



To netflix or not to netflix?

An AI-Assisted Search for Intelligent Drama Without Preaching, Vulgarity, and Noise

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Uncompressed Thinking

That's the question that came up the other evening as I was trying to choose what serial to watch on Netflix.

Obviously, I contacted my universal AI advisor.

Here is what I asked:

“Find the best serial on Netflix: recent intellectual drama, possible action.”

Here was the recommendation:

“My strongest recommendation: *The Diplomat*.”

It is an intelligent adult political thriller: international crises, manipulation, competing loyalties, marriage and ambition, with enough danger and action to maintain tension. The writing and acting are unusually sharp. Three seasons are currently available.”

After 10-15 minutes of watching, as the stage was being set up, I stopped and asked AI:

“I am looking for something not politically correct, as *The Diplomat* looks to me.”

I understand that was not very clear guidance, so AI, naturally, said:

“If by ‘not politically correct like *The Diplomat*’ you mean adult, intelligent drama that isn’t constantly trying to teach you the approved moral lesson: complicated characters, cynical politics, sex/violence where appropriate, and preferably some action I’d narrow Netflix down to these:

Black Doves: my first choice for you. Keira Knightley, British intelligence/politics, assassins, betrayal, dark humor, and considerably more violence than *The Diplomat*. It’s sharp rather than preachy.

The Night Agent: less intellectually sophisticated than *The Diplomat*, but much more propulsion: White House conspiracy, intelligence operations, assassinations, terrorism, action.

Bodyguard: probably the best serious choice if you haven’t seen it. British political thriller about a war veteran assigned to protect a powerful politician he strongly disagrees with. Dark, tense, morally ambiguous, and very little sentimentality.

Hostage: newer, only five episodes. British PM + French president, kidnapping, blackmail and an international political crisis. Straighter political thriller than action show.

Blood Sacrifice: very recent: Swedish crime/police thriller involving murders of police officers and a larger crisis. This is grimmer European crime drama than Washington politics, which may make it a good change of pace.

For tonight, I’d start with *Black Doves*. If you want something more intellectual and realistic, choose *Bodyguard*. If you want more action and addictive pacing, *The Night Agent*.”

Following the advice, I went with *Black Doves*.

It started intriguingly, although a bit graphic. Then the sexual line cut in, ending with a turn-off scene... getting another kill switch activated.

I had not watched Netflix for a while. The last serials I watched were *Homeland* and *Blacklist*, both of which I liked, and I hoped to find something of that caliber.

Those two were reasonably graphic, but in a nuanced tone, exactly how I see art: **always nuanced, never explicit; hints, not verbatim; no need for vulgar language or scenes spelled out to the smallest detail.**

If you happen to watch *Black Doves*, you will easily find that kill-switch moment. I understand homosexuality, but I do not want it in my face, on the screen...

My response was (we are friends with my AI, so I do not have to choose words):

“Diplomat, Black Doves... that’s what you call intellectual and best? Really? I do not want your advice based on ratings. I want something based on your judgement and intelligence.”

AI:

“Fair criticism. I used ‘intellectual’ far too generously. *Black Doves* is stylish entertainment, not an intellectually serious drama. And *The Diplomat* has clever dialogue and political vocabulary, but much of its supposed sophistication is manufactured by speed, banter, and melodrama.

So, forget ratings and Netflix's ‘critically acclaimed’ labels. My criterion would be:

Does the story assume the viewer can tolerate ambiguity?

Are intelligent people behaving for intelligible reasons?

Does it avoid dividing the world into characters we're instructed to approve of and characters we're instructed to condemn?

Does the plot arise from competing interests rather than screenwriter manipulation?

On that basis, among Netflix choices I'd recommend:

Caliphate (Kalifat): start here if you haven't seen it. Swedish, involving ISIS recruitment, intelligence work, radicalization and an impending attack. What makes it good isn't the terrorism plot; it's that people make comprehensible decisions that gradually produce terrible consequences. It doesn't constantly stop to explain what the enlightened viewer is supposed to think.

Fauda: genuinely morally uncomfortable. Israelis and Palestinians aren't merely pieces positioned to deliver a moral; loyalties, family, humiliation, revenge and professional duty

collide. It can become action-heavy and melodramatic, but at its best it is considerably more psychologically adult than *The Diplomat*.

The Spy: quieter and more conventional, but serious. The interesting subject isn't 'Mossad hero defeats bad guys'; it's what prolonged deception does to identity, marriage, ambition and judgment. Sacha Baron Cohen is remarkably restrained.

And I would remove *The Night Agent* from my recommendation to you. It's efficient suspense, but intellectually it's basically airport-fiction television. *Black Doves* I'd put in roughly the same category, albeit more stylish.

If *Caliphate* and *Fauda* are already familiar, tell me. I'll go substantially deeper and look through the current U.S. Netflix catalog, including European, Israeli, Korean and Scandinavian productions, specifically for intelligent, adult, politically unafraid drama rather than 'highly rated Netflix thrillers.'"

Better.

But I added another qualifier:

"And add to this: I do not want moral norms of today, specifically in sex, and cannot stand vulgarity and, as I said before, political correctness and DEI. Is there anything out there in the world of cinematography that fits the bill?"

AI:

"Yes, but we need to change the search criteria completely. You are not really asking me for 'prestige television.'

I would define what you're looking for as **adult in intelligence, but not adolescent in presentation**: morally complicated characters; politics without a prescribed ideological lesson; sexuality may exist as part of life, but you don't want contemporary sexual ideology to become a theme; little or no gratuitous nudity; and especially no crude/vulgar dialogue masquerading as sophistication.

You also don't want casting or story construction that feels driven by contemporary DEI conventions rather than the world being portrayed. And you want actual drama, not a museum piece..."

And then, eventually:

"If we stay with Netflix tonight, then I would move away from American political thrillers altogether.

The Breakthrough (*Genombrottet*) is a recent Swedish four-part crime drama based on the real Linköping double murder and the forensic genealogy investigation that eventually solved it. It's restrained, procedural and refreshingly uninterested in making every scene 'exciting.'

And I would look increasingly toward French, British, German, Scandinavian, Israeli and older American productions for you. Not because everything foreign is automatically better, far from it, but because **your particular combination of preferences eliminates a surprisingly large portion of contemporary American prestige television.**"

It was the word **"surprisingly"** that got me thinking and, eventually, led to this discussion.

Does it mean that I am such a surprisingly small minority in America?

Sad. (*But that's a minority opinion... :)*)

I said yes and decided to watch *The Breakthrough*.

My friend responded:

"Excellent. That 'Yes' is useful calibration. I now have a much better sense of the target: **intelligent and restrained; adult without vulgarity; morally complex without contemporary moral instruction; believable people rather than ideological representatives; and enough mystery, danger, or intellectual puzzle to keep it moving.**"

Then it added, to my relief:

"When you finish *The Breakthrough*, I'll use that standard, not ratings or Netflix popularity, for the next recommendation."

OK, stay posted!

So, closing the loop opened by the title:

To Netflix. But with extreme care.