

# TV Review: Showtime’s Riveting ‘Homeland’ is Best New Show of 2011

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on October 2, 2011 - 2:08pm

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CHICAGO – Very few programs of the last few years have been as instantly engaging as Showtime’s “Homeland.” Complex characters, daring storytelling, some of the best acting you’ll see on TV all year — this is a GREAT show from episode one and it’s remarkable to think that it could even get better. I’ve seen so much mediocre-to-OK new television this year that the series premiere of “Homeland” was like a shot of adrenalin. Nothing comes close in the race for the best new show of the Fall season.



Television Rating: **5.0/5.0**

“Homeland” stars a spectacular Claire Danes as CIA agent Carrie Mathison, a troubled government employee who has more than enough personal issues of her own to make her judgment questionable. She pops pills, sleeps around, and seems to have burned most of the bridges in her professional and personal lives. In the opening scene, Mathison is in Baghdad and has been given a chance to very briefly interrogate a prisoner about an impending attack. She gets nowhere but, as she’s being pulled away from the illegal questioning, the prisoner tells her that “*An American prisoner of war has been turned...*”



Homeland

Photo credit: Showtime

Months later, Carrie is home again and news breaks that Sgt. Nicholas Brody (Damian Lewis), missing since 2003 and presumed dead, has been found. He’s coming home. Mathison immediately suspects that Brody has become a double agent, an American helping plan a devastating terrorist attack from not just the inside but from the role of an American hero. It turns out that Carrie’s mission in Iraq wasn’t authorized and it wasn’t the first time that she’s ignored orders. Deputy Director David Estes (David Harewood) is not going to pay attention to her thinly-founded suspicions even if mentor Saul (Mandy Patinkin) still gives her the benefit of the doubt.







Homeland  
Photo credit: Showtime

As she watches Brody, Mathison becomes more convinced that something is not right. Why did they keep him alive for eight years if he gave them absolutely nothing? She takes her suspicions to extremes, illegally installing surveillance equipment in his house and watching his every move. And those moves are unusual...or are they? How does one define unusual behavior for a man who has been abused in a foreign country for eight years? Is Brody merely trying to readjust to his old life or is his behavior suspicious? Is he a hero or an enemy? And how far should Mathison be able to push his expected privacy if he's the former?

"Homeland" is supposed to make you uncomfortable. As Brody has awkward sex with his emotionally-torn wife Jessica (Morena Baccarin) and Mathison watches on a black-and-white monitor from her couch, the show creates fascinating conflicts within the viewer. Of course, she shouldn't be watching this. And yet, Brody's behavior is violent and possibly hinting at a torn psyche. So, maybe she should be watching. The questions of Brody's allegiance is blended with questions about Mathison's professionalism and possibly even her sanity in a way that creates fascinating storytelling.

But "Homeland" is not merely a political thriller. The personal lives of Brody and Mathison impact the ones with an espionage edge. Thinking her husband was dead, Jessica moved on and formed a relationship with his friend Captain Mike Faber (Diego Klattenhoff). While the love triangle may sound like something out of a soap opera, it's handled with delicacy thanks to an excellent supporting performance by Baccarin (recently seen on "V"). Even Brody's children (Jackson Pace, Morgan Saylor) aren't sure how to deal with their returned father and, again, this situation feels genuine and not merely the material of a melodrama, as it easily could have felt.



Homeland  
Photo credit: Showtime

"Homeland" is one of those very rare shows that works on every level. The direction (courtesy of "L.I.E." and regular "Dexter" helmer Michael Cuesta) is crisp, tight, and riveting. This is one of the fastest hours on TV in an era when "taking your time" (even fans of "Boardwalk

Empire," "The Killing," and "Mad Men" would admit they're slowly-paced) has become more of the norm. "Homeland" is paced like "Breaking Bad" — it flies. And Cuesta and his writers brilliantly stay one step ahead of their viewers but don't get overly complicated. You stick with it, wanting to see where they're going next.

Being one of the most expertly-produced shows on TV is one thing but "Homeland" wouldn't be the best new show of the year without the incredible performances from Danes, Lewis, Baccarin, and Patinkin. In particular, the Emmy-winning Danes (who got this part due to the producers seeing her work in "Temple Grandin") is simply amazing here. She's riveting from scene one and a strong contender for the Golden Globe and Emmy for Outstanding Actress in a Drama Series after only one episode. And she just gets better. Ably matched by Lewis, Baccarin, and Patinkin, this is one of those instantly-impressive ensembles that comes along a couple times a year if we're lucky.

It takes some shows time to get to the top of the ladder in terms of the most interesting dramas on TV. Some shows need fine-tuning and get better as they go along, learning from their mistakes. On the other hand, other shows are instantly engaging like "Breaking Bad," "Lost," or "Game of Thrones." "Homeland" deserves mention in that group.

*"Homeland" stars Claire Danes, Damian Lewis, Mandy Patinkin, David Harewood, and Morena Baccarin. It premieres on Showtime on October 2nd, 2011 at 9pm CST.*



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By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [14]

Content Director

[HollywoodChicago.com](http://HollywoodChicago.com)[brian@hollywoodchicago.com](mailto:brian@hollywoodchicago.com) [13]**Source URL (retrieved on Apr 25 2024 - 4:41am):**<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/15871/tv-review-showtime-s-riveting-homeland-is-best-new-show-of-2011>**Links:**[1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/briantt>[2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/brian-tallerico>[3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/claire-danes>[4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/damian-lewis>[5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/david-harewood>[6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>[7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/homeland>[8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/mandy-patinkin>[9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/morena-baccarin>[10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/showtime>[11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/television>[12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/dvd-theater-tv-news>[13] <mailto:brian@hollywoodchicago.com>[14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#BRIAN>