

DVD Reviews

16 Blocks

Warner Home Video

Say what you want, about Bruce Willis, he usually delivers the goods, as he does in 16 Blocks, directed by Richard Donner. Grey haired, fat, limping from one drink to the next his character, Jack Mosley, is a mess when he draws the assignment to get a witness to the Grand Jury by 10am.

Mos Def plays the witness, Eddie Bunker, and rather nicely, once you get past his irritating voice, which you do. Eddie has the goods on some corrupt cops who think life would be better if he were dead and Mosley has a reason to live, keeping Eddie alive, despite the best efforts of his former partner played to the hilt by David Morse.

While not quite a remake, this one owes a bunch to Clint Eastwoods' "*The Gauntlet*" but it's a way better film.

By the way, the alternative ending isn't. I mean it was the original ending but lacked the 'warm fuzzies' studios like so much, so be sure to check it out. The director and writers commentary is very worth a look as well.

Lee Crawford

Agatha Christie's The Pale Horse

Koch Vision

This is based on one of Christie's stand alone books, and is set in the sixties, however the story is pretty timeless. An artist is under suspicion of murder and as a result has a vested interest in finding the real killer. The victims are dying under what appear to be natural causes, but are actually a poison that is hard to detect. It's a wonderful tale with some nice twists. I also really enjoy the police in this, one of the detectives is rather stuck in his old school ways, and the younger of the two is a little more open minded.

The cast was great, including Hermione Norris, and Colin Buchanan, they really played their roles to perfection. I also thought the directing was spot on, in particular was one scene in which the younger detective meets the suspect for a drink, it looked like a scene Tarantino would direct.

I would recommend this to all mystery fans, in particular fans of the British mystery. It's traditional, but still fresh and engaging.

Jon Jordan

Black Hawk Down (Extended cut)

Sony Home Video

"Brilliantly funny!" "a rip-roaring laugh riot!" "Should be made into a Broadway musical!" "Tom Sizemore and Orlando Bloom are the best comedy duo since Hope & Crosby! What a team!" are phrases you will NOT hear in describing Black Hawk Down.

Phrases you WILL hear include: "Holy Sh** monkeys, was that f***ing intense." And "Man! I nearly wet my pants!" and possibly "How did Tom Sizemore stay clean &/or sober that long!?" I am, of course, kidding. He didn't stay sober. HA! I am kidding again! Tom and I like to kid each other! (The editors would like to note any opinions expressed here are solely the opinion of Randy Otteson, and not the editors. We wish to avoid being sued or in case we meet Mr. Sizemore at a party, we don't want him to kick the crap out of us. P.S. we are pretty sure Randy doesn't know Mr. Sizemore).

Based on the true story of when in the early 90's The United States tried to kidnap the higher ups of a vicious War Lord who was starving the people of Mogadishu. The mission has a few glitches and the troops that were only suppose to be in the "Hot Zone" for 30 minutes end up having to stay there for a full day and night. The "glitches" being the shooting down of two Black Hawk helicopters and the subsequent rescue attempts.

Director Ridley Scott (*Gladiator*, *Alien*) masterfully puts you in the middle of the battle and you find out what is like to be in a 24 hour non-stop firefight from all sides, bullets flying from every direction from men, women and children as well. If you have

ever seen *Casualties of War*, set during the Vietnam War, Sean Penn says to Michael J. Fox (Yes, they were in a movie together) after a particular battle that seemed to come out of no-where, and last no more than a few seconds "Mad f***in' minute. Huh, Cherry?" I feel that way through the entire movie *Black hawk Down*.

The cast is loaded with actors that would soon become household names: Josh Hartnett, Orlando Bloom, Eric Bana, Ewan McGregor, Jeremy Piven, as well as established actors like Tom Sizemore and Sam Sheppard. He also got together a good cast of known and unknown actors, some (at the time) soon-to-be well known actors and more than a few "Where do I know that guy from" actors.

They include:

Josh Hartnett (*Pearl Harbor, Lucky Number Sleven*)
Ewan McGregor (*Star Wars 1-3, Down with Love*)
Jason Isaacs (*Harry Potter* films, *The Patriot*)
Tom Sizemore (*Saving Private Ryan, Pearl Harbor*)
William Fichtner (*The Perfect Storm, Contact*)
Eric Bana (*The Incredible Hulk, Munich*)
Sam Shepard (*The Right Stuff, Steel Magnolias*)
Ron Eldard (*ER, Freedomland*)
Steven Ford (*Heat, Contact [also Gerald's son]*)
Orlando Bloom (*The Lord of the Rings, Pirates of the Caribbean* films)
Jeremy Piven (*Chasing Liberty, Runaway Jury*)

"Extended Cut" Refers to a few extra scenes that were cut out of the original (Probably due to length), that are restored for this release. The extra scenes do not add a "Whole new depth" to the movie, but are interesting for the film's fans. It also comes with a *Frontline* special on the real event. *Frontline*, for those who don't know (which I didn't), is PBS's long running "60 Minutes" or "48 Hours" type of news program. *Frontline* has been on TV since 1983, apparently I have been living in a cave (A cave that doesn't get PBS). The piece is very interesting for those who want to know more about why we were there, why we left, and why we had to sit on our hands and watch the brutality that went on. By "we" I of course mean our military. The closest I have been to combat, is talking too loud during bingo at a retirement home (I still have the scars, emotional as well as physical. NEVER mess with old people and bingo....NEVER! I can't talk about it anymore; I can feel the tears welling again).
Randy Otteson

Boston Legal: Season One Fox Home Entertainment.

If you had told me that I would be watching, and enjoying, a legal drama featuring William Shatner (Here forward referred to as The Shat!) and James Spader, I would have been fairly certain you had been taking illicit substances. I would have suggested a fine rehab clinic or a good shrink.

But here I am, watching Boston Legal, and enjoying it quite a bit. This show blends the lines of humor and drama as well as those between right and wrong. They offer you a character you like defending a position, or person, that is morally reprehensible. It also offers us some fairly scuzzy people behaving with kindness and decency.

David E. Kelly, best known for *Ally Mcbeal*, is the producer of the show. While *Legal* shares some of the bizarreness of *Mcbeal*, it does not come across as being weird for the sake of being weird. There are some distinctly odd people such as Denny Crane (The Shat! in a role that had to have been created just for him.) and Alan Shore (Spader), but the strangeness is reigned in and is consistent with the characters.

The one gripe I have is the mid season addition of Betty White. She plays a sweet looking assistant that is extremely sarcastic. The contrast is amusing, but detracts from the other characters.

Jeremy Lynch

The Adventues of Brisco County Jr FOX

Well, it's finally on DVD. On sale Tuesday the 18th. The full series is all here on one set with loads of extra features. I love this show. Westerns on TV have always been a staple, and WILD WILD WEST is one of my favorites. So lets do a little something here..

Name-Brisco County Jr, Name- James West
Brisco County is a cooler name
Brisco works for rich older white guys, West works for a politician.
Cooler booses - Brisco
James West has a train, Brisco has Comet the Wonder horse.
Cooler ride - Brisco
Side Kicks, West has Artie, the master of disguises, Brisco has Lord Bowler.
Lord Bowler could kick arties ass with his eyes closed, and wouldn't be fooled by the disguises either!

I think it's obvious that while Wild Wild West is a great show, The Adventures Brisco County Jr is worlds better.

For my money Bruce Campbell is one of the most entertaining people working today. He doesn't overstate his position in Hollywood, he's a working actor who loves what he does. And the role in this show was perfect for him. A harvard educated lawyer working as a bounty hunter, girls love him, men want to be him. He's a man of his word, and a man you can trust. And you can trust Bruce Campbell to play it perfectly. Filled with wonderful writing, humor, and characters that are great to watch interact with each other.

I also love the whole sci-fi element with "The Orb". A strange device that allows time travel and grants extraordinary powers. John Astin as Professor Wickwire inventing things like a rocket ship is just so much fun. Brisco has an eye open to the future, with the next century right around the corner, Brisco is ready to embrace it.

This show also has the best bad guys! Billy Drago as John Bly is amazing! John Bly's gang all killed Brisco County senior, and through out the show Brisco is tracking them down. I really loved the episode called "Pirates!" with Andrew Divoff as a pirate in the west trying to steal enough to build a new boat and get back to the seas.

Brisco County is a show everyone can enjoy. Full of action, wonderful dialogue and a real sense of humor. Totally re-watchable.

The special features included is the icing on this perfect cake of television delights. Commentaries featuring Bruce Campbell, Brisco's book of coming things, A documentary The History of Brisco County Jr, Tools Of the Trade, A reading from the book of Bruce, a highly entertaining round table discussion with the writing staff and a great booklet.

I think this is a must have collection and a wonderful edition to any DVD collection.

Jon

Butch Cassidy and The Sundance Kid **Fox**

I hope, oh I do so hope, that I do not need to actually explain Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. I am going to assume that all of you know the classic I am writing about. You have likely heard about the legendary chemistry between Paul Newman and Robert Redford. I am a huge fan of the film and would put it in any list of all-time greats. Redford and Newman have done only two films together, but are as great an on-screen duo as Tracy and Hepburn. BC&TSK took an approach to the western that was not the norm. Armed with an amazing script (courtesy of William Goldman) and a charismatic pair of stars, George Hill delivered a western that was unlike any before it. Though initially panned, this film is now viewed as a true American classic, and with good reason.

This is the third DVD release of this film. Since they have gone to the well three times, I felt that I needed to truly view this package with a critical eye.

This collector's Edition is genuinely chocked full of cinematic goodness. Fans of behind the scenes features should enjoy the new feature that takes a very close look at the events that brought this film to the screen. You will find out the actual reason why Steve McQueen did not star opposite Newman. You will learn how much controversy there was regarding the insertion of the musical scene of Newman riding his bike with Raindrops keep fallin' on my head playing in the background. The original script was over 400 pages long and needed to be cut in half.

If you are a fan of extras and enjoy learning about what goes into a film, this is worth the money. If you do not own Butch and Sundance, this is the one to get. If you have purchased the previous two, I would say the bonus features are worth having.

Butch Cassidy and The Sundance Kid**Fox**

I remember seeing this on the big screen when it first came out. I was pretty young, but I loved every minute of it. I've also worn out a VHS copy of it. When we started collecting DVDs I was very happy to see special editions of movies with extra features. Some are good, some are a joke. But true collectors editions are truly a wonderful addition to a collection. The Criterion Edition of The Third Man is a good example of this.

Butch Cassidy and The Sundance Kid is a real film classic and deserving of a truly special edition. The screenplay by William Goldman is wonderful, the acting is top notch and the directing is great. The first in a new age of Buddy Films, this started a new trend. It's also called the last of the westerns, however I believe that the western has made a bit of a comeback starting with Silverado. But the new westerns all owe a tip of the cowboy hat to this movie. It added humor and used music wonderfully. It's what a great movie should be. Chances are you've seen the film so I don't need to blather on much more about the actual film.

The DVD is great. The transfer is perfect, crystal clear. The Sound quality rocks.

And the Extra Features.... oh the extra features.

New interviews including Newman, Redford and Katherine Ross. The true story of Butch and the Kid, Deleted scenes, and a bunch more. This is the way all special discs should be. Plus the price is very reasonable. And on Amazon it's only \$16.00 !!!

This is a must have DVD. I've watched it twice already, I kid you not.

Jon

Crimson Tide: Unrated Extended Edition**Buena Vista Home Entertainment**

I have gone back and read my past reviews, and noticed a theme. I like everything!!! Or at least everything I have reviewed so far. So I decided: The next one I do, I will not like the movie! Unfortunately I was asked to review Crimson Tide, which I think is a spectacularly underrated movie. I know what you're thinking: "But Randy, Denzel Washington is ALWAYS good! Gene Hackman is ALWAYS good! Of course its going to be a GOOD movie! You Moron! All I have to say is, FINE! !! Screw you I'm going home! ! Wait no, I say: This is not just a GOOD movie it is a GREAT movie. It has drama; it has suspense (I measured it. It is actually a crapload of suspense) and it has Viggo Mortensen. The Unrated Extended part is they added a few extended scenes of the crew.

The extras are two behind the scenes documentaries that are actually kind of fun.

But sticking with my promise to myself, I am finally going to right a bad review. Ready? Here we go:

When you put a cast together that includes the aforementioned Washington, Hackman and Mortensen, as well as James Gandolfini (Emmy Award Winner for the Sopranos), Rick Schroder (Silver Spoons, NYPD Blue), Steve Zahn (You've Got Mail, Out of Sight), Jason Robards (Magnolia, Philadelphia), and a no lines role for Ryan Phillippe (Crash, Cruel Intentions), you should be able to put together AT LEAST a good movie, Sadly, Director Tony Scott (Top Gun, The Last Boy Scout) makes some poor plotting choices. He had the perfect opportunity to make a romantic Navy submarine movie 11 years before Brokeback Mountain stole his thunder. Instead we are given a gripping film that pits officer against officer in a struggle to do what is right, in midst of conflicting orders.

Two-time Academy Award winners Denzel Washington, as the Executive Officer who wants to hold the launch of the missiles until they can find out what an interrupted second message said, and Gene Hackman, the Captain who has orders in hand and plans to launch the missiles as scheduled, give predictably spectacular (yawn) performances. Come on Denzel, we would like to see you do something else; give us a CRAPPY performance, instead of all the unbelievably good ones you usually give. And Gene, we have been waiting for years, when is that phoned in performance coming?

So if you like slow paced, movies that don't make think "WOW!!! Now THAT was a GREAT F***IN' MOVIE!!!" then this is not the movie for you.

Randy Otteson

Deadwood Season One & Two

HBO

I love westerns and the mystique of the outlaws so I was drawn to this as soon as heard about it. Series creator David Milch did not let me down. Season one is Deadwood in 1876 and season two is 1877. Most of the events that take place are based on actual events and people.

The very first episode opens with Seth Bullock (played by Timothy Olyphant) performing his last duties as a law man before heading to Deadwood to open a hardware store with partner Sol Star. His last duty turns out to be hanging a man before a mob can lynch him. As they arrive in Deadwood we see that it is very much the frontier, dirty, unorganized and without law. The two men rent space and put up a tent to start selling their wares. The man they rent from is Al Swearengen performed beautifully by Ian McShane. Swearengen owns the Gem saloon and is the undisputed leader in all things. His fingers are in everything. We also see the arrival of Wild Bill Hickok, who as history buffs will remember, dies in Deadwood.

As the show progresses into season two we see the beginnings of government in the town and what happens as money and politics begin to enter into the scenario. Different people in Deadwood have different reactions, Swearengen tries to avoid it, others embrace it. There is also a very interesting subplot with a representative of a Mr. Hearst who has a penchant for killing prostitutes.

What the show really is, is the story of the growth of a town, and the true pioneers who made this country what it is. It's also a crime drama, a love story and at times a comedy. What it is more than anything else is completely engrossing and hypnotic. The beauty of the DVD is being able to watch back to back episodes and watch them over and over.

The sets also have some very nice extra features including making of featurettes, The Real Deadwood for each season showing the real history, a wonderful conversation with David Milch and Keith Carradine on Season one.

To me Deadwood is the perfect example of why I have a DVD player. It's story telling at it's best and I think it's some of the best television I've seen in a long time, and in truth it feels like series of movies done in chapters. Truly amazing.

Jon

The Dick Francis Mysteries

From Koch Entertainment

Ian McShane stars in this British made series based on Dick Francis' books. This set includes McShane as jockey club investigator David Cleveland in *IN THE FRAME*, *BLOOD SPORT*, and *TWICE SHY*.

McShane is wonderful in this role as an investigator who knows how to handle himself. The stories are intelligent and written for people who don't mind thinking a little as they watch TV.

The first episode opens with a house exploding killing a woman inside, David's friend is a suspect and he pitches in to help clear him. When his friend and the friend's business partner find their homes have been emptied of all possessions the case takes a different slant. Cleveland follows the case to Germany to track down the people behind the killing and the theft.

In *Blood Sport* the case is a not so simple horse theft. The insurance company is ready to pay out, but the owner thinks the horse is still alive and wants him back. Enter David Cleveland on a trip to the Canadian Rockies to track down the thieves.

Twice Shy opens with a murder of a computer wiz who is killed rock climbing. Things start to get muddled as Cleveland discovers the real motive for the killing.

Ian McShane is great in this role, and fans of his work as *Lovejoy* will really love it. And at almost 5 hours, this is a lot of viewing for the buck. Filled with twists and surprises this is a set for any fan of British mysteries.

Jon

The Dirty Dozen special edition

Warner Home Video

For the two of you that are not familiar with *The Dirty Dozen*, let me set the scene: Lee Marvin plays a tough Major that is "volunteered" to lead a mission into Nazi Germany. He is to lead a band of imprisoned thugs, killers and crazies (The clinical

term for them is "whackjob") who will earn their freedom...should they survive.

To say this film is a classic would be an understatement. The Dirty Dozen created a genre. Many films have been done along these lines, but none have nailed it quite so wonderfully. The cast is truly star-studded with the likes of Lee Marvin, Ernest Borgnine, Charles Bronson, George Kennedy, Telly Savalas, Donald Sutherland and Jim Brown.

This Special Edition is loaded to the gills with all sorts of fun bonus features. Though I must confess I would not call the addition of the 1985 sequel, *The Dirty Dozen: the next mission*, a bonus, it is more like penance. Despite the inclusion of that painful film, this package really gives great bang for your buck. There is an old Marine Corps recruitment video that features Lee Marvin. How could anyone resist Lee Marvin's request to serve his or her country? There is also an audio commentary featuring members of the cast, the author of the novel and the military advisor to the film. This group gives an interesting mix of filming anecdotes and historical facts. These are just the tip of the iceberg as far as extras go.

The bottom line is: This is *The Dirty Dozen* and should be in every film lover's library.

Jeremy Lynch

End Game Sony Pictures

Cuba Gooding Jr., Angie Harmon, James Wood and Anne Archer are in this thriller about a conspiracy that killed a president. Gooding is secret service agent Alex Thomas, who takes a bullet trying to save the president, and Angie Harmon as a tenacious reporter Kate Crawford comes to him with proof of a plot which debunks the lone gunman theory. As they track down the truth they encounter more and more danger which leads them to believe they are on the right track.

While the mystery is not really a huge challenge to solve, and the red herrings are a bit transparent, it is an enjoyable movie with some nice action scenes. Gooding and Harmon work well together, and James woods is rather lively in his role as a secret service chief. All in all a pleasant way to spend 93 minutes.

Jon Jordan

Fangoria's Blooddrive Collection From Koch Entertainment

Fangoria is THE magazine for horror fans, proving again and again that they know more about the horror film genre than anyone. Well taking their love a step further they have started a short film contest, and this set contains 15 of the winning entries.

Volume one is hosted by Rob Zombie and also features a wonderful interview with Clive Barker. There is also a featurette with special effects wizard Stan Winston.

The standout film for me was *THE HITCH* by Drew Rist.

The seven short films are trully great hooor and this is a set not for the faint of heart!

Volume Two is hosted by Mistress Julia, featuring eight short films and an interview with Bruce Campbell on his ranch. I especially loved *WE ALL FALL DOWN* and *DISPOSER*.

Fans of horror know to trust Fangoria Magazine, so I can tell you that you should trust them to put together a great set of short films in this set.

Jon

Firewall Warner Home Video

The last decade has not been too kind to Mr. Ford, but then to be fair his choice in films has resulted in some fairly unpleasant cinema experiences for we the viewing audience as well. Anybody remember *Hollywood Homicide*? That is 116 minutes of my life I will never get back. This time around, Ford is heading back to comfortable territory. He plays Jack Stanfield, head of computer security for a bank. When his family is kidnapped, this everyman must rise up to the level of hero and remove his loved ones from harms way.

All in all, *Firewall* is an enjoyable action/suspense film. As I said, this is more familiar, more comfortable territory for Ford and it shows. His performance is solid stuff, the kind he has given many times before. The film is also helped by the very talented supporting cast, featuring Robert Patrick, Robert Forster, Virginia Madsen, Paul Bettany and Alan Arkin .Madsen does a great

job as the wife. She takes the fairly clichéd role of damsel in distress and breathes some life into it. Bettany steps away from his usual nice guy role to play the ruthless leader of the kidnappers. I had absolutely no problem being afraid of him here. His character is a nasty piece of work, don't EVER take a cookie from him!

Nobody will mistake Firewall for a classic, but it is an entertaining action flick and as good an excuse to make popcorn as you will find.

Jeremy Lynch

Hill Street Blues :Complete First Season Fox Television

Popping in the first disc of this set and watching the first few episodes got me thinking. It made me think about how much I really loved this show. It also makes me realize that no matter how hard people try, television cop shows have not been this good since Hill Street Blues, with the exception of Homicide and The Wire.

It's a combination of things that really make this stand out. The top two would have to be the cast and the writing. It was a show that tried to add realism to the drama of cop shows instead of shoot outs and car chases. The relationships between the characters draw you in and make you feel invested in what happens. And the ensemble cast is a perfect fit, like one big dysfunctional family. What also makes it special is that they are just doing the job, day to day. No major cases, no huge crime lords, just the every day job of policing.

The opening notes of the theme song on piano brought it all flooding back and I actually got a chill and I realized I was grinning as the first episode started. This truly is great television, and being able to watch episodes back to back is wonderful. The extra features are few, a couple commentary tracks and an interview with some of the cast, but the truth is this doesn't need whistles and bells with it, the magic is in the episodes. This is one DVD set that will be re-watched many times in my household. I can't wait for season two.

Jon Jordan

Hill Street Blues Season Two Fox Television

Season two is every bit as good as season one, in fact it's better. The characters are fleshed out more, the actors are more in tune with their roles and the show has its own style well in place. The story lines in season two are terrific, police corruption, JD's on going battle with booze, Renko dealing with Hill's changing role as a black officer and of course Ferrilo and Joyce decide to go public with their relationship.

Season two also had some of the best writing on television, which was only enhanced by a Mr. Robert Crais a story editor in the beginning of the season. Also involved is Anthony Yerkovich who later went on to do Miami Vice. Season two is also loaded with people who went on to be famous for other roles, such as Jonathan Frakes of Star Trek Next Generation playing a drug dealer, Edward James Olmos as a young law student, and Danny Glover as an ex-con.

This series holds up very well, because while clothes styles may change and the monetary values may change, the situations don't. This series has stories that could be happening today in any city. Also included are some very nice featurettes including a closer look at some of the characters of Renko and Belcker and Captain Freedom.

This is a lot of entertainment for the buck, and Hill Street Blues is one of the most re-watchable shows to ever air.
Jon Jordan

I SPY –Set 1 Image Entertainment Inc.

The 1960s James Bond pop culture juggernaut spawned a slew of television spy shows. And my favorite - by a country mile - was I SPY, which ran on NBC for three seasons (from 1965 to 1968) and which I fell in love with as a child when it aired in after school re-runs. Such childhood love affairs can be perilous - many of my favorite shows of the time have not aged well (Hawaii Five-O, anyone?). So it was with some trepidation that I broke the seal on Box Set #1 of I SPY. I needn't have worried. In a nutshell, I SPY rocks.

Robert Culp and Bill Cosby co-star as Kelly Robinson and Alexander Scott, two American spies who love their country but sometimes question the wisdom and morality of their superiors at the Pentagon. Robinson is a Princeton grad and former Davis Cup tennis champion, while Scott is a Rhodes Scholar, fluent in seven languages. They travel the world undercover as a playboy tennis bum and his trainer.

The series is very smart and very funny and never takes itself too seriously, but occasionally achieves moments of darkness, bitter irony, and even poignancy. The fight scenes (directed by Culp, who also wrote and directed some episodes) can be ridiculously slapstick or brutal and heart-pounding, from one episode to the next. But the heart of I SPY is the relationship between Culp (Robinson) and Cosby (Scott). Born out of a close off-screen friendship, Culp's and Cosby's performances set the standard for buddy bantering and improvisational interplay on television. The chemistry between them is extraordinary. You can't not love these guys.

And it goes deeper than that. In 1965, this was landmark television. The first network series to star an African-American, I SPY featured an interracial friendship and professional partnership where the black guy and the white guy were truly equals. An example: In one episode, Culp and Cosby are struggling to find a solution to their current pickle. Cosby comes up with the solution, and then we get the following banter:

Culp: Will you stop that? I hate it when you do that.

Cosby: Do what?

Culp: Being smarter than me. You're always doing that.

Have I mentioned that this was 1965? Never on a soapbox, these guys simply walked the walk, presenting a divided nation with two hip and smart guys whose relationship was way beyond race. This was groundbreaking stuff, and it changed the way many young people looked at race in America. I'm not sure it has been matched to this day. I SPY also broke ground as the first American drama series to be shot on location around the world. Robinson and Scott travel to Hong Kong, Japan, Vietnam, Morocco, Spain, Italy, Japan, Greece, England, Scotland, Mexico and even, occasionally, the United States. The exotic locals are beautifully shot by Fouad Said, whose cinematography grows more ambitious as the series progresses. The list of guest stars represents an embarrassment of riches: Gene Hackman, Jim Brown, Eartha Kitt, Peter Lawford, Leslie Uggams, Martin Landau, Boris Karloff, Vera Miles, Don Rickles, Cicely Tyson, Ricardo Montalban, Sally Kellerman, Richard Kiel, Jim Backus, and so on.

Okay, so aren't there any nits to pick? Sure, a few. You'll find a small number of clunkers scattered among the 82 episodes, as you'd expect with most series. The episodes are not presented in chronological order, or in any apparent order at all – which I find very odd. Since they package the series in three box sets, why not Season 1, Season 2 and Season 3? And, other than Robert Culp's commentary on the last two DVDs, there are no extras, special features, closed captioning, booklets...nothing. Just the shows. While it would be fun to have bonus features, I SPY doesn't need bells and whistles to justify your purchase. You buy it for the shows. You buy it for the wonderfulness of I SPY. And you should.

Sean Chercover's debut novel, *BIG CITY, BAD BLOOD* is coming from William Morrow in January.

I Wake Up Screaming (1941) **Fox Film Noir**

I Wake Up Screaming starring Betty Grable of pin-up fame, Victor Mature and Carol Landis, directed by H. Bruce Humberstone. is visually stunning for a black and white movie. The lighting and composition of this very early if not first Film Noir is the best I've ever seen. Granted it seems a bit clichéd now but remember, they were minting the clichés here. Throw in a good story and decent or better acting and you have a winning flick in this oft overlooked work.

Sports promoter Frankie Christofer picks up a waitress in a diner and decides to make her a star- until somebody murders her. Coppers think he did it and so does everyone else except her sister, who's in love with him and willing to help him clear himself.

So who dun it? A green-eyed sister? Frankie? The newspaperman? The washed up actor? or the lead investigator for the police?(Whaaa...?) Nicely twisted ending.

Listen to the commentary by Film Noir historian Eddie Muller, a pretty entertaining guy in his own right.

If you are a fan of Noir, you owe it to yourself to pick this up.

Lee Crawford

KISS KISS BANG BANG

I just fell in love again. Three times in two hours.... no I'm not getting personal, I'm talking about last year's Kiss, Kiss Bang, Bang. A perfect movie. The writing was spot on. An homage to the pulp novels of the fifties brought up to date. An homage to those classic movie romantic comedies of the thirties. Updated as only Shane Black could do it.

From the opening you are in the movie's grasp. Everyone looks great. Val Kilmer is back in form, and Robert Downey Jr. is once again acting in the seamless fashion that made him a name long before the tabloids got a hold of his personal life. Michele Monaghan is picture perfect as the girl.

This is a movie for everyone to see and enjoy. Black became famous for his "buddy movie" style (Lethal Weapon) and in Kiss, Kiss, Bang, Bang he shows he has a better grasp on the spirit of this movie sub-genre than anyone with an uncanny ear of what the contemporary viewer wants to see.

This is a movie that will only gain fame as time passes. L.A. will never be the same. Harry Lockhart has come to town and has Gay Perry and Harmony to back his play.

So I'm in love with the movie, in love with the director and in love with the cast. And I haven't even seen the special features yet.

Ruth

KISS KISS BANG BANG

Shane Black has made some of my favorite movies and in my opinion this could be the best one he's done. I love the fact that a running thread throughout the film is the "Johnny Gossmer" books (which look just like the Matt Shayne books right down to the McGinnis covers). Robert Downey Jr was at his best playing a bumbling crook who luucks into a movie audition. Kilmer is a PI hired to train him to be a PI. And just like in the old PI books they end up working two cases which connect and wind around each other.

Truly a great film that I will be watching again and again.

Jon

Mr. & Mrs. Smith (Unrated Collector's Edition)**Fox Home Video**

This movie will likely be remembered as the one that brought together Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt. After the filming of this, Brad and Jennifer Aniston divorced. The truth is that Mr. & Mrs. Smith is very entertaining. The charisma of Brad and Angelina individually, as well as their chemistry together, is what makes this film really work.

John and Jane are a married couple that has settled into a...comfortable (Some might say comatose) marriage. It turns out that each of them is using the other as a cover for their real identity as an assassin. When each is hired to take out the other, things start to get interesting. Not only do the bullets fly, the sparks as well. Each remembers what it was about the other that drew them together,

The film is a fun one, with inspired performances by the leads as well as Vince Vaughn. I am not a big fan of Mr. Vaughn, but his performance here is a hoot. The action scenes are entertaining as are the quips that Brad and Angelina trade between punches and bullets.

Among the special features is an alternate ending that I think is MUCH BETTER than the one they chose. We also get to read the pages of the scripted ending which is also better than the ending. The film's actual ending is a little too cute and doesn't quite work as far as logic goes as it does not address the fallout of their actions. Still, even that does not prevent this film from shining.

Also included in the bonus features are scene breakdowns that show the process from storyboard to filming. Some very interesting stuff, even if you are not a total film nerd.

All in all, this is a fun edition of a very fun film. You really can't go wrong picking this one up.

Jeremy Lynch

Munich**Universal Hone Entertainment.**

In 1972, at the Winter Olympics, a group of Arab terrorists kidnapped, and ultimately executed 13 Israeli athletes. After this tragedy, Israel called upon a handful of its citizens to seek out and punish some of the people behind the massacre.

In Munich, Steven Spielberg takes us on a very uncomfortable journey with the men that are called on, by Israel, to exact retribution on the Arab terrorists. The Oscar nominated film is about vengeance and the devastating effects it can have on society and the men that carry it out in the name of justice and country.

Are these acts atrocities, or simply justice being administered by a country that has had its citizens brutally executed simply because of who they are and where they are from? This film chooses not to offer an answer to that question, perhaps because the answer will depend on your point of view. The film instead chooses to focus on what happens when good men who are guided by patriotism commit murder. These men are not sociopaths and therefore struggle and suffer from actions that their job requires.

If you are going to buy this on dvd, and I suggest you do, pick up the two dvd set. The extras feature the thoughts and feelings of the cast in regards to the Munich massacre. You get a much better feeling for the film and why Steven felt compelled to make it despite the criticism he received for doing so.

Jeremy Lynch

Nightstalker The Complete Series Walt Disney Video

The remake of the classic 70's show was put together by Frank Spotnitz of X-Files fame and stars Stuart Townsend as Carl Kolchak. It has similar elements to the first series, Carl is a reporter and he's chasing monsters. It has some similar production values to X-Files and Millennium, however it is not quite up to those standards as the writers tend to fall back on some of the same old clichés. That said it is still a great show with wonderful suspense, and the filming in LA adds a wealth of authenticity and beauty to the show. The actors really make this work as they do not play it campy, Townsend in particular is wonderful in his quest to find who, or what, killed his wife. With over seven hours worth of episodes including some that never aired, and some decent behind the scenes stuff this is a nice way to spend a few evenings just escaping from the world.

Jon

Numb3rs: Complete first season Paramount home Entertainment

Rob Morrow stars in this slightly unusual crime drama. Morrow plays Don Epps, an FBI agent that draws on the mathematical skills of his genius brother Charlie (David Krumholtz) to help solve cases. That description fails to do the show justice. It is that type of description that caused me to miss the first couple of seasons on TV.

There is a lot more to the show than just the crimes, Judd Hirsh plays the father of the main characters. I honestly had forgotten how talented Mr. Hirsh is. The sense of family really comes across, I have no trouble believing they related.

While the use of math in this show can certainly be called a gimmick, it is exceedingly well done. If math had been presented to me this way, I might have actually taken a course or two in college. In the first season, I could not find a single case in which the use of it seemed to be a stretch.

Numb3rs gives us a very fresh approach to a familiar genre of television.

Jeremy Lynch

Road House 2 Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

What can I say about Road House 2 (starring Jonathon Schaech and Jake Busey, Gary's kid. Directed by Scott Ziehl). It's not as bad as I expected. It's nicely photographed. Louisiana is pretty country. It's a valentine to clichés. The acting is...nicely photographed.

The story's pitiful and wildly unlikely: nobody did the math on Jake Busey's age so one doubts he was working as a bouncer 10 or 15 years ago when Dalton, the Patrick Swayze role in the original and the hero's father, was murdered.

The fight scenes are only slightly more realistic than your average Kung Fu film, with punches thrown at the hero that would have killed him if he were 7 or 8 feet tall.

The Director seems fascinated by the women using dirty words (the only one that cusses more is Busey) but it's forced and jarring.

The fact that I started this by saying it was better than I expected should give you some idea how low my expectations were. Walk by this one. Avert your eyes. Use the time to trim your toenails, or someone else's.

Lee Crawford

The St. Valentine's Day Massacre
Fox Home Entertainment

The St. Valentine's Day Massacre, starring Jason Robards and George Segal (directed by Roger Corman), which covers the fairly sophisticated plot by Al Capone to eliminate 'Bugsy' Moran and most of his mob by impersonating police, disarming them and murdering them in cold blood. Never quite got me to suspend disbelief, due in large part to the look of the film, best described as department store diorama.

Everything looked new. Newly constructed, newly tailored, newly purchased. Chicago of 1929 must have been prosperous indeed as only one or two characters had clothes that looked like they'd been worn before. I found it distracting.

There are no 'heroes' in this piece, only bums and victims- mostly bums. Robards' Capone is alternately charming and enraged and not much else. George Segal as one of Morans henchmen showed me more than I'd expected, but then I hadn't expected much.

The level this movie worked well for me was straight reportage'. One gets the feeling they went to great pains to 'get it right' and did. All dramatic tension is here. The voice over narrative could have been irritating but wasn't until the end when it went into; 'Joe Dokes, at 7:45 on the last morning of his life...' Four of five of those and they start to grate.

One other pet peeve: Not only with this film but any that feature firearms in any sort of way. Here it is the .45 caliber Thompson submachine gun using 50 round drum magazines and having a rate of fire of around 150 rounds per minute (if memory serves). This, my dear cinema creators, means that at somewhere around twenty seconds THE DAMN GUN ISN'T GOING TO GO BANG ANYMORE UNLESS YOU RELOAD IT! It may manage a pitiful metallic click, but that's it.

This work is worth a watch if you've heard of the golden age of the Chicago gangs and prohibition and want to know more about them. If you're looking for entertainment, I'd look elsewhere.

Lee Crawford

Smokey and the Bandit
Universal Home Entertainment

Smokey & The Bandit is a weak concept that worked because of the charm, and chemistry, of it's cast. Smokey finds Burt Reynolds at his best. Along for the ride is a surprisingly good Jerry Reed, Sally Fields and Jackie Gleason. Gleason is fantastic as a Texas Sheriff determined to catch the Bandit (Reynolds). He is given some great lines and he delivers them like only the Great One can.

For those of you that are unfamiliar with the flick, here is the scoop:

A rich man makes a bet to The Bandit that he can't go from Atlanta, to Texarkana, pick up a truckload of Coors beer, and bring it back in 28 hours. Of course taking it across state lines is bootlegging, which is a no-no. The Bandit enlists the help of his pal, the Sandman (Reed), and away they go. Bandit picks up a bride (Sally Fields) fleeing her wedding. The Father of the Groom is Sheriff Buford t. Justice (Gleason). Sheriff Justice is unhappy about this turn of events and decides to pursue the errant bride. Chaos ensues.

This is a Sunday afternoon flick. Something you watch when you are feeling stupid and need to be amused. As I said, the charm of Burt and co. makes this fun ride. A word of caution, the main song, by Jerry Reed, will be stuck in your head for some time.

As far as special editions go, this really isn't that special. There are two features on this disc, one of which is CB lingo. If this was 1983, I might have cared. Some of the people watching this won't even know what a CB is. The other feature is a little more interesting. It talks about how the film came about and does include some interviews with a few of the people involved.

Jeremy Lynch

The Wild Wild West: Season One Paramount Home Video

When I was a lad and spent my days in school I would always rush home every day. Did I miss my Mother? Not too much. Was I starving? Not really. I needed to get to the television. Wild Wild West came on every day at 4:00. Well I need rush no more, because the folks at Paramount are putting The Wild Wild West out on DVD. Season one is available now.

Originally airing from 1965 to 1969, The Wild Wild West, starring Robert Conrad, is a show that is set right after the Civil War, and Conrad's character, James West, answers directly to President Grant. He is undercover on his own train working for the Secret Service to keep the west free of plots and madmen. He has as many gadgets as Bond, though because of the era they aren't as sophisticated. He is assisted by Ross Martin in the role of Artemus Gordon, a master of disguise.

The first season is in Black and White, though later seasons would be in color. The very first episode we see West trying to stop a crazed madman from Mexico from chasing out settlers and reclaim New Mexico. The episode is called Night Of The Inferno and co stars Susanne Pleshette who would later go on to marry America's favorite psychologist on The Bob Newhart show. All the shows were titled with "The Night of..." and my favorite of this season is The Night of The Druid's Blood. Evil Magicians, mad scientists, it's all in a days work for our heroes.

This show is loads of fun as the two make their way across the west doing whatever they can to preserve freedom and Democracy. And they go up against some really great bad guys. This really is wonderfully fun television.

The set is extra nice with intros from Robert Conrad and interviews with writers. They have the original "lost" opening, photo galleries and more.

This western espionage has been missing from the shelves and I for one am glad it's finally out. Don't bother with the updated movie, get the original.

28 episodes for a total of over 22 hours of viewing, completely remastered.