

Trapped – the Icelandic thriller that's the unexpected TV hit of the year so far

It's Agatha Christie meets Nordic noir ... claustrophobic, horrifically intense and set in a landscape that humans cannot possibly take on and win

[Ellie Violet Bramley](#)



A heart-throb in his home country ... Andri (Ólafur Darri Ólafsson) in Trapped, the Nordic noir that stands alone. Photograph: Lilja Jonsdottir/BBC/RVK Studios

If your world has been a little less complete since Saga and Henrik drove off into the sunset in her bog-green Porsche in [The Bridge](#), have no fear, Trapped is here.

The first Icelandic drama ever acquired by the BBC, Trapped has become the sleeper hit of the winter, with over a million addicted fans desperately awaiting the finale on Saturday. It has all the tropes you would cross your mittened fingers for from a Nordic noir. There are bleak skies and brooding landscapes; a head-scratchingly unusual murder; a charismatic, if troubled, lead detective, and a storyline with more (pickled) red herrings than you could shake a loaf of rye bread at. Plus woollens! So many woollens. When a pair of Nigerian sisters turn up off the ferry, victims of human trafficking, police officer Hinrika can hardly wait to get them into some patterned knits that would turn Sarah Lund mad with envy.



He's huge, he's hairy – and he's the hottest man in Iceland

But Trapped is far from just a box-ticker. It doesn't feel for one second as if it's going through the well-oiled noirish motions. Take the credits. As the music of Jóhann Jóhannsson (who composed the Golden Globe-winning score for The Theory of Everything) swoops over epic images of vast glaciers, wide plains and a frothing sea, interspersed with uncomfortable close-ups of the bloodshot eyeballs and grubby fingernails of a corpse, you know this show intends to soar.

Set in the tiny Icelandic fishing town of [Seyðisfjörður](#), there's something a little bit Fargo about the parochial policing set-up – here are a group of well-meaning coppers who never have their Thermos flasks far from hand; who pass incoming calls to colleagues if they're too invested in a game of computer chess. And, as with Fargo's Kansas City gang who enter centre stage and guns blazing, this small port town has a storm a-brewing – metaphorically and meteorologically.



In Seyðisfjörður, it doesn't rain it blizzards. As the ferry from Denmark arrives over the fjord, a mutilated torso gets caught in a nearby trawler's net. From this point on, the sleepy town is shaken, and we descend into a world of human trafficking, murder, domestic violence and political corruption. And tentacles of the past – the framing tale of the death of Dagný in a fire, from which boyfriend Hjörtur fails to save her, still wreaks havoc on the community – are bound to intertwine with this more recent drama.

Bitter and grieving ... Eirikur (Thorsteinn Gunnarsson). Photograph: BBC/RVK Studios



Angst, thrills, intrigue: why Euro drama is taking over our screens

Local police chief and great big bear-man Andri (played by [Ólafur Darri Ólafsson, apparently now a heart-throb in Iceland](#)) weathers the choppy waters as best he can, with his own family drama unfolding – his not-quite-ex-wife is visiting with her new partner, and his father-in-law, a still grieving and bitter father to fire victim Dagný, continues to struggle with his loss. Ólafsson plays Andri with great subtlety, especially for a man who rouses himself by rubbing snow in his big bristly beard. What's wrong with a coffee? And why won't he ever do up his coat? Even in an Arctic blizzard, with mini icicles growing from his facial hair, he seems relatively laissez-faire about zipping up. The female characters are less well fleshed out, but there's certainly something about police officer, Hinrika, played by Ilmur Kristjánsdóttir – I'm hoping her character will develop further in the finale.

Trapped has its feet firmly on the hard ground: the financial crisis of 2008 is still felt, and there's a possible deal on the table from China to turn this sleepy corner of east Iceland into a major port, lying as it does in a new east-west shipping corridor. It's against this businesslike backdrop that noir can shine (see The Killing season two for another great example). Plus, this storyline also gives us

Seyðisfjörður's answer to to the recent Boris Johnson/Stanley Johnson Brexit kerfuffle, when harbourmaster Sigurður Gudmundsson's warning that "one man can ruin this for the rest of us" is met by his father's "I'll volunteer to be that man".



There's something about Hinrika (Ilmur Kristjánsdóttir). Photograph: BBC / RVK Studios

[As Sam Wollaston attests in his review](#), there's something distinctly Icelandic about Trapped, and it really sets itself apart from those shows based in and around Copenhagen and Malmö (and the bridge connecting the two). In part, that's down to the hulking presence of nature. This is the kind of nature that inspires

cathedrals, dwarfs human beings. It's the kind that humans cannot take on and win – as we see with poor old Guðmundur's "controlled" avalanche that is anything but. (When did we ever have an avalanche in a noir?!)

The other thing that makes Trapped different from other Nordic noirs: the brilliantly intense claustrophobia, brought about by the hyperbolic levels of snow (which also gives us one of the greatest chase scenes ever – a camper van through feet-deep snow, followed by two huffing, puffing men – Andri and the Lithuanian human trafficker – practically crawling through the stuff).



**Trapped review:
stuck in a stormy,
moody fjord with a
killer on the loose?
Yes please**

The residents of the town, along with the passengers from the ferry, are well and truly stuck. The blizzard has made the road over the mountains impassable and all

planes are grounded, meaning the police team from Reykjavík (including the moustachioed Tausti, played by Björn Hlynur Haraldsson of Fortitude fame) don't stand a chance. And a Danish court order, plus pack ice in the fjord, means that the ferry, captained by a very sinister version of Nanna Birk Larsen's dad (from season one of The Killing), is also trapped.

[Director and creator Baltasar Kormákur has called the show](#) "a mix of Nordic noir and Agatha Christie" – and it definitely comes with a timebomb feeling of dread. "I wanted to remind the audience that we are on the outskirts of the inhabitable world," he says – the producer of Everest, this is obviously something of a personal interest. And it's on these fringes that he's found ripe terrain for a noir with a polar twist. If you haven't been watching thus far, don some long johns and get with the programme.