

Secrets and lies

The powerhouse cast of 'Big Little Lies' welcomes a familiar face for Season 2

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TV Media

When the Season 1 finale of "Big Little Lies" aired last year on HBO, few were expecting it to return for a second season. Not because it wasn't worthy — the show did exceptionally well, and raked in the accolades during awards season — but because the story on which it is based ends where Season 1 left off. On Sunday, June 9, the critically acclaimed series returns for an unexpected second season, and we are treated to further exploration of the intrigue-filled lives of a group of Californian women.

"Big Little Lies" premiered in 2017 as a seven-part limited series on HBO. The project was spearheaded by movie stars Nicole Kidman ("The Hours," 2002) and Reese Witherspoon ("A Wrinkle in Time," 2018), who, several years earlier, had optioned the rights to produce a film or television series based on author Liane Moriarty's novel of the same name.

Moriarty's novel depicted a complicated web of secrets, abuse and revenge that brings a group of very different women together and results in an ultimate act of desperate violence. After Witherspoon and Kidman opted to produce the project as a series rather than as a film, as initially expected, the already noteworthy cast began to grow. A additional stars signed on, including Shailene Woodley ("Divergent," 2014), Zoë Kravitz ("Mad Max: Fury Road," 2015) and Laura Dern ("Jurassic Park," 1993), who filled out the group of women central to the story's plot.

Supporting cast members included Alexander Skarsgård ("True Blood"), Adam Scott ("Parks and Recreation"), Kathryn Newton ("Halt and Catch Fire") and Iain Armitage ("Young Sheldon"), most of whom are returning in Season

2. I say "most" in an effort to spare you from spoilers — if you haven't watched the first season, telling you who isn't returning for Season 2 would give too much away.

So far, "Big Little Lies" has followed the three lead characters Celeste (Kidman), Madeline (Witherspoon) and Jane (Woodley). Jane is a newcomer to Monterey, and is there to raise her son as a single mother and hide a troubled past. The women meet because of their children, who all attend the same school, and Madeline takes Jane under her wing.

Season 1 was a roller-coaster of drama and secrets. Celeste's marriage was not what it seemed. Madeline's controlling nature threatened to ruin her relationships with family members. Jane's past seemed to literally chase her as she did her best to outrun it and care for her son. Ultimately, these women, along with others who seem at first to be antagonists, come together in a moment of great need to resolve a serious case of abuse. They kill a man.

It's here that the story diverges from the source material. In the novel, the woman who does the actual killing admits to her actions immediately and turns herself in, despite her friends agreeing to lie on her behalf. In the television version, the women come up with a story in which the man died accidentally after instigating a struggle, and present a united front to police. The investigation into the death and the repercussions of that night are the source of much of the tension and drama Season 2 has to offer.

Meryl Streep ("Doubt," 2008) joins the already ridiculously talented cast this season. She plays the mother of the man who died, and she comes to town looking for answers about his death.

When Moriarty's novel left the series with no further source material to draw upon, the cast



Shailene Woodley in a scene from "Big Little Lies"

and creators seemed reticent to endorse the idea of a second season; they all claimed to be supremely happy with the way the first season turned out and defended its existence as a standalone piece of work.

The demand for more must have simply been too great, because in 2017, shortly after "Big Little Lies" had received an Emmy nomination for Outstanding Limited Series, HBO

announced that a second season was being explored, and that Moriarty had been contacted to write new material for it.

Later that year, the second season was confirmed, and while fans were overjoyed, the announcement didn't thrill other awards-season contenders. HBO had waited until after voting had concluded so the show would not be pulled from the "Limited Series" category for awards sea-

son. "Big Little Lies" ultimately nabbed several awards, including the Emmy and the Golden Globe for Best Miniseries.

Awards-season controversy aside, the return of the series has plenty of people excited. Like Moriarty's novel, the television version of "Big Little Lies" manages to balance a dark sense of humor with a conscientious and sensitive exploration of domestic abuse and the effects

of trauma. The show's elite cast, which now includes three Oscar winners (Kidman, Witherspoon, Streep) and a two-time Oscar nominee (Dern), lovingly brings each character to life, and it's a real joy to watch these women, both fictional and real, work together on screen.

Season 2 of "Big Little Lies" continues to explore the dark secrets of Monterey when it premieres Sunday, June 9, on HBO.