

coverstory

BY JAY BOBBIN

Prime Video's 'The English' a parable on race, power and love in the Old West



Chaske Spencer and Emily Blunt star in "The English," premiering Friday on Prime Video.

A woman's quest to avenge her son's death launches her into an epic adventure across a violent 1890s landscape in a Western series coming to Prime Video.

In "The English," a six episode series premiering Friday, Nov. 11, Emily Blunt ("A Quiet Place") stars as Lady Cornelia Locke, a British aristocrat who arrives in a lawless Kansas town and crosses paths with Eli Whipp (Chaske Spencer, "The Twilight Saga" film series), a Pawnee ex-Cavalry scout about to be killed by a gang of local thugs. She bargains for his life and is almost killed but through a series of events both are freed.

He has a mission of his own – to claim land as a military veteran under Abraham Lincoln's Homestead Act but soon discovers that that doesn't mean much for Native Americans. So the pair head off for Hoxem, Wyo., on a quest to find the killer of Cornelia's son but encounter much more than they anticipated.

Filmed on location in Spain, the series from writer/director Hugo Blick ("The Honourable Woman," "Black Earth Rising") features lush photography and a solid cast that also includes Stephen Rea, Valerie Pachner, Rafe Spall and Thomas Trafford.

"I think revenge and identity are, at its core, the main themes," explains Blunt, who is also an executive producer. "You've got Cornelia's character, who is seeking a blood revenge, and if she's able to carry that

out then she sees a reclaiming of who she is. And you've got Eli Whipp, who's just seeking a land claim. It sounds simple, but that is his way of reclaiming his identity after leaving the U.S. Army and all the atonement of guilt he has to go through.

"But tonally, the story is told in this very intimate way that's funny, violent, but also epic. We haven't seen that for a while, something so epic and so beautiful with something that has modern intimacy to it."

Indeed, there is an intimate power in the performances of both lead actors, particularly Spencer, who brings a stillness to the role of Eli.

"It's a beast of a role," he says. "To me, I saw him as a modern-day biker, an ex-veteran. Someone who has seen war and been through tragedy. If Eli were alive today, he would be riding a Harley Davidson with a big beard and tattoos, and he probably would have met Cornelia at a truck stop.

"When I was reading through this, my imagination was going with that," he continues, "and I hope I can represent that in him, because I do see him as an ex-vet. He suffers from PTSD and loneliness, and throughout the story you see those walls start coming down – with both characters, Cornelia and Eli. That's what I wanted to bring to Eli, to make him as human as possible."

In Focus

"When I Think of Christmas" (Hallmark Channel — TV movie premiere, Nov. 20)

Sara (Shenae Grimes-Beech) returns to her hometown to help her mother (Beth Broderick) move and is surprised to find her ex-boyfriend Josh (Niall Matter) is back home. The two had once planned a life in music together but Sara left to study law. When Sara makes a surprising discovery, she and Josh forge a bold plan for the upcoming Christmas concert that will lead them back to their musical roots and make this a holiday to remember in this 2022 romance.

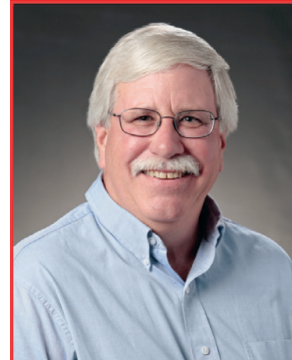
"A Waltons Thanksgiving" (The CW — TV movie premiere, Nov. 20)

This 2022 drama reunites the Walton family as they prepare for Thanksgiving in 1934. The Depression has reached far and wide, but John Walton Sr. (Teddy Sears) provides for his family through the farm and

by doing odd jobs from the eccentric Baldwin Sisters (Susan Savoie, Annie Cook). And it's also the time of year for the Annual Harvest Festival Fair, where carnival rides, talent shows and pie contests become the center of attention. Logan Shroyer, Marcelle LeBlanc, Rebecca Koon and Bellamy Young also star.

"Criminal Minds: Evolution: Season 1" (Paramount+ — series premiere, Nov. 24)

This new iteration in the "Criminal Minds" franchise follows the elite team of FBI criminal profilers who come up against their greatest threat yet, an UnSub who has used the pandemic to build a network of other serial killers. Joe Mantegna, A.J. Cook, Kirsten Vangsness, Aisha Tyler, Adam Rodriguez and Paget Brewster reprise their roles from the original series, joined by Zach Gilford.



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