

# coverstory

BY JAY BOBBIN



Ella Purnell (left) and Sophie Nelisse star in "Yellowjackets," premiering Sunday on Showtime.

The word "reunion" typically connotes a happy regathering. Then, there's the reunion that fuels "Yellowjackets."

Premiering Sunday, Nov. 14, the Showtime drama series focuses on four women 25 years after surviving a wilderness plane crash while members of a high school soccer team. The show flashes back frequently to that ordeal, helping to explain the respective issues that they still have now. Melanie Lynskey ("Two and a Half Men"), Juliette Lewis ("Natural Born Killers"), Christina Ricci ("Black Snake Moan") and Tawny Cypress ("Unforgettable") play the quartet in the present day.

"I honestly was so excited to read something that was so different," Lynskey reflects. "There was a genuine sort of edge to this, something very tense in the writing. And I really loved that it was so female-centered, and every single one of the women was so well-drawn and interesting. By the end of the pilot, I felt like I knew everybody, and they were all unique individuals. I'm very, very nervous of signing long-term show contracts, and I just was like, 'I can't wait to see where this goes. I can't wait to do this for as long as I can do it.'"

Since "Yellowjackets" visualizes the plane crash often, a younger foursome of actresses also portrays the central characters. Sophie

Nelisse ("The Book Thief"), Lynskey's counterpart as the teenage Shauna, recalls that working on that part of the show's set was, "very claustrophobic. The plane was slightly tilted to the side, so I think it was really helpful for us to be in an environment like that. It made it very realistic. When we got there on the first day and saw how real it looked, I think we felt very scared, and it really helped us get into our characters' bodies and motions." Ella Purnell also is among the younger cast members.

"Yellowjackets" executive producer and (with Bart Nickerson) co-creator Ashley Lyle says, "We knew we didn't want to be a show about what happened, but about why it happened. We figured the best way to do that was to just play it all in the beginning, so that the question is more, 'How did they get from Point A to Point B?' Obviously, there are rifts in the group, but it's really a team.

"What was interesting to us about having it be a championship soccer team is that it's all about collaboration," adds Lyle. "Spoiler alert: It's not really a soccer show, but it's about how these girls were able to really work together, then to see how that might really start to fall apart and shatter over the course of a season. The circumstances bring out both the best and the worst in them."

## 'Yellowjackets' brings athletes' past trauma into the present on Showtime

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