

# *TV Review:* *‘Fargo,’ Season 2*



COURTESY OF FX

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After “True Detective’s” disappointing second season, “[Fargo](#)” could have sent its fellow limited crime series a gift basket for its

role in helping to diminish expectations. Yet after watching four episodes of this encore, such thanks turns out to be unnecessary, since [FX](#)'s frost-covered drama appears to have equaled its splendid predecessor, capturing the same off-kilter tone while actually enhancing the comedy quotient. If the first series deftly approximated the spirit of its movie namesake, this one works in a cheeky Quentin Tarantino vibe, with results as refreshing and bracing as the region's abundant snow.

Season two of " Fargo " isn't a prequel, exactly, but it does benefit from tying in with the original by going back to 1979, following a strange (understatement alert!) case that involved Lou Solverson, played here with perfect pitch by [Patrick Wilson](#) (and Keith Carradine as his older self in the earlier production). From the old MGM logo to the exaggerated music, everything speaks to a heightened sense of reality mixed with dollops of nostalgia.

Showrunner [Noah Hawley](#) has delicately woven together a trio of major plots, progressing on courses that, even in their lighter moments, offer unsettling hints of a major collision to come. That's all set in motion by a bloody shootout at the local Waffle Hut, followed by a chance accident and another reminder — appropriately, given the occasional references to Richard Nixon — that it's the cover-up, not the crime, that usually gets people in trouble.

Investigating the murder falls to Lou, who is caring for his young daughter Molly while fretting about his ailing wife (Cristin Milioti). His boss, the sheriff, is none other than his father-in-law (Ted Danson, wonderful as always). The killing also has implications for a criminal family facing problems of its own, with the family patriarch having suffered a stroke, leaving his steely wife (Jean Smart) and hot-headed son (Jeffrey Donovan) jockeying for power, even as a Kansas City syndicate — with personnel played by Brad Garrett and Bokeem Woodbine — begins to target their operations.

Finally, there's Peggy ([Kirsten Dunst](#)), who also gets drawn into this web by way of a hit-and-run incident, forcing her puppy-dog of a husband (" Breaking Bad 's" Jesse Plemons, considerably bulked up) to gallantly help her. Alas, these two aren't exactly criminal masterminds, although his job at the butcher shop promises to become as potentially handy as ready access to a wood chipper.

Although the episodes move along at a pretty brisk clip — the laconic nature of the speech patterns notwithstanding — Hawley finds time to keep adding layers to the story, working in small asides and illuminating flashbacks that deepen the characters. The decades-removed connection to season one was also an extremely shrewd choice, although one theoretically doesn't need to have watched the first season to enjoy this one.

Having such an impressive cast, of course, is another huge asset, with Woodbine, as the enforcer, engaging in a lot of cheerful philosophizing that always seems like it might be leading up to guns blazing.

Although FX has offered up a number of prestige dramas, “Fargo” kicked that into a higher gear, walking away with the 2014 Emmy for best miniseries. Recapturing that sort of magic — or meeting those lofty expectations — starting from scratch, or something near it, is never easy. Still, in terms of whether this franchise could ace the test that HBO couldn't, the answer, inevitably if not predictably, is “You betcha.”