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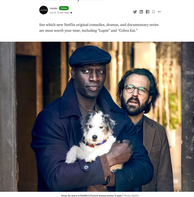
The 15 best Netflix TV shows of 2021 so far, ranked

By Kim Renfro
Insider Inside

See which new Netflix original comedies, dramas, and documentary series are most worth your time, including "Lupin" and "Cobra Kai."



Snap Up Alex's Netflix Picks! Jonathan Taylor / Flickr

By Kim Renfro

Netflix has a slew of original shows to binge, but which ones are most worth your time? Using critics ratings from Rotten Tomatoes, Insider ranked the best TV shows of the year on the streaming service so far.

Our list includes all new seasons that have a 60% or higher score from 10 or more critics, and all new shows that have a 60% or higher score, we used the total number of reviews for each show to break the tie.

The top shows so far include fan favorites like "Lupin" and "Cobra Kai." Keep reading to see which other shows made the cut.

"Behind Her Eyes" (limited series)

Eve Hewson as Adele in "Behind Her Eyes" Netflix

Netflix description: "Simona Brown plays Louise, a single mother who has an affair with her psychiatrist boss David. Her life takes a strange turn when she later befriends his wife Adele, and the finds herself caught in a web of secrets and lies where nothing is what it seems."

Rotten Tomatoes rating: 62%

While some critics found the genre twists and turns in "Behind Her Eyes" to be a whiplash experience, others enjoyed the daring mystery series.

"A fantastically entertaining magic trick of a TV show, so confident in its twistage-your-gotta-laugh that you won't be able to look away," Roxana Hadadi writes for Pop culture.com.

"The Serpent" (limited series)

Jenna Coleman and Tahar Rahim starring in "The Serpent" Photo: Netflix

Netflix description: Inspired by real events, "The Serpent" reveals the story of serial woman Charles Sobhraj and the remarkable attempts to bring him to justice."

Rotten Tomatoes rating: 68%

If you're a fan of the true-crime genre, then there's a high chance you'll be interested in watching "The Serpent." It has some extra bite the numerous fans in uncommon towards the end, though.

"It is excellent at conjuring up an atmosphere, although sometimes at the cost of the story," wrote Gaudens critic Rebecca Nicholson.

"Ginny and Georgia" (season one)

Brianne Howey as Ginny Miller and Kristen Bauer van Straten as Tessa and Georgia Photo: Netflix

Netflix description: "Hoping for a fresh start, teenager Ginny and her mother, Georgia, settle in a new town. But the secrets in Georgia's past may jeopardize their future."

Rotten Tomatoes rating: 68%

This Netflix series leans into soap-opera drama and teen TV tropes with middling success, according to critics.

"The whole package may be dubiously constructed and unremarkable, but Howey and Bauer van Straten make it can't help but work," wrote Valerie Ariyo, Kathryn Sparkenbrook.

"History of Swear Words" (season one)

Nicolas Cage in the trailer of "History of Swear Words" on Netflix. Photo: Netflix

Netflix description: "Nicolas Cage hosts this proudly profane series that explores the origins and impact of some of the most notorious bad words in the English language."

Rotten Tomatoes rating: 70%

The six-episode season of "History of Swear Words" was one of the first new Netflix shows to premiere in 2021.

"For all its brevity, 'History of Swear Words' does a more than serviceable job probing the origins of expletives we too often take for granted," critic Keven Ferr wrote in a review for Slant. "And if it prides itself on fill-up-your-Scrabble-bag-with-some-words-like-it's-dawn, the research is bound to be a pay of its own."

"Night Stalker: The Hunt for a Serial Killer" (limited series)

Bill Graham in a Netflix and Lionsgate collaboration of a scene from "Night Stalker: The Hunt for a Serial Killer." Photo: Netflix

Alex Blackwood and Aaron Hawkins starring in documentary "Worth Dying For Money." Photo: Netflix

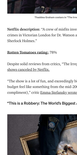
Netflix description: "Beneath the sunlit glamour of 1985 LA lurks a relentless serial killer, a walking avatar of evil. Two detectives won't rest until they catch him."

Rotten Tomatoes rating: 75%

This four-episode documentary series is one of many true-crime shows on Netflix's premiere slate for 2021.

"The crimes are disturbing. The police work is intriguing. The interviews create a lot of ground and bring some emotion into the story," The Hollywood Reporter's critic Dave Thorburn wrote in a review. "Four episodes and I never looked at my watch, and mostly, I felt like I could have watched more."

"Pacific Rim: The Black" (season one)



Alex Hawkins and Aaron Hawkins starring in "Pacific Rim: The Black." Photo: Netflix

Netflix description: "After Kaiju savage Australia, two siblings pilot a jaeger to search for their parents, encountering non-creatures, nerdy characters, and chance allies."

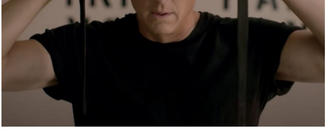
Rotten Tomatoes rating: 75%

This anime series expands upon the world mechwarriors fell in love with in the 2013 live-action film "Pacific Rim."

"Pacific Rim: The Black' may take a few episodes to kick in fully, but once it does, it's a compelling, well-crafted, thoughtful, and, at times, heartbreaking continuation, and recapitulation, of the franchise," critic Mary Tandy wrote for IGN.

"The Irregulars" (season one)

Thomas Sangster, Darci Shaw, Jeremy Irvine, Harry Gilby, Jeremy Irvine, Darci Shaw, Thomas Sangster



William Zabka stars in "Cobra Kai." Photo: Netflix

Netflix description: "With a new sensei at the helm of the Cobra Kai dojo, a three-way feud takes center stage. Old grudges — like Cobra Kai — never die."

Rotten Tomatoes rating: 90%

After moving from YouTube Red to Netflix, "Cobra Kai" premiered its third season at the start of 2021 to positive reviews from critics.

"In an age of reboots and sequels, 'Cobra Kai' continues to make the case that there are still ways to recycle 40-year-old characters and stories and make them feel fresh, timely, and necessary," critic Rafael Motamayor wrote for Slashfilm.

"Yasuke" (season one)

Lakeith Stanfield is one of the lead voice actors in "Yasuke." Photo: Netflix

Netflix description: "A peaceful boatman once known as the Black Samurai is pulled back into conflict when he takes a little girl with mysterious powers under his wing."

Rotten Tomatoes rating: 92%

This new anime series from Netflix is one of the best-reviewed shows of the year so far, with many critics praising its stunning visuals and solid character work.

"To the tune of six brisk half-hour length episodes, ['Yasuke'] hits the spot for any anime lover while offering new subversions to the samurai genre," critic Robert Daniels wrote for RogerEbert.com

"Waffles + Mochi" (season one)

Zach Galifianakis and Michelle Obama on "Waffles + Mochi." Photo: Adam Rose/Netflix

Netflix description: "Curious puppet pals Waffles and Mochi travel the world exploring the wonders of food and culture while learning how to cook with fresh ingredients."

Rotten Tomatoes rating: 95%

Former first lady Michelle Obama (who executive produced the series alongside former President Barack Obama) hosts this kid-friendly educational seriesthat all members of a family will enjoy.

"Warm, witty, and unabashedly brilliant, 'Waffles + Mochi' is truly spectacular," critic Meghan O'Keefe wrote for Decider.

"Lupin" (season one)

Omar Sy stars in "Lupin." Photo: Emmanuel Guimier/Netflix

Netflix description: "Inspired by the adventures of Arsène Lupin, gentleman thief Assane Diop sets out to avenge his father for an injustice inflicted by a wealthy family."

Rotten Tomatoes rating: 98%

"Lupin," a French original series that premiered at the start of the year, is currently the best Netflix show of 2021, according to critics. Reviewers love the incredulous heist plots, clever twists, and thrilling drama contained in its first season.

"The series also doesn't waste a single minute, packing each and every moment full of suspense," critic Karen Han wrote for Slate. "Put all of that together, and it's an early front-runner to steal a spot as one of the best shows of the year."

Disclosure: Mathias Döpfner, CEO of Business Insider's parent company, Axel Springer, is a Netflix board member.

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