

TV Technica 2019: These were our favorite shows and binges this year

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Warning: This story discusses a handful of specific moments from TV in 2019. There are major spoilers for the final season of *Game of Thrones*. Although we've otherwise done our best to avoid spoiling anything too major, please note this list includes specific references to *The Mandalorian*, *The Good Place*, *The Orville*, *Barry*, *Fleabag*, *Counterpart*, *Mindhunter*, *The Santa Clarita Diet*, *Daybreak*, and *Russian Doll*, among others.

Is it possible to out-peak peak TV? If so, 2019 might just have attained that goal. This year saw the launch of two new streaming platforms into an already crowded market: Apple TV+ and Disney+, along with so much original programming that it was easy for promising fledgling shows to simply get lost in the firehose of fresh content. There's bound to be some shakeups and consolidation in the years ahead, because the current explosive rate of growth is likely unsustainable. But for now, let's revel in the glorious smorgasbord of quality shows—offered below in no particular order—that captured our heads and hearts this year.

Enlarge / Anson Mount plays the tough but fair Captain Pike on *Star Trek: Discovery*.
CBS/All access

Stellar cast shines on *Star Trek: Discovery*

Star Trek: Discovery's second season isn't perfect. The heavy amount of retconning around the original *Star Trek* series feels contrived at times, and certain romantic pairings the show tries desperately to sell have all the chemistry of a pile of wet sand.

But when *Discovery* shines, it's like a supernova against the night sky—and much of that light comes from the stellar cast. Michelle Yeoh's scene-chewing as Georgiou is a pure delight to watch; Doug Jones defies who-knows-how-many layers of makeup and prosthetics to make us feel every one of Saru's deep emotions; and Mary Wiseman continues to radiate infectious joy and enthusiasm as Tilly grows and matures as a character and a

leader.

The unexpected heart of season two, though, came not from the core cast but from a surprising quarter: Captain Christopher Pike (Anson Mount). Before, Pike was best known for using a space-age wheel-free wheelchair and beeping yes or no. *Discovery* does not change his ultimate fate but, instead, takes an appropriately science fictiony device and fleshes Pike out enormously, ultimately making him a hero who chooses repeatedly—at enormous personal cost and with full understanding of the weight of those costs—to do the right thing.

Pike's arc is a standout example of *Star Trek's* most consistent and loftiest goal: setting the tone from the captain's chair, having the leader live up to Starfleet's highest ideals even when doing so feels impossibly hard, and trusting the rest of the crew to rise to the occasion.

—Kate Cox, *Tech Policy Reporter*

Enlarge / The Soul Squad is back for a final season on *The*

Entering the endgame on *The Good Place*

The Good Place has always kept us guessing, from the pilot episode in which Eleanor (Kristen Bell) realizes she's been admitted to paradise by mistake, to the heartbreaking S3 finale setting up this fourth and final season. Much of S3 took place back on Earth, where the Soul Squad—Eleanor, Chidi (William Jackson Harper), Tahani (Jameela Jamil), and Jason (Manny Jacinto)—had been given one more chance to become better people on Earth.

It was a bold move by the writers, although the first few episodes were a bit lackluster. Earth just isn't as interesting as the crazy surreal illogic of the show's brilliant conception of the afterlife. But S3 soon hit its stride. In the finale, reformed demon Michael (Ted Danson) convinced Judge Gen (Maya Rudolph) to repeat the original experiment of S1 with four new humans, chosen by the Bad Place. The Soul Squad would be on hand to assist. But there's always a catch when the Bad Place gets involved, and this one was particularly heartbreaking for fans of the Eleanor-Chidi soulmate coupling. Chidi was rebooted along with everything else, which removed his memories of Eleanor.

S4 brought everyone back to the afterlife, with all the cheesy puns and comic absurdity that comes with that goofy eternal realm. (A game of *Pictionary* in which the images come to life ends in chaos, thanks to a terrifying mutation produced by Chidi's crude drawing of a horse.) Eleanor is now running the Good Place, with four new test subjects: John (Brandon Scott Jones), a former gossip columnist who wrote nasty things about Tahani back on Earth; *uber*-douche male chauvinist Brent (Benjamin Koldyke); Chidi's Australian neuroscientist love

interest from S3, Simone (Kirby Howell-Baptiste); and Chidi himself (a replacement for Linda, who turned out to be a demon in disguise). There are twists and double crosses and daring rescues, ending with Judge Gen concluding in the midseason finale that, yes, the afterlife's point system is flawed. But her solution is to wipe out all humans from existence in a reset to start over—not the outcome the Soul Squad was hoping for.

The writing is still so fresh and the philosophical rumination still so sharp and witty, one might be tempted to keep the show going as long as possible. But I think it's a wise move to wrap things up after four solid-gold seasons. Will Judge Gen relent on her decision to reset the human experiment and give the Soul Squad a chance to redesign the afterlife? Will there be a happily ever after for Eleanor and Chidi? Will Jason's beloved Jacksonville Jaguars ever win a championship without Blake Bortles? It's anyone's guess how things will end for this always surprising and thought-provoking series.

—Jennifer Ouellette, Senior Writer

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