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Somewhere in the overlap between William Friedkin’s 1977 action thriller “Sorcerer” and Kelly Reichardt’s 2020 Pacific Northwest pioneer indie “First Cow” lies Padraic McKinley’s directorial debut “The Weight.”

“Sorcerer” is about a group of fugitives driving a load of dynamite across the jungle; “The Weight” follows a group of Depression-era convicts hiking gold through the forest. “First Cow” is about the sweetness of friendship and French pastry in the wilds of Oregon during westward expansion; “The Weight” is about the logical endpoint of boom and bust, the corrupting forces of capitalism that cannibalize their own. Made in the 2020s, set in the 1930s, and inspired by the 1970s, “The Weight” marries the instincts of modern indie filmmaking with a New Hollywood ethos, while bringing an authenticity to the details of the period.

Written by Matthew Booi, Shelby Gaines, Leo Scherman and Matthew Chapman, we follow the story of Murphy (Ethan Hawke), a World War I vet and single father in Eugene, Oregon, struggling to provide for his daughter Penny (Avy Berry), three years into the Great Depression. After an unfortunate run-in with the law, Murphy finds himself in a prison labor camp, building a road, trying to shorten his sentence so he can get out before his daughter is adopted to a new family.

Opportunity presents itself in his foreman Clancy (Russell Crowe), who takes a shine to Murphy after he fixes his car and devises an ingenious way to remove boulders without dynamite. Cuddly but



Ethan Hawke, left, and Austin Amelio in a scene from “The Weight.”

MOVIE REVIEW

Film brings 1970s ethos to a survival story set in the Great Depression

dangerous, Clancy makes a seemingly simple offer to Murphy: he and three friends can earn their freedom if they hike a load of gold out of a mining camp on the eve of President Franklin D. Roosevelt confiscating all gold stockpiles.

The how and why details aren’t that important; the story is merely that the prisoners have to get from Point A to Point B through a rugged forested terrain, under the watch of two intimidating chaperones, Amis (Sam Hazeldine) and

Letender (George Burgess). A mining camp servant, Anna (Julia Jones), joins their group as a runaway, and while it seems a straightforward task, the arduous and brutal journey is one that is liable to turn these convicts into criminals.

Murphy’s gang weren’t really outlaws to begin with – he was imprisoned for defending his daughter from some undercover cops; Singh (Avi Nash) arrested for protesting and associations with socialism. Olson (Lucas Lynggaard Tønnesen) was part of a group going

after a judge for seizing Scandinavian farms, while the most hardened criminal among them is Rankin (Austin Amelio), who grew up in juvie. But in order to survive the woods, crawling with transient miners, as well as their foreboding escorts, Murphy will have to dig deep into his wartime past, and rely on his own skills and smarts to make out it out intact.

McKinley pours his craft into authentically representing this time, from the perfectly worn denim of the costumes to the refreshingly real and craggy faces of the cast

(and thank goodness Hawke and Crowe are respectably aging into their character actor looks). The Bavarian forest beautifully stands in for 1930s Oregon, and cinematographer Matteo Cocco balances the different eras of influence, juxtaposing ‘70s-inspired slow zooms with composed, high-contrast images that hark to early 20th century styles of photography. A score by Latham and Shelby Gaines balances discordant, atonal tones with suspense-driven sound design that captures the creaking noises

of the forest and the concealed dangers it holds.

McKinley stages a few bullet-sweating sequences of peril, including a particularly brutal transport of gold bars across a crumbling rope bridge, and an underwater accident exacerbated by floating logs. Both are nail-biters, but you can’t help but think he could have pushed it even further. Tonally, the film is torn between wanting to be brutally bleak, and offering some kind of hope or happy ending for Murphy and his precocious, adorable daughter.

When “The Weight” leans into its nasty, mean and grim moments, it gets at something that seems closer to truth than the saccharine sweet resolution we hope, or fear, is coming. It seems like McKinley wants to deliver a crushing blow, but then feints at the last minute, opting for a more optimistic kind of fantasy.

Politically and culturally, what “The Weight” speaks to is as ugly as the violence that occurs in the mud and fog of the forest, but it ends on an oddly cheery note that doesn’t square with where we’ve been and what we’ve seen. It’s a cutesy ‘70s nod that feels more “Smokey and the Bandit” than “Sorcerer.” The bolder choice would have been to commit to expressing the cutting, even despairing, lessons of this world. We want to see these characters changed by what they experienced, even if it’s dark; we want to see them actually carry the weight.

‘THE WEIGHT’
★★★ (out of 4)
MPA rating: R (for language and some violence/bloody images)
Running time: 110 minutes
How to watch: Now in theaters. Check local listings for availability.

The top five new Netflix TV shows of 2026 so far

BY JASON STRUSS
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Netflix has continued its reign as the most popular streaming service in the world thanks to past hits like “Stranger Things” and “Squid Game,” as well as current successful series like “Outer Banks” and “The Gentlemen.”

Here’s my countdown of the five best new Netflix shows of 2026 so far.

From a thriller about a religious cult to a dramatization of a terrorist attack, these shows stood out from the pack and represent the best Netflix has to offer.

5. ‘UNCHOSEN’

Nothing’s perfect in the “Fellowship of the Divine,” a cult-like religious sect at the heart of the series “Unchosen,” but it’s better than the “unchosen” modern world all of their members shun. That’s what Rosie tells herself, even as she endures an abusive marriage to Adam (Asa Butterfield). But when handsome stranger Sam (Fra Fee) seeks refuge in their community, Rosie’s life takes a turn for the better – at least for a little while. But Sam’s true nature begins to emerge, and it could break the Fellowship apart for good.

“Unchosen” is a terrific thriller that’s rooted in fact. There really are religious communities like the Fel-

lowship in England, and they’re almost as strict and intimidating. The key to the series’ success is that most of its characters aren’t completely good or bad – they all exist in moral shades of grey, which makes it complicated to really root for or dislike any of them.

4. ‘THE BOMBING OF PAN AM 103’

On Dec. 21, 1988, the unthinkable happened – a Pan Am 103 commercial jet exploded over the small town of Lockerbie, Scotland. A total of 207 lives were lost, and the chaos and confusion afterward sparked an investigation that’s still talked about today.

What makes “The Bombing of Pan Am 103” such a compelling TV show is how undramatic it is. Whereas most shows would dial up the melodrama, this series simply presents the events as they happened – and the painstaking investigation that was launched to determine the cause of the explosion and who, if anyone, was responsible. Connor Swindells (“Sex Education”) and Patrick J. Adams (“Suits”) lead a stellar international cast, but this is the kind of show where the actors fade into the background. The story is the star, and it’s what makes “The Bombing of Pan Am 103” one of the best Netflix shows of 2026.



Philippa Northeast, left, and Christopher Chung in a scene from “My Brilliant Career.”

3. ‘THE BOROUGH’S’

Sam (Alfred Molina) doesn’t want to live in the Boroughs, an exclusive retirement community in New Mexico, but he doesn’t really have a choice. Recently widowed, he has nowhere else to go; besides, the down payment is non-refundable. While he befriends his neighbors like the bohemian Renee (Geena Davis) and the hippie Judy (Alfre Woodward), he still feels a little out of place – and kinda creeped out. There’s a good reason why Sam is unsettled – strange creatures are stalking the neighborhood, and some neighbors are leaving in coffins. Can Sam get to the bottom of the mystery before he becomes the next victim?

Despite “The Boroughs” debuting to good critical reviews and relatively strong ratings, Netflix canceled the series before it had a chance to really catch on with the public. That’s a shame, as the show, which was executive-produced by the Duffer Brothers, is a reminder of what made “Stranger Things” such a pop culture

phenomenon in the first place. It blends the paranormal with ordinary tales of older people getting on in life, with a fantastic cast of vets that includes Bill Pullman, Denis O’Hare, Mary McDonnell and Jane Kaczmarek. “The Boroughs” also weaves an intriguing sci-fi mystery that is truly binge-worthy – it’s hard to stop watching and makes you wish there’s more of it to consume.

2. ‘LITTLE HOUSE ON THE PRAIRIE’

Some shows should never be remade, and there are others that can’t be redone for a modern audience. Then there’s “Little House on the Prairie,” which falls into both categories. Or at least so I thought until I streamed Netflix’s surprisingly lively and topical reimagining, which somehow preserves the innocence of Laura Ingalls Wilder’s original 1930s novels while adding a modern touch to a very American story.

Part sweet family drama, part sweeping origin story of the American heartland, “Little House” chronicles

the Ingalls family – sisters Laura (Alice Halsey) and Mary (Skywalker Hughes), mother Caroline (Crosby Fitzgerald) and beloved patriarch Pa (Luke Bracey) – as they try to make a new home in Kansas in 19th-century America. Facing harsh weather conditions and an Osage community that doesn’t like people stealing their land, the Ingalls family’s prairie life is far from ideal, but what makes it all worth it is the loving bond they all share. The series does a good job of reimagining what American frontier life must have looked and felt like, while also telling simple yet absorbing stories of survival and overcoming impossible odds.

1. ‘MY BRILLIANT CAREER’

Netflix’s best show of 2026 so far is a radical reimagining of a novel a lot of other people don’t know exists. Published in 1901, “My Brilliant Career” was written by an Australian teenager who wanted to show her feminist ideas way before that term was even widely known. That

youthful energy and chafing against a rigid society take center stage in the Netflix adaptation, which is faithful to the novel’s time period but also manages to feel vital and current.

Sybylla (Philippa Northeast) is young enough to still dream about the life she wants to lead – as a free-thinking writer – but old enough for her family to begin pressuring her to marry the right fellow before it’s too late. That’s partly why she’s sent to her rich grandmother’s estate, where she’s taught to be the right kind of lady to appeal to an upper-class suitor. Sybylla wants to focus on her writing, but she can’t help but notice the swoon-worthy Harry Beecham (Christopher Chung) and the brooding Englishman Frank Hawden (Jake Dunn). In a time when electricity and indoor plumbing are radical new inventions, can the forward-thinking Sybylla break conventions and have it all?

Like Sofia Coppola’s idiosyncratic 2006 film “Marie Antoinette,” “My Brilliant Career” is a period drama punctuated with anachronistic flourishes, like cover versions of pop hits “Atomic,” “Horses” and “Scarborough Fair.” That gives it an edge most newly 20th-century-set shows lack, while also explicitly connecting it to the present day. More importantly, the show displays some impressive production design (you really believe it’s set in turn-of-the-century Australia) and a stellar lead performance by Northeast, who makes Sybylla a complex heroine who thinks she has it all figured out but finds out she still has a lot to learn. This is a fun, thought-provoking show, and it shows Netflix is capable of more than just releasing another season of “Virgin River.”