



**Variety**

## TV Review: 'Fargo'

**Production:** Filmed in Alberta by Nomadic Pictures, 26 Keys Prods. and the Littlefield Co. in association with MGM Television and FX Prods.



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As bracing as the snowy vistas in the movie on which it is based, [FX's "Fargo"](#) quickly establishes itself as its own property, possessing the tone and style of the rightly admired Coen brothers classic, but pursuing a new tawdry true-crime tale, albeit in similar environs. The limited series also goes far out on a limb in proclaiming its veracity, saying its story's being told "exactly as it occurred" — a claim that invites skepticism (artistic license has a way of encroaching), but does nothing to cool the passion the show should inspire. Boasting a stellar cast and hypnotic tone, is "Fargo" worth a 10-episode commitment? You betcha.

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Indeed, what looked like a daunting challenge — translating the Coens' idiosyncratic style to TV — can join "American Horror Story" in FX's quiver of limited-series concepts that are well-suited to the genre. Only unlike that overheated mess, "Fargo" has considerable latitude to reboot with a new cast and new crime — a la HBO's "True Detective" — stretching what once would have been relegated to a TV movie into more marketable "event" territory.

What's most interesting in this permutation, conceived by [Noah Hawley](#), is how the narrative, despite its basis in truth, seems to draw from a variety of Coen brothers movies. The implacable contract killer played by [Billy Bob Thornton](#), for example, feels like a close cousin to Javier Bardem's philosopher-murderer in "No Country for Old Men," down to his sadistic streak and tendency to engage prey in casual (if inordinately uncomfortable) conversation.

Set in Minnesota in 2006, the multifaceted story centers on Lester Nygaard (Martin Freeman), an unsuccessful insurance salesman trapped in a rotten marriage. A chance encounter with a bully from his high school days leads to an emergency room visit, where he chats with Thornton's killer, there because a car accident has complicated his latest assignment. Faster than you can say "Strangers on a Train," Lester's complaints trigger fatal consequences, leading the soft-spoken fellow down a rabbit hole from which there appears to be no happy ending.

Still, that's just the tip of a very twisted iceberg, with Allison Tolman as a local deputy who's a lot smarter than her boss; Colin Hanks as a Duluth cop who stumbles into a situation for which he's ill prepared; Adam Goldberg and Russell Harvard as two more killers brought into the plot; Oliver Platt as a supermarket magnate with blackmail issues; and Kate Walsh as a not-so-grieving widow.

Directed by Adam Bernstein, the 90-minute premiere is particularly taut and effective, with three subsequent episodes slightly less so; nevertheless, there's enough going on (indeed, almost too much) and such a weird string of dominos that it's hard not to imagine those sampling the opener won't want to see things through to the finish.

FX has sometimes felt guilty of indulging in darkness gratuitously, but the true-crime label and organic atmosphere of this world combine to prevent "Fargo" from feeling that way even at its most grisly. Part of that has to do with a black-comedy streak (starting with those goofy accents) clearly designed to evoke the movie.

The only mildly false note comes in the onscreen claim that the show's commitment to accuracy is "out of respect for the dead." In light of the way the characters are depicted, respect is as rare a commodity in "Fargo" as balmy breezes.

Granted, the appealing elements of this "Fargo" won't be easily replicated, but one suspects the producers will have the chance to try. And unlike the victims' chances with the killer in "No Country," their odds here look better than a coin flip.

(Limited series; FX, Tues. April 15, 10 p.m.)

**Crew:** Executive producers, Noah Hawley, Warren Littlefield, Joel Coen, Ethan Coen, Geyer Kosinski; co-executive producer, John Cameron; producers, Kim Todd, Chad Oakes, Mike Frislev; director, Adam Bernstein; writer, Hawley; camera, Matthew J. Lloyd; production designers, John Blackie, Warren Young; editor, Skip Macdonald; music, Jeff Russo; casting, Rachel Tenner, Jackie Lind, Stephanie Gorin. 60 MIN.

**Cast:** Billy Bob Thornton, Martin Freeman, Colin Hanks, Allison Tolman, Bob Odenkirk, Oliver Platt, Kate Walsh, Glenn Howerton, Joey King, Peter Breitmayer, Tom Musgrave, Josh Close, Russell Harvard, Adam Goldberg, Keegan-Michael Key, Jordan Peele