

## AGATHA CHRISTIE'S POIROT: THE CLASSIC COLLECTION, VOL. 2

Acorn Media

What we have here is a veritable treasure chest of Christie. Or rather of Christie's creation Hercule Poirot. Poirot made his debut in 1920 in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (which is included in this set) and went on to become one of the most famous fictional sleuths in the world.

An odd little Belgian man, Poirot uses his "little grey cells" to solve the crimes that often baffle the police. While his creator did not particularly like the character, his eccentricities brought him close to Dame Agatha's legions of fans.

This set includes nine television movies, all featuring David Suchet as Poirot. While many actors have played the role (including Albert Finney and Peter Ustinov), Suchet is considered by many to be the best Poirot.

This set includes Poirot's debut (the aforementioned *Mysterious Affair at Styles*), which was set during World War I and continues through the years to *Dumb Witness*, which was published in 1944. We are witness to the nationalism of a country at war, as well as seeing some changes in societal views regarding race and class. Suchet's performances are very consistent, as are the screenplay adaptations, to the point where there is no title here that I could honestly call a dud. The actors seem to grow more comfortable with each film and really make the characters their own.

There is only one real "extra" here and that is a featurette entitled Agatha's Christie's Garden: Murder & Mystery in Devon. It runs about an hour with interviews from relatives and even P.D. James. Interesting, but nothing extraordinary.

Fans of Christie really should pick this up, it will provide hours of mystery bliss.

Jeremy Lynch

## THE CLOSER SEASON 2

Warner Home Video

I picked up the first season of *The Closer* because my wife and I are huge fans of Kyra Sedgwick. Big enough fans to buy a DVD set with out having seen any of it. We loved it, and as luck would have it, the following Tuesday the Second Season came out on Disc.

Season two see Brenda Lee Johnson (Sedgwick) more comfortable with her squad in the High Profile Homicide Unit. While still very focused and somewhat lacking people skills she has the respect of the detectives working with her and the bosses seem happy with her work.

I would like to stress that I love this show enough that we bought it brand new the day it was released.

Jon

## THE FALL GUY

20th Century Fox

In the early 80s, we were treated to films full of wacky stunts (*Hooper*, *Smokey & the Bandit*) thanks to Burt Reynolds. Lee Majors saw the success of those films and had a notion to bring that kind of wacky fun to the small screen.

And so *The Fall Guy* was born.

Lee Majors stars as Colt Seavers, stunt man and part-time bounty hunter. He is assisted in his stunts and crime fighting by his younger cousin Howie (Douglas Barr) and Jodie (Heather Thomas).

Each episode features a stunt and some sort of mystery/crime storyline. The crime stories are nothing you have not seen before on numerous other shows, but anyone watching this show is likely

not looking for brilliant, original writing.

No, what they are looking for is a little fun. And on that front, *The Fall Guy* does its job.

To keep the show authentic, the producers had to keep a steady stream of stars making guest appearances. In these early episodes, we see Farrah Fawcett, James Coburn, Eddie Albert, Robert Wagner, Milton Berle, Linda Evans, Don Ho, Jamie Farr, Shecky Greene, Cathy Lee Crosby, Buddy Hackett, Heather Locklear and Herve Villechaize.

Certainly that list seems less than impressive today, but most were stars at the time.

For extras, we do get a segment featuring the cast and creators looking back at the show, but it runs a little over ten minutes and really doesn't run long enough to provide much other than a few fun bits of info.

We also get a look at the title song, which apparently was a bit of a hit in...Germany. The same country that seems fond of the vocal stylings of one Mr. David Hasslehoff. Must be something in the water.

Jeremy

## HUSTLE: SEASONS 1,2 AND 3

BBC Warner

*Hustle* is one of those rare shows, an ensemble cast with a classic theme that manages to remake it and make it feel like a classic in the process. Five grifters working together as a team in London, always on the lookout for the next big score. Created by Tony Jordan who is also the genius behind *Life On Mars* and *EastEnders* this show has what is becoming a signature look for him, interesting camera angles, great editing which includes switching to slow mo and back at just the right times and cutting from angle to angle creating a full on feeling of being in the room. It also has some great shots when all but the cast are frozen. Add to this a perfect blend of music and a terrific group of actors and you've got gold.

The series opens with Mickey "Bricks" Stone (Adrian Lester) getting out of prison. In need of cash he falls back on what he does best, con people out of money. He puts together a crew of his old friends Ash Morgan (Robert Glenister), Stacie Monroe (Jaime Murray) and his mentor, Eddie (Robert Vaughn). During their first con together since Mickey's release a new kid to the game bullies/cons his way on to the team. Danny Blue played by Marc Warren is the newbie with a chip on his shoulder and something to prove. He also has a lot to learn. And learn he does.

Each episode is another con, perpetrated on people who deserve it and can afford to get fleeced. I love watching the set up for each gig, in particular I liked the modern day take off of the con that Redford and Newman used in *The Sting*. Updated cons include land fraud deals, stock manipulations and

The show is smart, hip and incredibly watchable. I love the music, it feels like a sixties caper film shot now. The dynamic between the different characters is terrific, Mickey would love to make a move on Stacie but knows he shouldn't. Eddie is dealing with getting older while Mickey has moved into his role as the teacher with Danny. Ash is the gadget guy, but also seems to relish the job the most and as a result fits in well with everyone. Attention is paid to the history between the characters and also to showing that they do indeed follow a set of their own morals.

The show moves fast and has plenty of action, each episode feeling like a mini movie. Especially satisfying is the explanation for each hustle they do. I would recommend this to anyone who enjoys a good caper, or just likes damn entertaining television.

Jon

**THE HUSTLER: SPECIAL COLLECTOR'S EDITION**20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox

Paul Newman. What can you say? The man is not only an unbelievable actor, but a spectacular human being and from all accounts just a really nice guy. Not only has he been involved in politics, but gives until it hurts to charities. He started The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp for disabled children, all of the profits for his Newman's Own food company go to charity, and he sends money to help impoverished countries in Africa.

I first saw *The Hustler* when I was 17, and said, "Hmm. That was long and depressing...but good." (I was 17.) The reason that I saw it was that I had gone to see *The Color of Money*, and thought it was a very good movie, and wanted to see where the Fast Eddie Felson character had started...and I liked to play pool. I have watched the film several times since then and have changed my opinion. It is long, yes. It is depressing, yes. But it is a very good movie. What I realize now is that it is not so much about pool, but about self destructive people; set in the seedy, smoky, alcohol filled world of pool halls.

Paul Newman plays Fast Eddie Felson, a pool hustler who thinks he is the best player in the world, and who wants to beat the reigning pool champion Minnesota Fats, played by Jackie Gleason.

Newman was nominated for an Academy Award (for the second time) for his role as Fast Eddie. He did not win, but 20 some years later when he reprised the role in *The Color of Money*, he won the little, bald, gold one. Apparently he was the losingest actor in the history of the awards, so much so that they gave him a lifetime achievement award a few years before he won a trophy on his own. (Paul wouldn't say it, but I will: IN YOUR FACE, ACADEMY AWARDS!) But because he was tired of losing, he decided not to attend the ceremony that year--oops.

This edition is bursting at the seams with extras. There are several segments featuring interviews with the cast and crew: one on pool hustling and a few on pool shots. Also included is the A&E Biography of Paul Newman. There is what they call an Audio Commentary, but it is actually just interviews with the cast and crew--many of the comments are taken from the video segments that are also included.

Randy Otteson

**JESSE STONE: NIGHT PASSAGE & JESSE STONE: DEATH IN PARADISE**

Sony Pictures Television

Tom Selleck reprises his role as disgraced alcoholic LAPD cop Jesse Stone, hired as police chief of Paradise, Massachusetts. A prequel to 2005's *Stone Cold*, *Night Passage* covers Jesse's cross-country drive to accept the job, his bonding with the town's four-person police force, and his investigation into why he was hired in the first place.

The first call Jesse responds to is at the home of Joe and Carole Genest. Recently divorced, Joe (Stephen Baldwin) has violated a restraining order and threatened to kill his wife. Chief Stone explains quite frankly that another restraining order probably won't work in this case, and just when Joe thinks he's off the hook, Jesse kicks him in the groin.

Robert B. Parker's books often explore the gray areas between "right" and "legal," "wrong" and "illegal", with frontier values usually prevailing. Though considerably older than the Stone of the books, TV Western star Selleck proves the best lead to deliver Parker's themes as well as his dryly funny dialog.

*Night Passage's* main conflict is the suspicious death of ex-police chief Lou Carson (Mike Starr). True to Parker's recent form, the man behind the death is known well before the end. The question is, will Jesse get himself together enough to act on his suspicions and bring the man to justice?

*Death in Paradise* picks up after the events of *Night Passage* and *Stone Cold*, and is more of a mystery. The body of a teenage girl is found in a lake, and Jesse and the Paradise police must piece together the details of her life and how she died.

After the ratings success of *Stone Cold* there was some buzz that Stone might fuel a weekly drama. Exec producer Selleck wisely stayed with the TV movie format, insuring a consistent, not overplayed tone in the writing, direction, and chemistry among regulars.

The *Night Passage* and *Death in Paradise* DVDs are presented in widescreen. They include no behind-the-scenes extras, but subtitles and audio are available in several languages.

Gerald So

**JOHN GRISHAM'S THE RAINMAKER**

Paramount Home Entertainment

*John Grisham's The Rainmaker* is a good, solid film with an engaging story and fine acting throughout. Matt Damon leads as Rudy Baylor, a recent law school grad. Baylor is forced by circumstance to work for Bruiser (Mickey Rourke), a bottom feeding lawyer at the very bottom, mentored by Deck (Danny DeVito)--who has ambulance chasing down to an art, but has blown the Bar Exam five times. Round this out with Jon Voigt as the insurance company's high priced talent, Danny Glover as the sympathetic judge, and Mary Kay Place as the mother of a boy about Rudy's age who is dying of cancer (because the insurer won't pay for a bone marrow transplant), and you've got a movie that rings like an anvil. Did I mention solid?

The sub-plot featuring Claire Danes as an abused wife who catches Rudy's eye as he's hiding out in the hospital cafeteria, studying for his Bar Exam, has disaster written all over it; and doesn't disappoint.

I did mention solid, didn't I? This one has substance to burn and will hold your eyes.

The Special Features section includes commentary by Director Francis Ford Coppola and Danny DeVito, along with deleted scenes and screen tests; but for me the real treasure is 'Francis Ford Coppola Directs John Grisham's The Rainmaker' which is a mouthful but not to be missed. In it we learn of taping a rock to Matt Damon's back so he will look ill at ease, or replacing Claire Danes' wheelchair seat with a block of ice to help her look unwell and make her tremble slightly. This section is full of such things; the shoving match between Damon and Voigt in the parking lot to get their dander up for a confrontation scene is great.

Very solid.

Lee Crawford

**MAGNUM P.I.: THE COMPLETE 7TH SEASON**

Season seven of Magnum was actually supposed to be the final season of Magnum.

By this point, the show was a bit long in the tooth, but this season features some outstanding episodes. Laura features Frank Sinatra (in his last major acting role) as a retired NY cop trying track down his granddaughter's killers. A very powerful episode that is a must see. Sinatra was supposed to make a return appearance, but scheduling conflicts prevented it from ever happening.

Slightly less so is the *Murder, She Wrote* crossover. It is here and seeing it again makes me very sad. But MSW was doing well and CBS liked doing crossovers so it happened. There were plans to have a Magnum/Equalizer crossover but the plans fell through. The final episode is something to be treasured. Had the series ended here, I think it would be one of the greatest series finales of all time.

As I said, some of this is less than top notch, but Laura and the season finale make this a must own for Magnum fans.

Jeremy

#### **MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE - THE SECOND TV SEASON (1966)**

Paramount

This review will self destruct in 15 seconds.

Season two of this wonderful show brings in Peter Graves to replace Steven Hill as the leader of the Impossible Missions Force. As much as I enjoyed Hill in the show, Pete Graves is the face that most people associate with the series. Returning are Barbara Bain, Martin Landau, Peter Lupus and Greg Morris.

Season two weighs in with 25 episodes at almost 21 hours. The writing is a bit tighter and the action seems a bit larger. While it may seem dated, this show really broke a lot of ground and set the stage for other shows to follow even years later. Shows like *MI-5* (Spooks), *The Pretender*, and many others really owe Mission Impossible. It's tightly plotted with adventurous locations and tons of gadgets coupled with a great soundtrack. The big budget ( the largest in its time) shows with all the elaborate sets.

The really fun part is that so much of this is steeped in the cold war. This team doesn't go after little fish and they seem to be saving the world in every episode. I really enjoyed *The Echo Of Yesterday* and *The Killing*. This is a great way to spend a few nights and is a welcome addition to any DVD collection.

Jon

#### **FILM NOIR CLASSICS COLLECTION VOL. 4**

Warner Home Entertainment

Before I actually talk about this set, I must give major kudos to Warner for delving into their very deep library to provide us with many delightful lost gems. Warner Brothers is not only using their own catalog, but also that of those they have acquired over the years. Studios like RKO, Monogram and MGM. Some of these would likely have never seen a modern release otherwise.

Volume four has more titles than usual, with ten films in all, with names like Robert Mitchum (in 2), Sterling Hayden, Charles Bronson, Edward G. Robinson, Mary Astor, and Jane Mansfield. The films are put together in sets of two and those sets are available individually. Those sets are *Crime Wave/Decoy*, *Act of Violence/Mystery Street*, *They live by Night/Side Street*, *Illegal/ The Big Steal*, and *Where Danger Lives/ Tension*.

*Crime Wave* is one that really caught my attention. Steve Lacey (Gene Nelson) is an ex-con now trying to live a stand up life. He is married and keeping out of trouble. Since this is a noir flick, things can't stay that way. Nelson finds himself caught between a hard-nosed cop (Hayden) and ruthless gang of robbers. The gang takes his wife hostage to force him to act as a wheelman for a major bank job.

*Crime Wave* is wonderfully shot, with great performances by everyone. And while the movie is great, the commentary is just as good. Noir Czar Eddie Mueller and iconic author James Ellroy are awesome here and deliver fun, informative banter. I understand that they are friends in real life, and that come across here. Even if you

don't generally check out the commentaries, you will want to hear this one.

Paired with *Crime Wave* is the bizarre *Decoy*. When was the last time you watched a noir film that included raising the dead? *Decoy* has an awesome femme fatale in Margot Shelby (Jean Gillie). She spends virtually all of her time seducing, betraying or killing the hapless men that get in her way.

The entire set is entertaining, with no real stinkers in the bunch. We get many of the usual themes of the genre, with *Act of Violence* showing a man's past transgressions returning to haunt him and *Mystery Street* gives us a man whose attempts to conceal his illicit behavior put him in even hotter water. But one film, *They live by Night* is the odd one of the bunch in that it has a bit of a love story going on.

Fans of old cinema will be in heaven with *Film Noir Classics Collection Volume 4* and should certainly pick up a copy.

Jeremy

#### **PERFUME**

Paramount Home Entertainment

Based on Patrick Süskind's critically acclaimed novel, *Perfume* shows us a man's obsession with the smells around him. His obsession drives him to unspeakable acts that will also surely put you on the edge of your seat...or perhaps curled up in a fetal position.

Jean-Baptiste Grenouille is one of the great unwashed, much like those around him except for one thing: he possesses an extraordinary sense of smell, so acute that it can pick each individual aroma out of a crowded room, or the fragrance of each flower in a garden. With this sense of smell, Jean-Baptiste develops an obsessive desire to preserve each scent.

*Perfume* is directed by Tom Tykwer (*Run Lola Run*), who does a very nice job of retaining everything that made the book so captivating.

Set in the 18th century, *Perfume* is both a rich period piece, as well as a gripping, unnerving horror flick that could very well inhabit your dreams for many days to come.

There is one extra here, and fortunately it is a nice one. *The Story of Perfume* gives us a look at the process of bringing an excellent book to the big screen. Insightful with only a limited amount of shilling done (which is nice since we already bought the damn thing).

Jeremy

#### **THE PRACTICE – VOL. 1**

20th Century Fox

Prior to watching this set, *The Practice* was--to me--the answer of a trivia question: From the ashes of what show did *Boston Legal* come?

This collection makes up the first two seasons of *The Practice*.

Don't get too excited, we are only talking about thirteen episodes.

*The Practice* is about Bobby Donnelly (Dylan McDermott) a criminal defense lawyer whose morals are, at the start of the show, a tad...elastic. His office is struggling simply to pay the lease. But all of that changes when he wins a major murder case, at which time there is a veritable smorgasbord of killers and drug dealers vying for the services of Bobby and his merry band of lawyers.

As business increases, Bobby struggles to follow his moral compass while still making the office as successful as possible. The show is a tad uneven in these early episodes, but still fairly entertaining.

Without a doubt, the highpoints of this set are special appearances

of John Larroquette and Ed Asner. Asner plays a judge (a role he returns to a few times over the course of the shows run) and John plays...well, you can see for yourself. I will say that Larroquette returns to play this character a total of six times over the years, picking up an Emmy in 1998 for the character.

Also worth mentioning is Linda Hunt. Linda has a recurring guest role as a judge. Her scenes with Bobby are excellent; they have good chemistry. Her character plays a part in Bobby developing a moral compass.

As I said, the set is worth buying simply for John Larroquette's episode, but the others will certainly provide some bang for your buck.

Jeremy

### RESCUE ME Season 3

Sony

When I first saw Dennis Leary it was on commercials on MTV for MTV. He was brash, snarky, sarcastic and funny as Hell. Soon I started seeing him in films and enjoyed his performances, though the first few didn't really show a lot other than Dennis Leary being Dennis Leary. It soon became obvious thought that this is someone who is much more than a comedian.

His work on Rescue Me has been amazing. In the third season he is completely Tommy Gavin. From the beginning we've known Tommy is haunted by people he couldn't save, and while that is still true it doesn't play as large a part. I think part of this is because it's becoming obvious that the person he needs to save and can't seem to is himself.

It's not that he isn't trying, he's sober, he's trying not to smoke and to be a good Dad. But with all the outside forces pushing on him it's all he can do to keep it together. His brother is sleeping with his ex-wife, some of the guys in the station want to get out, and Sheila is quickly loosing it and seems to want to take Tommy down with her.

Rescue Me is about a group of firemen, but it's really about someone just trying to survive his life. It's not as depressing as it sounds though. There is more than enough comedy to keep the show from causing viewers from slashing their wrists. I really enjoyed the episode where they put out a fire in a building with pot growing in the basement and they all end up stoned while the plants burn.

Leary and company are amazing, and as if that's not enough they all have some great people taking smaller roles, Susan Serandon, Marisa Tomie, and Tatum O'Neal are great and Charles Durning should get a damn Emmy. If you haven't seen this show you are really missing out.

Special features include a look at locations, a gag reel and 5 featurettes.

Jon Jordan

### SERENITY (COLLECTOR'S EDITION)

Universal Studios Home Entertainment

I am writing this with the assumption that you have already seen *Firefly* the series. If not, go out and buy it right now. Seriously, purchase it and your life will have more value...or at least more quality to it.

*Serenity* picks up after the series and tells the story of River, a young passenger on the starship *Serenity* who was subject to experiments by the government. The idea was to turn her into a perfect killing machine. Since the government put so much time and energy into her, they naturally want her back.

An assassin is sent in pursuit and now the fun begins. We see the

crew of mercenaries suddenly finding a cause to believe in--to die for if need be.

*Serenity* is best if one has already seen the *Firefly* series (hence my urging that you get *Firefly*), but even by itself it is entertaining. The characters are colorful and the banter is delightful.

This set is jacked to the gills with extras. We get deleted scenes, extended scenes, a bunch of behind the scenes featurettes and a very nice commentary by Joss Whedon.

The world of *Serenity* and *Firefly* is a magical one, the *Wild West* set in space, and is worth owning.

I highly recommend both this set as well as the series for fans of westerns as well as sci-fi.

Jeremy

### WILD WILD WEST: SEASON TWO

Paramount Home Entertainment

24 hours and 13 minutes, 28 episodes in living color make up the Second Season of *Wild Wild West*, It's the first season they shot in color and it show Robert Conrad in full action mode.

While I really enjoyed *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, I think WWWT is still his best work, he's young and doing all his own stunts and he's all attitude. Ross Martin really embraces his role as well in the second season as his character Artemus Gordon and Jim West are working closer together.

This isn't high drama and it's doubtful that either actor will be remembered for stellar performances, but *Wild Wild West* is still one of the most entertaining westerns in my mind. It has all the best elements of western, espionage and pure straight up action. The Bond inspired gadgets just add to the entertainment value, as do the one liners and the outrageous story lines.

Maybe its nostalgia, maybe it's the camp factor, maybe it's just the fun, whatever it is, I really enjoyed this box set.

Jon