a guileless pawn, hoping the “Anjin” would cause dissension during a time of political turmoil.

Shogun is a brilliant update of woefully outdated material that transforms James Clavell's saga into a masterclass of storytelling. A rich and complex reworking of the original story, *Shogun* highlights all the strengths of the original novel while eliminating problematic white savior tropes, thereby creating an inspired remake for a new generation.

Another series whose lead character lurks in the shadows is HBO's , as audiences watched in gobsmacked wonder as a latex-laden Colin Farrell returns to the role of criminal mastermind Oswald

“Oz” Cobb from Matt Reeves's *The Batman*. From under pounds of prosthetics, Farrell emotes a complex portrait of a would-be crime lord who is part evil genius, part momma's boy. Matching his dramatic chops was Cristin Milioti as the scene-stealing Sofia Falcone as the duo became the talk of both Gotham and Tinseltown.

Rewriting 80 years of *Batman* lore in a mere eight episodes, *The Penguin* managed to defeat superhero fatigue while reviving the DC Universe as it pulls the ultimate magic trick: turning comic book fare into prestige television. Abracadabra. It is one of the best shows of the year.

Another delinquent to delight us in 2024 was Tom Ripley, who saw a sweeping, cinematic reimagining in Steven Zaillian's *Ripley* on Netflix. Stunning in its cinematography and chilling in Andrew Scott's outstanding performance, the miniseries saw the return of Mr. Ripley as the elusive fiend and fraudster as he makes his way through Italy, destroy-

THE FINAL TALLY	
1	<i>Shogun</i> FX on Hulu
2	<i>The Penguin</i> HBO
3	<i>Ripley</i> Netflix
4	<i>Baby Reindeer</i> Netflix
5	<i>True Detective: Night Country</i> Season 4, HBO
6	<i>Hacks</i> Season 3, Max
7	<i>The Bear</i> Season 3, FX on Hulu
8	<i>Shoresy</i> Season 3, Hulu
9	<i>Fallout</i> Amazon Prime Video
10	<i>English Teacher</i> FX

ing and consuming almost everything in his path.

Shot in stunning black and white, *Ripley* recreates 1960s Italy as a devil's playground for the rich and a paradise in which a monster can prosper. Scott's *Ripley* is as charming as he is conniving, a dangerous deviant who hides behind a handshake and a smile. And though he is an evil incarnate, watching him work his wiles on Dickie Greenleaf and his fair Marge (Johnny Flynn and Dakota Fanning) is still something to behold.

Also among the top miscreants to cap-

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CLASSIFIED 8

LA WEEKLY

PRODUCTION AND DESIGN
LAURA E. WHITE FOR STREET MEDIA



ture the attention of audiences this year was the unsettling Martha Scott from Netflix's *Baby Reindeer*. Played to exquisite perfection by Jessica Gunning, the story of a struggling comedian's toxic relationship with a demented stalker became the season's "must-binge" when it debuted. Created by and starring Richard Gadd as Donny Dunn in this true-ish story, Martha's unhinged behavior along with Donny's ghastly experiences that followed made *Baby Reindeer* a dark, off-beat thrill ride that viewers could not look away from.

HBO's *True Detective* is no stranger to allowing an anti-hero to take center stage, but *True Detective: Night Country* was a different beast as it steered audiences straight into the dark abyss of the frozen tundra of Ennis, Alaska. After the bizarre deaths of eight scientists from a research facility, along with the discovery of a disembodied tongue, Detectives Liz Danvers and Evangeline Navarro find themselves embroiled in a peculiar investigation brimming with corruption and cover-ups. Led by superb performances from Jodie Foster and Kali Reis, the fourth outing of HBO's neo-noir detective series used a palette of nuanced characters to paint a picture of small-town life fueled by deception, degradation and deep freeze.

To make it in the entertainment industry, one might have to sell a little bit of one's soul in return for fame and fortune. And in the third season of HBO's *Hacks*, no friendship or loved one is safe when it comes to Hollywood's sacrificial

altar. Starring current and future Emmy-award winner Jean Smart as vet comic Deborah Vance and her human punching bag, Ava Daniels — played with neurotic excellence by Hannah Einbinder — the new season saw the two frenemies turn their toxic friendship into contention as they both look to further their careers. Their relationship might be brutal, but their interactions are pure candy to the comedy lovers.

Speaking of love-hate relationships, the third season of Hulu's *The Bear* returned to find Carmy (Jeremy Allen White) wandering into villain territory as his attempts to follow the path blazed by his beloved mentors are distorted due to his self-destructive nature. The chef's inability to distinguish between gentle guidance and relational bullying becomes an issue for both the restaurant and the staff, especially Sydney (Ayo Edebiri), who bears the brunt of Carmy's dark side. The most anxiety-ridden "comedy" of all time, the third season of *The Bear* takes viewers down a dark path as Carmy mutates from savior to tormentor despite good intentions.

A former *Letterkenny* nogoodnik-turned-Sudbury hometown hero gave audiences the ultimate underdog story with Hulu's *Shoresy*. A gift from our friends in the Great White North, the third season of the *Letterkenny* spin-off saw the Sudbury Blueberry Bulldogs in the National Senior Tournament battling against the best hockey teams from across Canada. Thanks to creator Jared Keeso's talents both in front and behind

the camera, a one-time one-note character best known for his litany of crass jokes involving mothers and gastric issues has evolved into a highly nuanced character capable of setting the tone for high comedy.

From the digital mythos of a best-selling video game franchise, a diamond was mined in the form of Amazon Prime Video's *Fallout*, a post-apocalyptic horror series that expanded the already-mammoth fictional world of the Wasteland by setting its story within the cracks of the gameplay narrative. By using unexplored vaults and creating characters that fit perfectly within the established lore, *Fallout* managed to appease both longtime fans and newbies with its top-notch writing and stellar cast.

Led by former vault-dweller Lucy and a bounty-hunting Ghoul (a fantastic Ella



The Penguin

COURTESY OF HBO



Ripley

COURTESY OF NETFLIX

Purnell and Walton Goggins), survivors are forced to make choices that conflict with their moral center and humanity, but are necessary to survival. The result is an elaborate, thoughtfully-crafted adaptation that is at times both humorous and horrifying, and always a spectacle.

And finally, UnBinged ends its best of 2024 list on a humorous note with FX's *English Teacher*, the story of a frustrated educator attempting to navigate the uber-woke waters of a clueless student body and their absurd, demanding parents. Created and starring Brian Jordan Alvarez as teacher Evan Marquez, the sitcom's setting of Austin comes into play as Texas's renowned haven for heathens meshes with its Red State standing to create the perfect satirical background for a half-hour comedy with bite. As a gay high school English

teacher endeavoring to balance his professional goals with a social life, Evan often finds himself at odds with his students, their parents and the occasional teacher. But not with critics and audiences, who found the off-beat sitcom endearing, and one of the best of the year.

2024 was the year of the affable villain, the dark hero, and the underappreciated underdog who led the way for many remarkable series. These were characters striving towards perfection and happiness by whatever means necessary. And though these characters might be extreme, audiences couldn't help but be drawn to them, perhaps because they shared similar goals: to be the hero of their own story. Which in the end, was a relatable objective for most viewers, no matter how dark the path. 📺

Honorable Mentions:

Among the also-rans who almost made the Top 10 were Hulu's deliciously devious *Rivals* and Netflix's heartfelt mystery *A Man on the Inside*. AppleTV+ had a couple of winners as well with the fourth season of *Slow Horses* and sci-fi-esque thriller *Sunny*. The second season of AMC's *Interview with the Vampire* continues to honor Anne Rice's original text while HBO's *The Sympathizer* showed off Robert Downey Jr.'s versatility. And finally, Investigation Discovery's *Quiet on Set: The Dark Side of Kids TV* was a harrowing docuseries that explored the seedy underside of children's television.

2024's VIP: Kaitlin Olsen

Please take a moment to bow down to the underrated comedy queen, who took a break from her duties as Sweet Dee Reynolds on *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* to lend her talents both as Deborah's daughter DJ in *Hacks* and in the hit new show *High Potential* on ABC. She's been flying under the radar for too long with too little recognition.

Change of Heart

Disney's *Agatha All Along* was the witchy, bitchy, LGBTQ+ show about love and loss that audiences needed, but when it came to review, the good folks at Disney only gave out a few scant episodes, not really allowing critics to watch the show as it fully blossomed. In the end, *Agatha* revealed itself to be a poignant series that can stand on its own outside the MCU, or rather, in spite of the MCU. Disney, bubba, please stop being greedy with those screeners. You are not hurting anyone but yourself.

WHAT'S UP POPPING UP

Fat Sal's Rises Like A Phoenix From The Ashes

BY MICHELE STUEYEN



COURTESY MOTHER WOLF

After the AutoZone Hollywood fire on Highland Ave. on Saturday, Nov. 16, neighboring Fat Sal's sandwich shop didn't waste any time. Like a phoenix from the ashes, they are back with [Club Fat Sal's](#) down the street at 1154 N. Highland. They've already launched DoorDash deliveries from their new location, and doors are open to the public daily from 11 a.m. to 3 a.m.

"After watching the epic fire that ravaged Fat Sal's Hollywood, I went home and tucked my four-year-old in at night and realized what was important," Josh Stone, Fat Sal's co-owner said in a statement. "No one was hurt or injured. The very next morning I woke up early and got to work. I found a suitable location for a new restaurant and secured it by 1 p.m. that day. The Fat Sal's team and I worked tirelessly through the day and night and were able to open for business the following day."

[Mother Wolf](#) Chef Evan Funke welcomes Chef Sarah Cicolini of Rome's famed [SantoPalato](#) for an exclusive collaborative dinner series. Together, they

will present a special Four Hands feast, showcasing the finest flavors of Cucina Roma. The menu will include five courses, offering a blend of signature dishes and new creations that highlight the very best of truffle season. Some dishes will be crafted solely by Chef Sarah, others by Chef Evan, alongside dishes that combine each Chef's skill and technique. Reservations are available [via Resy](#) at \$281.25 per person (price includes 20% gratuity, 5% admin fee, and sales tax). The event takes place Wednesday, Dec. 11, and Thursday, Dec. 12, with dining available between 6:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m.

[American Beauty](#), the Venice Beach steakhouse known for its wood-grilled steaks, seafood, and seasonal vegetable dishes is heading east toward the Fairfax district. The new location will introduce weekday lunch and weekend brunch alongside its classic dinner menu. The expansive space will feature an airy, indoor-outdoor horseshoe bar and floor-to-ceiling stackable doors that open to the cozy front patio with fire pits, as well as plush booths, hand-painted murals, and a back



Tidings of Whiskey & Joy

COURTESY BLITZEN'S BAR



COURTESY FAT SAL'S

patio under trees and string lights. The new location opened on Nov 30.

[Omni Hotels & Resorts](#) are toasting the season at [Blitzen's Bar](#), the annual holiday pop-up featuring cocktails from mixologist and star of Netflix's Drink Masters, Julie Reiner. Featuring 12 festive libations, including two non-alcoholic options, Reiner brings her signature touch to the menu. Festive options include Tidings of Whiskey & Joy and Baby It's Cold Outside. Get into the spirit of any 13 Omni locations now through Monday, Dec. 30.

James Beard Finalist and Food + Wine Best New Chef and cookbook author Caroline Schiff, formerly the Executive Pastry Chef of the acclaimed Gage & Tollner in Brooklyn, will present a preview of her forthcoming Diner concept for one weekend only within Siete at [Santa Monica Proper](#).

Offering dinner for only two nights – Friday, Dec. 6, and Saturday, Dec. 7, the three-course pre-fixe menu will kick off with a welcome cocktail followed by fun twists on diner classics and signature maximalist desserts for \$100 per person.

Standouts include spinach artichoke fritters and Black Forest cake bombe flambée. Reservations are available on [OpenTable](#).

One day only, Schiff's prix-fixe two-course brunch menu will be offered on Sunday, Dec. 8, and will include options like the Challah Amaretto French Toast with whipped cream and roasted plum jam or the Onion Bialy Toad in a Hole with Herby Salad. Reservations are \$85 per person and include free-flowing mimosas and bloody marys. Available on [OpenTable](#).

[Black Lagoon](#), Krampus' Cove is an immersive cocktail pop-up that plunges guests into the dark and twisted world of Krampus returns for its third year to Los Angeles, From Thursday, Dec. 5 through Monday, Dec. 23, Coles' French Dip will be transformed with black Christmas trees adorned with doll heads, skeletons, skulls, and faux severed body parts and will feature an interactive ticketed show with Krampus and the evil elves for board games with two seatings scheduled every night aside from Tuesdays at 6:30 PM and 8:30 PM. Tickets to purchase are now available on [Eventbrite](#).

Drink highlights include Better Watch Out with Fords Gin, cranberry rosemary syrup, lemon juice, Bitter Queens Caribbean Bitters, Red Snow with vodka, coconut peppermint syrup, Lustau Amon-tillado sherry, lemon juice, and absinthe, Red-Rum-pum-pum-pum served hot with Diplomático Reserva Rum, Lustau Vermut Rojo, Lustau Oloroso Don Nuno, buttered rum batter and Bitter Queens Caribbean Bitters, Santa Slay with ancho chili Mezcal, Cafeto Coffee Liqueur, Creme De Cacao, Lustau Oloroso Don Nuno, cold brew, Bitter Queens chocolate walnut bitters, and toasted milk as well as the Jingle Hell with cranberry rosemary syrup, lemon juice, and tonic water. [A]

CULTURE

GO OFF THE GRID — STARGAZING IN BORREGO SPRINGS

BY MICHELE STUEVEN

Three hours from Los Angeles and about 40 miles from the Mexican border, Borrego Springs is one of eight international Dark Sky Communities and the gateway to Anza-Borrego Desert State Park in Northern San Diego County. If you seek perspective, this clean, uncluttered, and not overpopulated 650,000-acre desert park is the place to clear your head.

The park takes its name from 18th-century Spanish explorer Juan Bautista de Anza and borrego, the Spanish word for sheep, of which many bighorns still roam the local mountains.

The park's fossil record includes preserved plants, a variety of shells, animal tracks, bones, and teeth. Most fossils found in the park date from six million to under a half million years of age. Paleontological



Galleta Meadows



Morteros, bedrock mortar grinding holes



Anza Borrego State Park Slot Canyon



Slot Canyon

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Salad at the Big Horn Restaurant



Burgers and shakes at the Big Horn Restaurant

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Meatloaf dinner at The Red Ocotillo

remains are widespread and diverse, scattered over hundreds of square miles of eroded badland terrain extending south from the Santa Rose Mountains into Northern Baja California in Mexico. For thousands of years, it was the homeland of native Cahuilla, Cupeno, and Indigenous Kumeyaay tribes.

The park offers four different points, each with an excellent view of the desert landscape. The four-mile road to Fonts Point is not marked but consists mainly of hard-packed sand and dirt, and it is easy to follow.

The badlands are a region of arid geography with sunken mesas and corrugated hills of dry mud and a view of the Salton Sea in the distance. The Fonts Point area is one of the best places in North America to view these sedimentary layers. Visit early in the morning or late in the day to avoid the heat.

Once undersea, the Borrego Badlands are a maze of hills and arroyos which, when seen close-up, reveal a hidden treasure of native palms, remote springs, and mysterious concretions, none of which feel like planet Earth.

Named by USA Today as one of the ten top stargazing locations in America, the Anza-Borrego Desert is rugged. Most of the hundreds of trails, including slot canyons, ancient Kumeyaay villages, dramatic badlands, and the celestial views from Fonts Point, can only be accessed by four-wheel-drive vehicles.

But that ride is just the start of what will help dislodge the cobwebs and constraints of your mind. The twinkling views of the Pleiades star cluster, Double Star Cluster in Perseus, Orion Nebula, Andromeda Galaxy, distant galaxies M81/M82, and the planets Jupiter and Saturn will set it

all straight.

For the most adventurous, you will find local stargazers near Superstition Mountain, an off-roading area in Imperial County, California, that's about 17 miles west of El Centro. The 13,000-acre open area contains sand dunes, mud hills, rocky trails, and typical hard-pack desert terrain. Cross-country off-highway vehicle use is permitted within the boundaries of this area. No fees are required for use or camping.

Borrego Night Sky Tours by noted astronomer Dennis Mammana takes visitors on two-hour curated tours of the desert sky, identifying its comets and constellations with the help of a telescope. There is no fixed location to meet, but it will always be minutes from the Borrego Springs town center, which will be determined when you get your final tour details. No four-wheel drive is necessary; precise directions are sent via email a week in advance. Every nighttime observation is different, depending on a variety of celestial conditions, and offers a truly personalized experience.

You can also stargaze in any of the park's 12 campgrounds and it's one of the few California parks that allows open camping throughout its 650,000 acres.

Where To Stay

The Borrego Valley Inn is a serene oasis with modern comforts. The adults-only, invisible service adobe property has 15 rooms with private sunbathing patios, fireplaces, complimentary Wi-Fi, access to two pools (one clothing optional), and outdoor hot tubs. There's no front desk or onsite staff, with automated coded check-in. Breakfast is delivered to your doorstep with a soft knock on the door.



The welcoming courtyard at the Borrego Valley Inn

COURTESY BORREGO VALLEY INN

A phone number is provided upon reservation confirmation if you need to reach someone.

The larger nearby Palm Canyon Hotel & RV Resort offers a family and pet-friendly Western-themed experience, with spacious king or queen rooms, solar-powered Jupes equipped with Wi-Fi, USB charging stations, and dimmable LED lighting and premium recreational vehicle sites, as well as customized onsite Airstream trailers available for rental. The property has outdoor pools and hot tubs, a restaurant and saloon, a general store, laundry, and RV guest facilities. Plus, you can sleep in the jail.

Where To Eat

All the restaurants are privately owned mom-and-pop establishments. You won't find chains of any kind in Borrego Springs, with the closest McDonald's an hour away.

Big Horn Burgers And Shakes at the Palm Canyon Hotel serves Western fare, and its saloon shakes up a thirst-quenching blood orange margarita. If you're planning a long hike or desert tour, have Kendall's Cafe pack you a picnic lunch to go with one of their massive sandwiches. For a romantic dinner under the stars

or a frisky sunrise breakfast, join the locals at The Red Ocotillo for old-school American fare like exceptional meatloaf and mashed potatoes. The garden-to-table restaurant sources produce from its adjacent vegetable garden. If you're in the mood for Mexican food, the family-owned Carmelita's Mexican Grill And Cantina has been a local standby since 2008, with owner/chef Narciso Dorado in the kitchen.

Because of the heat, the season usually runs from October through Mother's Day, and because it's an official Dark Sky Community, codes and statutes have been established to reduce light pollution, bringing a feeling of peace and making it possible never to escape the stars. The only thing you will hear at night is the wind blowing and the coyotes baying at the moon.

And if you want to see giant scorpions battle grasshoppers or oversized sand dragons emerging from the desert floor, don't miss the more than 100 metal sculptures created by Ricardo Breceda in the Galleta Meadows Estate. It's free to visit, you don't need a state park pass.

Maps and information are available at the Park Visitor Center, the State Park Store operated by the Anza-Borrego

Foundation, and the Anza-Borrego Desert Natural History Association store. Check out the Anza Borrego Foundation website for more info on what to see and do in the park, as well

as education programs provided by the foundation through the spring of 2025. The Borrego Springs Film Festival takes place from Wednesday, Jan. 15 through Sunday, Jan. 19. [L]

LA WEEKLY CLASSIFIEDS

EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION

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