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RIVER

NETFLIX'S NEW ORIGINAL SERIES DEBUNKS COP CLICHÉ

By Jen Kusch
MANAGING-EDITOR

Tortured, hypocritical cops are not a concept unique to Netflix's new original series *River*. Whether it was Elliot Stabler's violent outbursts on *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit* or Matthew McConaughey's tortured performance on HBO's hit drama *True Detective*, we've been there, done that.

However, *River* lends a refreshingly real perspective to the age-old story. The drama doesn't have the molasses-rich sex appeal of McConaughey or killer theme music of *Law and Order*, yet it feels enticingly new.

Detective Inspector John River (Stellan Skarsgard) is a schizophrenic cop in London left reeling after the murder of his partner, Stevie (Nicola Walker).

River is a man of few words—with the living. He is plagued by “manifests” of the dead, and his hallucinations guide him to closure in both his cases and emotions as he pursues Stevie's shooter. His mental health teeters on a hallucinogenic cliff as he openly converses with these manifests in the workplace, floating deeper into the fog of a life without any genuine relationships keeping him anchored to reality.

Skarsgard delivered a monumental performance in the show's debut season. Despite the first season's brief six-show run, his concise development of River did not feel rushed, and his craggy face and dejected exterior float through the London suburbs as a moral

entity above the fray of the London police.

The development of River's state often leaves the viewer doing the detective work, as the lines between reality and hallucination blur into a haze of delusion that viewers and River must wade through together. His relationship with Stevie is developed stunningly as River clings to the idea of his beloved colleague—an honest, loyal partner with a fiery love of disco and karaoke—instead of the image being painted in the wake of a suspicious drive-by shooting.

While River

relishes his own misery, the show does not remain unrelentingly depressed. Though their present ghostly partnership may not be conventional, Stevie's (imagined) presence provides for witty banter between the two old friends. It also allows further development of River's affection for her, a partnership that was never given the time to be anything more than professional.

But Stevie is not the only skeleton in River's closet. He is shadowed by a number of imagined ghosts, including those of a teenage girl and a man he believed had a connection to Stevie's murder.


The show's pithy writing and dreary setting lends the Scandi-noir piece an eerie tone fit for a more urbane Netflix audience. *River* is refined, subtle, yet finds a way to bask in muted desperation. Its execution understates and exaggerates in a way that will keep viewers on their toes as *River* battles with his own psyche and his undying love for a departed partner.

River is worth the emotional ride and is a Netflix binge in the most quintessential way. In a handful of episodes, the show is able to delve into the darkest workings of the human mind, how we get our demons (visible or invisible) and how our intangible manifestations can define our palpable actions. *River's* analysis of family ties and the truth beneath the stories we weave binds the show's deeper message to a cop cliché made unpredictable.



RIVER
2015
UNRATED
NETFLIX

GAME/APP
MONUMENT VALLEY
★★★★★




WWW.ITUNES.APPLE.COM

Dropping users into a shadowy first level as soon as it opens, iTunes' Free App of the Week *Monument Valley* from indie game studio Ustwo will pique players' interests the second they lay eyes on its elegance. The game follows a small, geometrically-shaped princess named Ida who has been sent on a journey. The game's goal is for users to get Ida through minimalistically designed levels that are equal parts optical illusion and obscure adventure. The story behind the destruction of Ida's quiet world is revealed at the end of select levels. This otherworldly element combined with *Monument Valley's* muted color scheme, ambient soundtrack and elaborate task make it easy for users to become entranced. Players can manually move levers to reveal the ability to alter parts of the puzzle's landscape, too. *Monument Valley* demands users' focus, ensuring they keep track of Ida's every step. Clearing the pathway for Ida to reach the top of each level is no easy feat. she will run into menaces called Crow People, and users will often have to twist the architecture of the puzzles to get her through. The constant perspective shifts prove to be the most difficult aspect of the gaming experience. These changes include Ida disappearing out of the user's sight until repositioned and occasionally having to defy gravity (if gravity even exists in Ida's world) and walk completely upside down. Ustwo takes the simplistic cube-y style that is found in other popular games like *Minecraft* and *Crossy Road* to the next level by adding mesmerizing visuals like multi-colored towers and palaces with running streams. *Monument Valley's* unique narrative style is what sets it apart from most puzzle games in the App Store. Instead of having each level be its own individual journey, *Monument Valley* blends the storylines of multiple levels together, making the experience more authentic for users as they guide Ida through them. For users looking for a challenging adventure with compelling visuals, *Monument Valley* is a go-to game.

Monument Valley; Ustwo digital product studio; iTunes App Store; Free

By Abbey Cadieux

BOOK
THE SWORD OF SUMMER
★★★★★




RIORDAN.WIKIA.COM

From the author of the *Percy Jackson* series and the *Kane Chronicles* comes a new story based on Norse mythology. *The Sword of Summer* by Rick Riordan takes place in the same universe as his other books and even includes a character from *Percy Jackson*, who appears in several chapters as a minor character. Riordan's fans will find he departs from his typical beginning. The main character, Magnus, begins his quest to discover his heritage and save the world by dying. After he is killed, he is sent to Valhalla, where warriors who die brave deaths train tirelessly for Ragnarok, the end of the world. Here, he discovers who his father really is, the Norse god Frey. This idea is unique and Riordan uses it well, tying it into other parts of Norse mythology by including Valkyries and the World Tree. Even readers who know very little about Norse mythology will find the book pretty easy to follow. Having some background knowledge would be helpful at parts, but the book generally does a good job of explaining the myths. Throughout the book, there are many surprises and an interesting variety of characters. An elf, valkyrie, dwarf and undead warriors from many different time periods are only some of the unusual cast that appear throughout it. The story takes place only in Magnus's point of view, and many of the characters hide their intentions from him, keeping the reader guessing whose side they're really on. This can be frustrating but also puts the reader in Magnus's position as he too is new to this world, making the story even more realistic. Any fans of Riordan's previous work or Norse mythology will love this book. Even at 500 pages, it's a true page-turner. Riordan creates a unique place for the Norse gods alongside the Greeks, Romans and Egyptians. And while so far only Annabeth interacts with Magnus, there is a chance for many more old characters to make an appearance.

The Sword Of Summer; Rick Riordan; 491 pp; \$12.99

By Katelynn Mulder

GAME/APP
HOPELESS 2: CAVE ESCAPE
★★★★★




APKONE.NET

After over a year of silence, IronSource has released the fourth game in the *Hopeless* series. *Hopeless 2: Cave Escape* offers a fresh spin on the series. In the first three games, players fight as frightened yellow blobs against monsters hunting them. But now the blobs are on the run, and players must protect the armed blobs as they ride in minecarts through monster-ridden caves, searching for safety. However, not everything is different. Similar to the earlier games, the caves are poorly lit, and monsters will appear seemingly out of nowhere. This forces players to have quick reflexes to make it through the level. Each level begins with one blob in the cart, and others can be saved along the way. The cart can hold up to three blobs at a time, essentially serving as three lives. But beware, loose blobs can also be accidentally killed, and doing so too often will end the level. Players must also restart when every blob dies. Restarting forces the player to lose on of their carts, which are required to play and will regenerate over time. As the player progresses, the difficulty increases rapidly. Levels become more intricate, and the design harder to get through on the first try. Players can combat the game's increasing adversity by obtaining better weapons. Weapons range from weak pistols to deadly acid guns and can make or break the player's chances at a level. They are also extremely expensive and often force players to reluctantly replay levels to afford the next one. In addition to guns, gadgets and boosters are also available. These items provide single-use assistance that can help struggling players get past a tough level. There are two types featured in the game: coins and gems. Coins can be found spread throughout levels, while gems are rewards for completing missions, similar to those assigned in *Jetpack Joyride*. Overall, *Hopeless 2*, although not perfect, proves to be an enticing game that is just as challenging to play as it is to put down.

Hopeless 2: Cave Escape; IronSource; 2015; Available for Apple and Android; Free

By Billy Moin

TV SHOW
THE FLASH: SEASON 2
★★★★★



ARROW.WIKIA.COM

After a particle accelerated exploded in the middle of Central City, unleashing a new type of radiation on the general population, a new breed of human was born. These new humans, dubbed metahumans, exhibited supernatural abilities seemingly defy the laws of physics themselves. However, as humans are, some use these powers for selfish gains. Enter Barry Allen (Grant Gustin), a shy forensic scientist who devotes his career to finding the truth behind his mother's supernatural demise. Allen has the ability to achieve simply impossible speeds because of the radiation released from the particle accelerator. He dons the persona of The Flash and fights the wrongdoings metahumans who threaten the city. Season two begins with Barry rebuilding the city six months after causing and subsequently stopping the cataclysmic wormhole that nearly devoured Central City at the end of the first season. One thing that holds true into the second season is the fact that the special effects of the show, while serviceable still seem cheap. CGI seems relatively rubbery and not realistic at all. The Flash's sense of speed is also made cheesy by the liberal use of light and lightning streaks. However, to some people, that aspect may add to the experience. The acting is average, nothing truly exceptional. Gustin plays his role as The Flash well enough, however all of the characters have an oddly artificial “daytime TV” feel to them. It is as though they are merely acting and not truly convincing the audience that they embody the characters. The battles themselves, although made shabby by the computer animation, are still very intense. The combat is a feast for the eyes as cars are thrown and buildings break at the whim of metahumans. For any fan of DC Comics, *The Flash* is a great treat of fan service that will keep people watching and enjoying every second of seeing memorable characters portrayed in live action. However, this is the show's main demographic. Casual watchers may find it a bit difficult to break in and get absorbed in the series.

The Flash: Season 2; 2015; TV-PG; The CW

By Giuseppe Parison