Search Party is the scathing millennial satire you need to binge

It’s been three years since *Search Party* last aired on TBS, where tragically few people watched it. An immediate cult hit, *Search Party* won ardent fans across its brief two-season run by being an unexpected mix of thriller and satire. The series was a bait-and-switch: it begins with a mystery about a missing woman, but mostly used that in the service of a withering takedown of white millennial life. Now, the show has returned with a third season on a new platform, HBO Max, where it is one of the few must-watch original series and a terrific weekend binge.

In its new third season, now available to stream in its entirety, *Search Party* gets meaner than ever while maintaining the relentless pacing of both thrills and comedy. This remains as impressive a high-wire act now as it was in 2016, especially given how season 3 picks up the story immediately after the end of season 2.

(Spoilers for the first two seasons follow.)

Search Party always seemed like an unlikely candidate for a seasons-long run. It begins as a story about obsession — Dory Sief (Alia Shawkat) is a young twenty-something New Yorker who, caught in a spell of generational malaise, becomes increasingly interested in the disappearance of Chantal Witherbottom, a college acquaintance she barely knew. Across 10 episodes, Dory and her circle of friends — her nice guy stereotype boyfriend Drew (John Reynolds), spoiled-and-struggling actress Portia (Meredith Hagner), and aspiring socialite Elliot (John Early) begin to investigate Chantal’s disappearance in their free time, finding reason to believe

she might be in the thrall of a cult.

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Twists abound, and the show delighted in revealing both exciting new wrinkles to Chantal's disappearance and increasingly repulsive facets of Dory and her friends. Narcissism manifests in each of their lives in various ways: Elliot lying about having cancer in order to market his vanity charity (which, when exposed, nets him a book deal about being a liar); Drew's inability to imagine the life of his girlfriend, his neighbor, or anyone outside of their relation to him; Portia's single-minded pursuit of career opportunities or hot dates.

The sharpest cut, however, is reserved for Dory. Sensible throughout, she's the lens through which we see *Search Party*'s vision of Brooklyn, the one trying to corral her selfish friends into caring about someone else that they don't really know, pushing them to help her find the next clue and help someone who may be in trouble. Except, she's wrong. Chantal is not in trouble, Dory has misread every clue, and the first season ends with a man dead because of it. Like a film noir protagonist, she got in over her head, laundering her own selfishness and dissatisfaction with life through performative concern for Chantal's fate. Someone dies thanks to her obliviousness, and as she and her friends attempt to cover it up throughout the show's second season, she murders someone else.

Throughout the first two seasons, the twisty plotting, while exceedingly well done (minus a few strange leaps taken in season 2) remained largely beside the point. Dory and her friends were always the villains of the story. They always would be, even if they hadn't been responsible for literal murder. Their lives are defined by consumption: of brunch, of lavish experiences above their means, of connections and what they might bring.

Despite their cartoonishly broad personalities, they are emblematic of what *Refinery29* writer Connie Wang calls “The Grateful Generation”, a breed of aspirational millennial careerism that readily assimilates into an inequitable environment in the hopes of increasing their own clout and rising above the riffraff. In *Search Party*, living in a city as big and varied as New York is not a chance to enrich yourself with your proximity to a multitude of other people, but an excuse to ignore them, to filter human beings as useful to you or not.

This is the space in which season 3 thrives. While it’s ostensibly about dominoes falling — it takes place immediately after Dory is under arrest for murder — it turns into a post-truth farce. Its story is an extremely 2020 courtroom drama where the perpetrators of awful things do not have to admit to them and are rewarded for their resilience, spun as the victims of those who would hold them accountable. In its revival, *Search Party* dives into the privilege’s endgame, white and otherwise. No one is immune to its allure, the siren song that says you don’t have to be accountable if you don’t want to be. You can tell whatever story you want about yourself, and as long as you repeat it enough, you can get away with murder.

https://www.theverge.com/21310000/search-party-hbo-max-season-3-review