

DVD Reviews
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The Sopranos—The Complete Fifth Season

Created by David Chase
From HBO Home Video
780 minutes
ASIN: B0007YMWVO

Being a fan of *The Sopranos* is difficult. The show usually goes on hiatus for up to two years between seasons. By the time each season premieres, the fans are so hyped up for it that the episodes appear to be a disappointment. In fact, I don't believe the show can truly be appreciated until released on DVD. The recently released fifth season is no different.

The season deals with Tony Soprano's (James Gandolfini) separation from his wife Carmela (Edie Falco), mob girlfriend Adriana's (Drea de Matteo) turn as a federal snitch, New York boss Johnny Sack's (Vince Curatola) rise to power, and the release of four mobsters incarcerated fifteen years earlier, including Tony's cousin Tony Blundetto (Steve Buscemi). The season doesn't open with a bang, in fact, it grows gradually tracing each character's rise and fall and making the plot twists deliciously believable. When Blundetto tells Tony he wants to go straight, to the point where he gradually begins to slide back into life as a gangster, we believe it. The acting is wonderful and engrossing.

It is a brilliantly written show. What amazes me is how the show can continually reference itself and use small moments from earlier seasons to have a huge impact on current plot devices. What was a throwaway line in season two becomes a sticking point between Tony and one of the released mobsters in this season. A painting forgotten about at the end of season four causes Tony to make a huge decision in the fifth season's finale. Like a chapter in a novel, each episode is nuanced and textured. By the time Tony raises his glass to his family and says, "To the people I love. Nothing else matters," the line resonates with all that's happened before.

Review by David White

Veronica Mars—The Complete First Season

Created by Rob Thomas
From Warner Home Video
935 minutes
ASIN: B000A59PMO

Television P.I. work isn't the growth industry it once was. Many of today's attempts don't last a single season. Into this rough business struts Neptune, California high school student Veronica Mars (Kristen Bell). Part of the wealthy community of Neptune's in-crowd, Veronica's status changes dramatically when her best friend Lily Kane (Amanda Seyfried) is murdered. Veronica's father, Sheriff Keith Mars (Enrico Colantoni), suspects Lily's father Jake Kane, and pursuing that suspicion costs him his job. Shortly thereafter, Veronica's mother (Corinne Bohrer) abandons the family, forcing Keith to set up as a private investigator with Veronica to keep him sharp.

Viewers glancing at this show in first-run may think it's a teen-angst show dressed as a P.I. show. With a full season on DVD, however, the 22 episodes unfold like chapters of a novel. The town of Neptune brings to mind Ross Macdonald and Sue Grafton's Santa Teresa, realistic enough to preserve authenticity while lending the idea that "anything can happen." Flashbacks and dream-like sequences are used to good effect, gradually answering questions such as: Who killed Lily Kane? Why did Veronica's mother suddenly leave? What isn't her father telling her? One realizes *Veronica Mars* is a bona fide P.I. series that occasionally involves high school. In fact, teenage rebellion is the perfect mask for classic P.I. cynicism.

Also like many favorite P.I.s, Veronica has a colorful cast of friends, including new kid Wallace Fennell (Percy Daggs III)—saved by Veronica from a hazing ritual in the opening moments of the pilot—and motorcycle gang leader Eli "Weevil" Navarro (Francis Capra). At the heart of the show, though, are Veronica and her father. Kristen Bell immerses herself completely into character, whether portraying Veronica herself or Veronica role-playing to get information. Her chemistry with Enrico Colantoni as working-class single dad Keith Mars is genuine. They are P.I.s, yes, but also believably flawed people. The future of *Veronica Mars* was uncertain until late last season, and creator Rob Thomas opted to release the first DVD set sooner to build interest in the series. There are no audio commentaries, but the set does feature an extended version of the pilot and deleted scenes.

Review by Gerald So

The House Of Cards Trilogy

from BBC/Warner

640 minutes

ASIN: B00009MGGI

Francis Urquhart (played by Ian Richardson) is a charming political mover and shaker in the British government. He has his eye on the prime minister position and will do whatever he needs to do to get there, including ruining lives and careers. Told in three parts, *House of Cards*, *To Play The King* and *The Final Cut*, this story is spooky in its portrayal of the game of politics. The story shows the rise to power of this frightening man who is so charming that you can't help but like him.

The series is based on Michael Dobbs's best-selling novel of the same name, and adapted for screen by Andrew Davies. Among other awards it has won a primetime Emmy, a Peabody, two BAFTAs and a Broadcasting Press Guild Award.

This is truly political satire at its best and worth every penny. We've watched it three time already.
Review by Jon Jordan

Wiseguy – Prey For The City

Created by Stephen Cannell

from Action Video

600 minutes

ASIN: B0001XAKP6

Vinnie! Many who remember this edgy series from the late eighties and early nineties believe the first and second story arcs to be the strongest. For me it was *Garment Trade*, one of the two story arcs available in this collection. A who's who of T.V. guys sink their teeth into a teleplay of mob corruption on 7th Ave. Vinnie goes undercover to save Eli Sternberg's (Jerry Lewis in an unforgettable performance) dress firm from mobster Rick Pinzolo (Stanley Tucci in a pre Richard Cross role). Ron Silver as Eli's son manages to steal innumerable scenes.

The second story in this box set is the most personal. Vinnie is struggling with work he did in the O.C.B. and trying to move on with life. When White supremacists led by Fred Dalton Thomas threaten his formally safe neighborhood he is sucked back into the undercover life.

Why go back? *Wise Guy* had some of the best storytelling of its time and holds up much better than its contemporaries. The shoulder pads are big and the suits are shiny but *Wiseguy* is still great T.V. twenty years later.

Review by Ruth Jordan

Sahara

from Paramount

123 minutes

ASIN: B0009UC7H0

Based on the book by thriller writer extraordinaire Clive Cussler, *Sahara* is a wonderfully entertaining movie. Matthew McConaughey in the role of Dirk Pitt was great, as were Steve Zahn as Pitt's sidekick Al Giordino, and Penelope Cruz as Dr. Eva Rojas. The movie moves with steady pacing and lots of action. I also love the civil war stuff, while some of it is improbable it "could" be possible. Basically Pitt and his cohorts are tracking a warship from the civil war which is supposed to be full of confederate gold. The ship went missing and Pitt has tracked it to Africa. While not as edgy as the novels by Cussler, this is an entertaining movie and could quite easily become a franchise for McConaughey, which might explain why he played it a little more toward wisecracks and one liners. It was a beautiful movie to watch, and very fun.

The extra features include some deleted scenes and a few featurettes. Worth watching, especially considering the locations they filmed in. This is movie worth seeing for sure, and I think it's worth owning.

Review by Jon Jordan