

There's something so pleasing about seeing an actor flex their muscles after so long in one role. From 2011 to 2019, Chris Evans was defined by his portrayal as Captain America and with good reason. But as the face of a franchise like the MCU, there's little room for the dramatic storytelling on display in *Defending Jacob*. Turns out, Chris Evans has some serious muscle, whether throwing his shield like a boomerang or battling with the question of his son's innocence.

Following Assistant District Attorney Andy Barber (Evans) and his family in suburban Boston, offering a glimpse at their idyllic life before his son Jacob, played by Jaeden Martell, is arrested for the murder of a high school classmate. After initially investigating the crime, Andy is forced off the case and pursues his own investigation to try and clear his son's name, supported by wife Laurie, played by the outstanding Michelle Dockery. Yet *Defending Jacob* refuses to follow conventions, and instead makes Andy, Laurie and the viewers question Jacob's innocence until the very end, asking us to question the very nature of evil.

As I was making my way through the show, the biggest thing that sticks out is its lack of anything mediocre. So often a show is composed of some good aspects, maybe a great one or two, along with lots of mediocrity. The stuff you instantly forget about as soon as the show moves along. *Defending Jacob* somehow carries none of this, choosing only to follow the highest of highs whilst occasionally stumbling down some frustrating pitfalls.

The lows are few and far thankfully, as *Defending Jacob* soars more often than it stumbles. There are some pacing issues throughout, with an eight episode series that would've been more effective if it ran across six instead. Showrunner Mark Bombback and director Morten Tyldum - who helms all eight episodes - lean into the melodrama of it all too much, and while effective in places, in others it only serves to distract from the tension the show centres around.

At no point did these issues jar the overall experience though, and the strengths of the show easily shine through. The cast from the Barber family, through to Cherry Jones' defence attorney Joanna, Pablo Schreiber's seedy prosecutor Neal and J.K. Simmons' manipulative and cruel 'Bloody Billy'. Every member of the ensemble have scenes that steal the show, but *Defending Jacob* anchors itself to Evans' performance, delivered with an emotional weight and intensity that is magnetic. The show holds itself high from a technical proficiency too, as its strengths lie behind the camera as well as in front. Director of Photography Jonathan Freeman helps frame the show masterfully alongside Tyldum, as the show darkens along with the Barber family, helped along with a captivating score by Atli Örvarsson (and the needle-drop to close the show which had me in tears).

AppleTV hasn't made its mark yet on the streaming wars, but with shows like *Defending Jacob*, there's no reason to believe it won't eventually. Come for Chris Evans. Stay for everything else.