

My Post-Binge Review of Stranger Things 2

Yes, my wife and I have finished with Season 2 of Stranger Things already.

Actually, we've been finished for over 36 hours. We are obsessed with this show and we didn't waste much time blowing right through it in two nights.

I'm going to divide this review into two parts. The first part will be spoiler free and then I will get into spoilers. That way those who haven't watched or finished can enjoy and those that have finished can have some fun dialoguing about the whole thing without fear of saying the wrong thing.

SPOILER FREE COMMENTS

Right off the bat I will say this sequel is, to me, as entertaining as it gets. I have almost zero true complaints and there was definitely no letdown after the massive build up. Which is rare in my experience. I'd give it an A for all the key categories: acting, storytelling, character development, use of music, conflict, intensity, special effects, etc. I feel like this is as well as TV can be done and we are truly fortunate to live in a time when the Duffer brothers used inspiration from all the best sources (it goes way beyond obvious 80's movies), their own special talent and incredible unknown actors to bring to life a story I can't get over. There was a moment in episode 8 where I was literally shaking with excitement and anxiousness.

I enjoyed all of the cast additions to varying levels, and especially Sean Astin. The character as written and his acting wheelhouse were a perfect fit. He is nearly impossible not to

adore and in a town with so much drama and stress, he brings the levity. And what a Mount Rushmore of big roles for him now with *The Goonies*, *Rudy*, *Lord of the Rings* and *Stranger Things*. And join me in appreciating how those four works span four decades.

I will say this season seems to focus more on action than mystery, which I would have guessed would have disappointed me but it didn't. Because they use allusions to my absolute favorite action movies. There is also less development for some characters and more for others but the shoulders they had to stand on from Season 1 in this regard are so tall that it wasn't as essential to me that we learn more about the past to appreciate the lead roles. This season is not in competition with Season 1 to me at all. It is a beautiful continuation and they work together with a cohesive synergy that I have never seen in a TV show before. So if you want to know if it is better than Season 1, I am the wrong person to ask.

This season is by design bigger, scarier, more intense and more adult (without a bunch of gore or sex, but there is a lot of language), even though it was all of those things before. And it works. On every level, in every way, it works. The only drama that has ever captured my attention like this was *Lost* and they are so different I won't compare them otherwise. Perhaps the biggest compliment I can give it is that after we finished it Saturday I didn't want to continue our Halloween marathon on Sunday. I just wanted to reflect on what I saw the previous two nights. Anything else would have been lame. I am thrilled to have these 17 gifts of entertainment to watch over and over again. They're even better than all those He-man men I got for Christmas in 1983.

SPOILER COMMENTS (You have been warned!)

Let's jump right in...

Episode 8 rocked my world. It reminded me so much of *Jurassic Park*, one of my 10 favorite movies ever. Notably, the scenes with the demo-dogs reminded me of the uber-intense face off with JP's velociraptors. With Bob playing a cross between Samuel L. Jackson and Laura Dern. I am sure all my vital signs read like I was the one in danger that whole episode. I loved every millisecond of it.

And speaking of Bob, I am quite torn on his death. He was such an impacting addition to the cast. He was great as a role model for the science-loving kids. He was utterly lovable. He was a man of integrity and as safe a love interest as possible for the mother who had been through the fire, literally and figuratively.

Yet if you don't kill off important characters, I think you lose something in suspense. If they had killed off a Season 1 holdover, the fanbase would have rioted. If they killed off Steve I would have jerked my TV out of my wall and thrown it out the window. So someone really needed to be the hero who sacrificed it all. And Bob the Superhero was a great choice. He died because he knew how to do something that mega-testosterone Hopper didn't. He died because he loved others more than himself. He died in truly one of the great heroic acts in TV lore and left a legacy for those kids. I would love more Bob, but the payoff was worth it.

The other casts additions were fine to me. Paul Reiser was his usual charming self and as an old man, he still can still bring it. Max, if nothing else, allowed us to see more of Lucas and Dustin and I hope Eleven is eventually able to get over her jealousy and welcome Max into the party. As far as Billy...wow. I don't know what to think. I can only guess there is more where they are waiting to unleash in Season 3. But man what a complicated villain. A victim of abuse who clearly needs a new way to get therapy.

The scenes with Hopper and Eleven were epic. "A clash of the Titans," I heard one of the shows producers say and a perfect match for a man in need of a daughter with a girl in need of a parent. And a perfect contrast of a man who needs to protect and a girl who needs to rebel. I loved the fights as much as the apologies. But is there anything more tear-jerking than Hopper humbling himself to say he's sorry? I can't wait for more of the two brightest stars of the show interacting as a family.

I'm not sure how I feel about the side plot with Kali and especially a whole episode for it. I realize it's already polarizing but there were things to love—the opening of Episode 1 reminded me of the Dark Knight and The Strangers (two of my other 10 favorite films ever) and Eleven meeting a "sister" who helped her to come into her own was a wonderful touch. And watching Eleven refuse to descend to the abyss of morality was absolutely worth the trip to Chicago. The only complaint is that to do this episode you lose time with the other cast. We love Stranger Things for the ensemble cast as much as anything. But this episode was a risk worth taking, especially if they explore "008" more in the future.

It was in one of the trailers, but I love, love, LOVED the scene where the four boys have "Dart" trapped in the Ghostbusters toy containment unit and they step away from it as it bounces around, just as you see in Ghostbusters. The hat tips to the 80s are sometimes subtle but other times very obvious and they are all magnificent.

The pairing of Steve and Dustin was just magical, and it seems to have happened by accident according to the Duffers. Both characters really had nothing else to connect them to the other characters and the main plot so viola! Put them together and let the good times roll. So much laughter. So much enjoyment.

And on that note, I'll give my five favorite characters

through two seasons. After Season One here was my rankings and comments:

1. Hopper – The Alpha Dog, the Man, the tough guy many men long to be...and his past trauma just cinches the title of best character
2. Eleven – So few complete sentences and yet so much depth
3. Jonathan – Every show and movie seems to have someone I relate to and the awkward guy is usually him, but he is an inspiration in this series
4. Mike – a true hero, willing to do anything for his friends
5. Steve – Yes, you want to hate him and love him at the same time...what a performance

After Season 2, here are my rankings:

1. Hopper – winner and still champ...in Episodes 8 and 9 just about every time Hopper did something incredible, my wife would shout “G.O.A.T!” (Greatest of All Time) as I do when watching sports
2. Steve – When he tells Dustin how he does his hair...he vaulted to nearly the top of this list
3. Eleven – her growth in this season was a huge part of why it was endearing...when she comes in and saves the day at the end of Episode 8, there was major applause in my house
4. Jonathan – not quite as big a role to me this time but he’s still the anti-social hero who gets the girl so I’m still on board
5. Will – he didn’t get as much screen time the first season but that set him up to shine this time around and he did. The kid can act and this was an extremely difficult role to pull off. He tasered it out of the park.

I know some will clamor for Dustin's inclusion and he is great. It's very hard to find room for all the greatness.

So, what did you think? If you have spoiler comments, please say so up front in your post below!