

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

The Adventures of Brisco County Jr Warner Home Video

When television shows started showing up on DVD a lot of studios seemed a little hesitant about putting too much out. They released big shows with a pretty obvious audience. The sets sold well and they started putting together all sorts of sets before too long. Early on I had a list of what I really want to own in disc. Brisco County was at the top of the list. I watched it on Fox before the X-Files came on, and then again in reruns on TNT. In fact I got up early and drove to Mystery one bookstore every Saturday morning before 10:00 to see it with Richard Katz. Well It's finally here and on my shelf and I can watch it over and over at my leisure.

In case you don't know anything about the show let me set it up for you. Bruce Campbell is a bounty hunter hired to find the killers of his Father (Brisco County Sr.). He's Harvard educated, he can ride and fight like no bodies business. He's charming, he's funny and he's got an eye to the future, looking for coming things. In other words a role perfect for the ultra-entertaining Bruce Campbell. It's coming up on a new century and things are getting ready to change, and Brisco is ready.

Brisco's sidekicks help make this really entertaining. Socrates Poole is a lawyer working for the same rich men who hired Brisco. Socrates is supposed to oversee things and put in the pay vouchers. As they get to know each other Socrates plays a bigger and bigger role. Lord Bowler (played by Julius Carry) is a rival bounty hunter who is soon working along side Brisco. The two make an unstoppable team as they track down the bad guys. Rounding out the cast are Kelly Rutherford as Dixie Cousins, John Astin as Prof. Wickwire and Billy Drago as the ultimate bad guy, John Bly, a stone killer.

The series premise seems simple, Brisco is going to round up all the members of John Bly's gang for killing his Father. Along the way the discover "The Orb", a device possibly from the future that can grant great powers and has other strange powers as well. The original plan to capture all the bad guys changes as they need to protect the Orb from Bly.

This show is a combination Western/Sci-fi/Comedy and is extremely entertaining. Little glimpses of things to come, like rockets, deepsea diving rigs, hamburgers, and even Elvis just add to the fun.

The special features include a roundtable discussion with the writers, the history of Brisco County, and Bruce Campbell commentary on the pilot, among others. This is a great DVD set and as far as I'm concerned a must have for any collection.

Jon

Battlestar Galactica Season One

Universal

So for those of you who haven't picked up on it yet there's a lot of T.V. watching done in the Jordan house lately. And it's summer. I like outside in Summer. I try to share Jon's enthusiasm for all this T.V. but mostly I go to bed early, or escape to my loading dock outside.

Not last weekend though. We sat down to watch the Sci-Fi channel's mini series Battlestar Galactica and I got up off the couch as the credits rolled on the last episode of season 1.

The most classic story in Science Fiction has to be that of the end of the world. The world ends, there's a small band of survivors and an enemy lurking. Battlestar Galactica is now in the midst of its second life and the show is Stellar.

With the production values of a Hollywood movie, the style is there. Ron Moore's vision of the show elevates it above the mundane. He updates the classic characters, giving them back story to draw from and drama to chew on. Edward James Alamos as Adama, is an internal hero. Mary McDonnell's Laura Roslin is a multifaceted gem.

All are wonderful: Katee Sackhoff as Lt. Kara 'Starbuck' Thrace, Jamie Bamber as Capt. Lee 'Apollo' Adama, James Callis as Dr. Gaius Baltar, Tricia Helfer as Number 6 and Grace Park as Lt. Sharon 'Boomer' Valerii are just a sampling of the talented cast. It glories in the tradition of science fiction where hope is what elevates man above the machine. I revel in this later day Galactica. I have hope for that dreaded machine, T.V.

Ruth

Carnivale: The Complete Second Season HBO

I'll admit that when I first saw Carnivale in the first season I was a little confused. I didn't know what to make of this dark, gritty, dusty show set during the Great Depression. I stuck with it and I before too long I was hooked, like any addict I wanted more, and often.

Season Two picks up right where season one left us, and things start to become clear. An obvious battle of good versus evil is coming, and some of the participants are as old as the dirt they travel on. Ben Hawkins, our reluctant hero is on a quest to find the man he believes is his father, Henry Scudder. He wants some answers about who he is and what he can do. At the same time, Brother Justin is seeking him as well. And as Brother Justin becomes more powerful he also become more ruthless.

This show is such a joy to watch, drawing on apocalyptic visions and tragedy as seen through the eyes of a group of society outcasts. The writing is challenging and thought provoking. And the way it is filmed in mesmerizing, its hard to not want to watch in slow motion so as to take it all in.

There are some nice extra features on here about the show including a discussion with the cast and producers. And while I'm disappointed that there won't be a season three, this does a nice job of bringing some resolution to the story line they started.

This is damn good entertainment.

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

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 breaths 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

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

Marathon Man Paramount

This has been out for a while, having been released on DVD in 2001, but it is a timeless classic and one of the best thrillers ever filmed. Based on the outstanding novel by William Goldman Marathon Man puts an innocent man, Dustin Hoffman, into the middle of a situation involving nazi war criminals and the US Government. He also discovers his brother was a spy and is deeply involved in what is going on. This movie also changed the way most people view dentists forever (Is it safe?). Hoffman puts in an incredible performance as does Laurence Oliver.

The main reason I'm mentioning this is that the DVD has some really nice extra features on it, including interviews and rehearsal scenes. Yet another most own disc.

Jon

Manchild – complete first season Koch Vision

This British television program is one of the funniest things I've seen in a while. Starring Anthony Stewart Head (Buffy), Ray Burdis, Don Warrington and Nigel Havers as men a bit past their prime and suffering some midlife crisis issues, we follow their adventures looking for something to make them happy. These forty something men have spent their time earning money, gone through the divorces and the jobs and putting the kids through school. Now they discover the perils of dating 20-something women and trying to act half their age. This is almost a Sex in The City with British men starring. I laughed a lot, and plan to watch it often. Great comedy.

Jon

The Matt Helm Lounge set Sony

Donald Hamilton's Matt Helm series was one of those series that kind of falls into the Men's Adventure category. Irving Allen saw something in it he liked and went to produce four movies based on Matt Helm starring Dean Martin. Filmed in 1966, 67 and 68 these movies obviously were made to spoof the Bond movies which were becoming a part of our culture. Filled with gadgets, one liners and gorgeous women these films were loads of fun.

The set includes The Silencers ('66), Murder's Row ('66), The Ambushers ('67) and The Wrecking Crew('68), all based on Donald Hamilton novels. The plots are fairly simple, a supervillain is planning a world shattering crime and only Matt Helm can save the day. And this swinging spy, this fore-runner to Austin Powers is just the man to do it!

Great fun.

Jon Jordan

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

Murder Inc

Fox Home Entertainment

Going into this one, had heard of two people in the movie, Peter Falk and Morey Amsterdam (The Dick Van Dyke Show). Also going into this the only things I had seen Mr. Falk in were The Princess Bride, Murder By Death, and The In-Laws. The In-Laws I watched once a loooong time ago, Princess Bride and Murder by Death I can watch over and over. I had of course heard of Columbo, and probably even watched an episode or two growing up, but was not a huge fan. Not saying there was anything wrong with it, I just didn't watch it. Around that time, to a 13 year-old boy Charlie's Angels was "metal more attractive," as Hamlet would say (Even now, thinking back to Cheryl Ladd coming out of the water in that bikini, from the opening credits, gets me all warm & fuzzy). So I guess I knew Peter Falk best in comedies. Murder Inc is not a comedy. It was Mr. Falk's first screen role, and he exploded in the role of 'Kid Twist' Reles, an up and coming hitman in the mob.

I was shocked (pleasantly) at his energy and convincibility (not a real word). The movie itself was just OK, but I would say rent it or even buy it just to see Peter Falk like you (or at least I) have never seen him before. David J. Stewart was also very good as the mob boss that gives Reles his orders. I know what you're thinking, but no, my uncle's name is David Steuert, different spelling and my uncle is A LOT younger. (OK, no one was really thinking it). Murder Inc is based on the true story of Burton Turkus' cleaning up of New York mobs.

Randy Otteson

NYPD Blue Season 4

Fox Home Video

The fourth season of this show is one of the only ones with a sense of stability with the cast. It also could be one of the last really good seasons, before the show's writers decided to make the relationships the most important thing on the show. This is actually the last season I watched on TV. The interplay between Jimmy Smits and Dennis Franz is a major selling point for the show. While the other characters are interesting these two are the obvious choice as stars.

For me the best part of the show was always the police work, the relationships and insights into the lives of all the characters was always a bit over done. This becomes a real problem later in the series. However season 4 is still mostly about the work, and that was always the show's strength. So pick it up for the police work and the look inside a squad room. It's great.

It's also interesting watching this for me because one of the main story editors and writers is David Milch, who would later go on to one of my favorite shows, Deadwood.

Clocking in at 16 and ½ hours this is a lot of viewing for the buck, and Amazon is only charging \$28 for the whole thing.

Jon

Pinky and the Brain season one.

Warner Home Video

Yes, this is Emmy-award-winning cartoon about lab mice, but they are scheming to take over the world. What could be better suited for us? If the Brain were human, he would be the perfect Bond villain. Well, you would have to dress him in some stylish duds, but other than being naked, he has everything one could ever want from a fiendish villain. The Brain, along with his insane sidekick Pinky, spends each night trying to take over the world. While they invariably fail each time, they succeed in providing wonderful entertainment for all that watch. Pinky and the Brain is an exceptional series that while being great fun for kids, is also smart enough that adults can enjoy it as well. Really a great series that you can't go wrong with.

Jeremy

Road House (Deluxe edition)

SPHE

Ok, *Roadhouse*, starring Patrick Swayze, Kelly Lynch, Ben Gazzara, Sam Eliot, Kevin Tighe and Red West, is a guilty pleasure of mine. This is not my proudest declaration, but it is a fact. I like the damn film even as I'm aware of its glaring faults and they are legion. It's generally as subtle as a groin kick, cartoonish, and overdone. It has achieved "Cult Classic" status which usually means it's not very good but a lot of people like it. It is the Western brought into the eighties and hit with a carnivals' paint palate. I watch at least part of it most every time it's on.

Swayze plays Dalton, the super bouncer (Cooler) brought in to clean up the Double Deuce saloon owned by Kevin Tighe, the kind of dive that gives dives a bad name. Dalton, it is mentioned more than once, has a degree in Philosophy, but makes \$500 a night banging heads together (keeping the peace) so you know this is no Bozo, and falls in love (and some dandy lust) with the ER Doctor, Kelly Lynch. Ben Gazzara is awful as the villain, and I mean this in a good way. You'll hate him.

There are a lot of good elements here but they are not quite strung together right to make a first rate movie.

You can skip the extra features for my money, they're no bonus. The interviews with real Bouncers sounds like a better idea than it is.

Still, for me this film's got legs. Director Rowdy Harrington went over the top a bit much, but if the object was to entertain--he did.

Lee

Soundstage Presents Tom Petty

Koch Vision

Let me start by saying that this review is here because a lot of mystery writers like Tom Petty, as do I. I think given the tone of Petty's lyrics this actually seems like something most of our readers may be interested in.

Taken from the PBS how Soundstage this is 109 minutes of Tom Petty and The Heartbreakers performing live. The footage is amazing as is the choice of songs on this live set. Plus the sound quality is top notch. There some cover songs on here, like Baby Please Don't Go, as well as Petty classics such as I Won't Back Down and Refugee. Tom Petty is truly an incredible songwriter and this is one of the better live performances of his I've seen captured on film. I think this is a great DVD for Petty fans, or just people who love damn good American rock and roll.

Jon

Wild Wild West Complete First Season 1965-66

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.

The Wire Complete Third Season

HBO

The Wire is one of the shows that does more than just entertain. When I finish watching an episode I just kind of stare slack jawed at the screen while what I just saw sinks in. Seasons 1 and 2 were both amazing. Season 3 is even better, all 12 episodes grab you and refuse to let go. The focus in season three is back on the Drug dealers, Avon Barksdale and his pending release from jail, and how the business has changed. Drug money is being laundered into real estate, and things are being run like a corporation. It's a different world, and it's harder to know who the crooks are, especially when they are having meetings with politicians and businessmen. Our favorite cops are on the job and back as a special unit. But this time they have to dig deeper as the criminals they pursue get more clever and more violent. This Season has some great writing. There is an episode written by George Pelecanos that is a true Urban Western, all that was missing was the whistling music from the old Eastwood movies. Some of the other writers this season also include Richard Price and Dennis Lehane joining Ed Burns David Simon . Dennis even has a nice little cameo appearance. Simon really has a feel for the streets of Baltimore and watching this you would expect him to be a hardened criminal who has reformed and started writing. Not so, he's just that observant. And he has an uncanny knack to take his observations and share them with us, and for that I'm am grateful. The Wire is one of the best show on the small screen ever, and I don't say that lightly. Each episode unfolding like another chapter in a perfect book. And just like great books need to be read over and over, this will need to be watched repeatedly.

Jon