

Featured in The Nerd League

By Katie Knecht

[no spoilers]

It took three full hourlong episodes before I was hooked. *Bloodline*'s pacing is below my average television show speed, but a couple of friends kept promising it would be worth it, so I kept going. Danny Rayburn, the eldest and most troubled son of four siblings, returns to his parents' home in the Florida Keys. The first episode is a lot of sitting on the bus with Danny, sitting in a bar with Danny, and waiting for Danny to get the story moving.

Even by episode two, I wasn't convinced that the show was going to turn into more than the ostracized-family-member-returns-home-and-creates-drama trope. But with the introduction of half-hidden family secrets, a mysterious charred boat that turns up in the area, and Danny Rayburn's layered character, I was intrigued. I finished the two available seasons over the summer, with season three expected in the spring of 2017.

I'm glad I kept watching. Here's why.

#1 – The acting is stellar.

Ben Mendelsohn's performance as problem son Danny Rayburn of a well-off, well-known family in the Florida Keys is both charming and unnerving. I would have never known he was Australian by his smoky, even voice. His character promises enough complexity that, even when he made what I thought was the wrong choice, I was still rooting for him, sensing that something more was behind the curtain. Kyle Chandler (John Rayburn) plays the perfect son and deputy sheriff with quiet sincerity. He shows his character's dark background in unexpected moments. Linda Cardellini combines wit and deeply-rooted anxieties into the stout sister (Meg Rayburn). Norbert Leo Butz plays the hot-headed youngest brother (Kevin Rayburn), who I found both endearing and annoying because of this.

#2 – The setting is interesting.

I enjoy that the show is set in the Florida Keys, where the Rayburn family owns and operates an inn that has been in their family for decades. The inn is expansive and inviting, shaded with trees and overlooking the beach. In many scenes we stare out into the ocean, the waves soothing us in the midst of the Rayburns' turmoil: when the oldest brother of the family comes home, dark secrets bubble to the surface. The family is forced to face a past they had tried to forget and forge a new path that they did not intend. This is all in the name of protecting one another – most of the time, anyway. The contrast of the beach and its slow-moving way of life pushes nicely against the Rayburns' drama.

#3 – The plot twists are real.

Season one of *Bloodline* uses flash forwards (scenes that jump the narrative to the future) to move the viewer toward an ending point. By the close of the season, most of the flash forwards have been explained. The show also uses flashbacks to reveal details about the family's past (and the casting of the kid actors is on point). Just when I thought I understood what was happening and who was involved in what, a flashback would reveal different motivations, or I would realize I had made an inaccurate assumption based on a future scene. Both seasons build toward big moments of excitement, action, and truth.

#4 – Enrique Murciano.

[image]

Need I say more? Okay, I will. Enrique Murciano is right behind Ben Mendelsohn and Kyle Chandler for acting chops in this series. He plays a good-guy cop on the hunt for the truth, with a sly streak of anger that he uses to his benefit. He is rightly suspicious of even those he is close to and, especially in season two, he becomes a central point of concern and fear for the Rayburn family. He is also very nice to look at (see above) and has nailed the sultry I-don't-quite-trust-you look.

While the plot is not speedy, you can trust the acting and surprising moments sprinkled throughout both seasons to keep you watching. The slow burn is worth it and I'm ready for season three.