

3:10 TO YUMA

Lionsgate

Director James Mangold recently wandered into western territory when he did the Johnny Cash biopic Walk the Line. So it was no shock when it was announced that his next flick would be honest to God western.

3:10 is an excellent film that is respectful to the original, without being a note-for-note remake.

Christian Bale is a Civil War vet who currently lives, with his wife and two boys, on a small ranch in Arizona. Times are tough and Evans is struggling to hold onto said ranch so when word comes that \$200 is being offered to anyone that will help transport outlaw Ben Wade (Russell Crowe) to a nearby town and put him on a train, he jumps at the opportunity.

While there are some things about Crowe that bug me, I can't deny he is an excellent actor. If Ben Wade is not pure evil, he is pretty damn close to it. . . Bale delivers a solid performance here. Nothing flashy, but then the scenery chewing is clearly intended for the villainous ruffians that Bale is facing.

The supporting cast is excellent, with the side of good rounded out by Alan Tudyk (as a small town doctor) and Peter Fonda (a bounty hunter) and Ben Foster (Playing a grade A wack-job) heading up Wade's crew.

There is a nice audio commentary by director James Mangold as well as some deleted scenes and your basic behind-the-scenes featurette.

3:10 is a delightful modern western and will be enjoyed by fans of the genre, as well as anyone looking for a shoot em up battle between good and bad.

Jeremy Lynch

CSI: The complete 7th season

Paramount Home Entertainment

I am not a regular watcher of CSI. It is not that I hated it; the show simply had nothing to draw me in, none of the actors interest me (though William Peterson was the bomb in The Beast).

So season seven was my introduction to the world of CSI. I will start by saying I am going to ignore the major flaws in the show, the stuff that sends forensic scientists frothing at the mouth worse than a crazed St. Bernard with rabies.

I sat down looking to be entertained. On that front, CSI delivered. From what I gather, the subplots involving the various characters were a relatively new thing for the show. They were a major reason I enjoyed it. I have never been a big fan of the standard police procedurals; I enjoy ongoing stories and more personal content. This season focused on a serial killer called the Miniature Killer. Said wacko leaves behind little...miniature replicas of the crime scenes (including itty bitty bodies). ~Sigh~ the real world never has such interesting lunatics. Cannibals are about as interesting as they come.

So TMK is a true match for Gil Grissom (William Peterson) and his band of techs. This guy seems to thrive on perfection. That can be a problem for Crime Scene techs since their job is finding the evidence left behind by the bad guys.

This brings me to my biggest gripe: THE STORY DOES NOT END WITH THE SEASON FINALE!!!!!!!

They chose to wait until the season premiere of season eight to complete the story. For somebody watching it on DVD, this is really frustrating. The felines in the house became quite alarmed at my vocal declarations of outrage. Normally these come when I am either at the computer or opening the mail.

Now this is not enough for me to say that one should not buy the set, but I think it is worth pointing out so more people are not left cursing the producers of CSI at the end of their viewing binge (I know I am not the only one to watch hours at a time).

This season also saw William Peterson leave for a while. Liev Schreiber (Most recently seen in the remake of The Manchurian

Candidate) steps in for a stint as Michael Keepler. This change allows the producers to play around with the dynamics of the team. It makes for a nice change of pace and kept the show interesting. This season also sees appearances by John Mayer, Danny Bonaduce (who, I guess, has a right to make a living), Sean Young (What the hell happened to her career?), Ned Beatty, Ally Sheedy (See my comment about Sean Young), Julie Hagerty, Roger Daltrey and Cirque du Soleil.

For extras, there are seven commentary tracks here, as well as six featurettes. Some of these are quite interesting, including ones that look at Cirque du Soleil and Roger Daltrey (The show's theme song being from his old band The Who), while another focuses on the season-long story of The Miniature Killer.

Overall, I enjoyed this season and will likely come back for season eight...and not just for the completion of the TMK story!

Jeremy

DA VINCI'S INQUEST: Season 2

Acorn Media

Dominic Da Vinci (Nicholas Campbell) is a coroner for Vancouver. For those unfamiliar with Canadian policy, the coroner is in charge of all deaths. It is his (or her) responsibility to rule as to whether or not a death was accidental or intentional. They have the right to issue warrants and call an inquest (essentially a type of trial with a jury) to rule on a death and receive suggestions as to how things might better be handled in the future.

So while the show certainly is a police procedural, it also contains more humanity. There are episodes looking at the problems dealing with mental health, the impact and politics involved with placing blame on the loss of life on a fishing boat.

DVI looks far more real than any police show we currently have in the U.S. The characters look and feel like people we see around us. As a result, the suspension of disbelief is much easier than with CSI or Criminal Minds. Credit for this must be given both to the producers as well as the cast. While the cast does an exceptional job making these characters real people, the producers have made sure to avoid the glossy look and feel that is often part of television. Though not as good as the first, season two is engaging, entertaining and well worth the price of the package.

Jeremy

EASTERN PROMISES

Universal Studios Home Entertainment

Until about a year ago, I had little use for David Cronenberg. His stuff was simply not my cup of tea. That was until A History of Violence blew me away. That film showed me that there was a lot more to Cronenberg than I had thought. He proved a real skill for filming violence without seeming gratuitous. Brutal? Yes. Extreme? Yes, but not gratuitous.

Eastern Promises continues what Cronenberg started with AHoV. It shows us a world of grey where violence is simply part of the world around us.

Naomi Watts is Anna. Anna, a midwife, delivers a baby to a dying teenager. In the deceased mother's bag is a diary and the card of a Russian restaurant. Looking for info about the girl, Anna goes to the restaurant and talks to the owner, a kind grandfatherly figure named Semyon (wonderfully portrayed by Oscar nominee Armin Mueller-Stahl). He informs her that he does not recognize the picture of the girl. That is that until Anna mentions finding a diary. There is something chilling about his seemingly casual reaction to this news. Viggo Mortenson is Nikolai, a chauffeur for Semyon, who develops a sort of connection with Anna. Viggo is amazing here. He delivers much with body language and facial expressions. There is a scene, in a bathhouse, in which he battles armed thugs completely nude. We all have had unsettling dreams about being naked. But rarely with armed men trying to kill us. Well...at least I have not. If you

have, you might want to lay off the late night snacks and maybe see a therapist.

While this is indeed a mystery, it is also a fascinating look into the Russian mafia. I heard somebody compare it to the Godfather and that is not completely inaccurate. It does show us the workings of said crime organization in a sort of detached manner.

Eastern Promises is a mesmerizing film that will knock you back, then help you up. Cronenberg never passes judgment on his characters; he leaves that for the audience. This is something that many other directors could learn from him. I never felt preached to, or that I was being manipulated into feeling a certain way. It is as though Mr. Cronenberg has faith in the audience and allows us to react as we see fit.

Folks with delicate sensibilities should probably avoid this film, but this incredible film will likely delight anyone looking for a well-made intelligent crime film.

Jeremy

JERICHO: Season 1

Paramount

I was in Target looking for something, I don't remember what. As I walked past the DVD racks I noticed this box set. I hadn't seen any when it aired and knew nothing about the show. I picked it up, it looked interesting, so I bought it. Am I glad I did.

The premise is simple, there is a nuclear bombing in the US, major cities are gone and the country is in turmoil. No one knows what's going on and there is no way to find out. Television and radio are gone, and traveling is dangerous. The show focuses on one small town called Jericho and how the people of this town deal with the crisis. It's obviously wide open to ideas for different things to explore. Secrets and agendas, personal problems and things on a global scale.

The acting is strong, in particular Skeet Ulrich is terrific. The writing is also quite good, the show builds at a nice pace, not too fast, but fast enough to keep you interested.

I really hope they do more.

Jon

MR. BROOKS

Fox Home Entertainment

First off, I want to say I was a HUGE Kevin Costner fan in the 80's and early 90's. I guess I cannot say "was." I am still a fan! The sheer volume of great or at least entertaining movies he has made are staggering.

No Way Out, The Untouchables, Bull Durham, Silverado, Fandango, Sizzle Beach, U.S.A.

OK, Not *Sizzle Beach, U.S.A.*, which I have not actually seen, but the rest on the list are FANTASTIC movies!

In didn't even mention *Field of Dreams*, Academy Award winning *Dances with Wolves, JFK, A Perfect World* was a great movie, directed by Clint "Number of Oscar's I win must match my age" Eastwood. *Wyatt Earp* was a very good movie. *13 Days* was ... (running out of adjectives...) Supertabulous (making them up now). *Robin Hood* was entertaining (Editor's note: The hell it was!). *Tin Cup* was a very fun movie. *Open Range* was a Solid movie. I even thought *Waterworld* didn't suck as much as everyone else did.

(Editor: What about The Postman??)

Hold on, let me add that up....1.....2....3....12....carry the 9....44....230.... let's just say that's a CRAP Load.

Have all his movies been SUPERFABULANTASTIC? No. But who's have? Even Cary Grant and Humphrey Bogart had stinkers.

(To quote Myster Lynch) Having said that...

Mr. Brooks. It was...um...an "ok" movie. I liked Kevin as the tortured serial killer with a conscience (hence the "tortured"). I like Kevin as a bad guy. *A Perfect World* he was VERY good. Even *3,000 Miles to Graceland* he was good in. William Hurt was good playing

Kevin's "Dark side."

Think of this as another Kevin Costner "old, going to retire, grizzled man forced to train a new, up and comer" themed movie like "Bull Durham," and...Well, that's the only one I can think of at the moment (Editor's note: The turkey with Ashton Kutcher was another).

OK, think of Mr. Brooks as a *Bull Durham* type movie, but instead of Baseball Catcher, he's a serial killer! I like that idea, but somewhere between concept and execution (no pun intended), something went horribly wrong.

It was sort of a jumbled mess of a hardworking father and husband, who happens to be a serial killer, who's daughter has some MAJOR issues(she may has caught that wacky serial killer gene) and the cop chasing him also has her personal (Divorce) and professional (a different serial killer is trying to kill her) problems. Add on to THAT yet ANOTHER serial killer wants him to show him the ropes of the business or he'll turn him in! It's not easy being a father/husband/mentor/serial killer/wage earner. Does Hallmark have a card for that demographic?

Randy Otteson

MURDER SHE WROTE: The complete 8th season.

Universal Home Entertainment

Detective dramas for the elderly set became extremely popular in the 80's and *Murder She Wrote* was the cream of the crop. While the show has many detractors today, it's clear to see why it was ranked in the top 20 Nielsen ratings for nearly all of its 12 seasons. Compared to the gory forensics of *CSI* or *House*, *MSW* seems tame in comparison; however, by this time the show had become a well oiled machine, featuring clever mysteries and a parade of guest stars from Hollywood's most glamorous era. All 22 episodes of seventh season were released October 9th, and are a welcome addition to any DVD collection.

Season six began the trend of guest detectives taking over for Jessica Fletcher, as the strenuous schedule of filming an entire season became too much for its star. This concept was met with middling success and declined ratings; therefore Lansbury is featured more frequently in season seven. Ratings bounced back, leading producers to drop the substitute sleuths altogether in later years. Thank heavens for that, as Jessica's misadventures in Cabot Cove are clearly the stand-out episodes. In particular, check out "Thursday's Child" featuring Hitchcock blonde Vera Miles.

The picture and sound quality is good for a show of its age. There is minimal grain on the picture and the soundtrack is clear, featuring its original mono presentation. The discs continue to be single sided and housed in regular amarays. A coupon for season 8 suggests there will be more *MSW* arriving in 2008. I'm crossing my fingers the body count at Cabot Cove continues to pile up on my DVD shelf.

Bradley Hayward

OCEAN'S THIRTEEN

Warner Home Video

Ocean's Thirteen succeeds if only for the simple reason that it washes the rancid taste of *Ocean's Twelve* from our mouths. The jist of O13 is that Reuben Tishkoff (Elliott Gould) suffers a near-fatal heart attack after being double-crossed by hotel mogul Willie Bank (Al Pacino). Danny tried to warn him that Bank was a rat and would betray him, but Reuben, desperate to become relavent in today's Vegas, partnered up with Bank. Bank's betrayal triggers a near-fatal heart attack and Reuben is left for dead. Danny and Rusty get word and round up the gang to right this wrong by destroying Bank.

How?

By making sure the grand opening is an utter disaster both financially and personally. Their intent is to rig ALL the games, as

well as insure that not only does The Bank not get the "Five Diamond" award, but gets a truly awful review. This time around, everyone remembered to bring both their talent AND their charm. While not as good as Ocean's Eleven, O13 is fun and the time flies by while absurdly impossible tricks are done. You have no trouble suspending your disbelief because you are having a load of fun.

Among the more entertaining side plots is Scott Caan and Casey Affleck's involvement in a labor strike at a dice-making factory in Mexico. Pretty much everyone is given their chance to shine, though Matt Damon's character annoyed me more than a little. His character is supposed to be the younger, goofy one. Honestly, much of his performance screams dork and simply did not jive, for me, with the rest of the film.

The extras are pretty damn chintzy. We get an interesting look at the history of Vegas as well as a handful of deleted scenes. None of this is bad, but it would have been nice to get a little more meat instead of these meager scraps. Don't head into it expecting great cinema, just look for a breezy flick and you should have a good time.

Jeremy

RESCUE DAWN

Fox Home entertainment

Rescue Dawn is a beautifully filmed, almost lushly filmed movie dealing with the unpleasantness of mankind to itself. Thankfully it does not dwell on torture as some do, but the grinding hardship of life as a prisoner of war in Viet Nam in 1965, where even the guards were hungry.

Christian Bale plays pilot Dieter Dengler in this story based on Dengler's capture and escape, and does a nice job with it. He, along with Steve Zahn and a first rate supporting cast, make you care about these characters early and all the way through. Using the phrase "keeps you on the edge of your seat" is probably enough to get me barred from the reviewers club, but it does. Forty minutes into his first mission, Dengler is shot down and scrambles to evade capture, then to survive as an unloved prisoner. Strong stuff, but I fear the subject matter may doom this film from the start. It is not a feel good movie, much as they try to pump it up at the end, even though I feel they did most everything right, it leaves a sort of an ash on the tongue hangover. Too bad. This is a well made piece.

The Specials take you behind the scenes where Director Herzog does everything himself before asking his actors to do it. This is a good, well made film that may not get its due. And that's a shame.

Jeremy

SHOOT EM UP

New Line Cinema

We start out with Mr. Smith, sitting on a park bench, eating a carrot. He is looking a tad scruffy..who am I kidding? He looks one step above a homeless vagrant.

Anyway, he is sitting there when suddenly a very pregnant lady races by with some Mcnasties in close pursuit.

Mr. Smith does what any good guy would do: He steps up and helps the lady in distress. A question: Have you ever seen a carrot used as a lethal weapon? If not, now is your chance.

A baby is born, but the mother does not survive. Mr. Smith now finds himself in possession of a newly orphaned infant. He really has no time to ponder this, as head scumbag Hertz (Paul Giamatti in a wonderfully evil performance) wants the child. Mr. Smith, feeling that Hertz might not have the child's best interests at heart, chooses not to relinquish the child.

So now we have conflict. And with that, the bullets fly more than ever.

Oh yeah, the lovely Monica Bellucci comes on board aiding our Mr. Smith. This only seems fair, since Hertz has a veritable army of slime doggies obeying his every whim. I should point out that the army shrinks seemingly by the minute as Mr. Smith proves to be more than just a pretty face.

Folks looking for subtlety might well want to stay home; there is none of that here. As a matter of fact, I feel comfortable saying that if a character were to show signs of being subtle, he would likely get his head blown off. That kind of behavior will not be tolerated here! Fans of Sin City will likely have a blast. Actually, Sin City might be a perfect litmus test. Because I can certainly see those that disliked Sin City not making it to the end of Shoot 'Em Up. Shoot 'Em Up is a ridiculously violent film that both emulates and satirizes the hyper-violent action film genre. They don't simply cross the line; they start on that side of the line and go from there.

Remember some of the insane stuff with Bugs Bunny? That actually came to mind while viewing the carnage and mayhem wrought here. Of course it may simply have been the carrots. Watching this, you are not quite sure if they were serious or simply having fun.

I am betting it is the latter.

Jeremy

THE STREETS OF SAN FRANCISCO

SEASON 1 VOLUME 2

Paramount

Let me start by saying I don't understand why they split this into two sets, maybe it has to do with keeping costs down. What ever the case, they came out pretty close together so it wasn't like I had to wait for the rest of season 1 for very long.

I do love this show. This part of season one has an episode which has stuck with me since I first saw it back in '73 at ten years of age. An old man living in a big house is accused of killing a child. The house is piled high with newspapers and other things which are collected daily by the senior citizen. Upon rewatching this episode for the first time in 34 years something became clear to me about why this show works. The characters are very human. Mike Stone played by Karl Malden is tough as nails as the veteran detective. But when the need arises he can also be caring and even nurturing. I also love seeing Michael Douglas acting with Malden. The characters compliment each other almost as well as the actors do. The other thing that really makes this show stand out is the use of the city. Real shots on real streets.

This show holds up really well and I would recommend this to any one who loves a good cop show.

Jon

THE UNTOUCHABLES

SEASON 1 VOLUME 2

Paramount

The Untouchables was one of the very first producing jobs Quinn Martin held. He would later go on to produce many other television shows such as Street of San Francisco (also reviewed here).

This is the second part of the first season, later season went on to write totally fictional episodes, however the first season drew from the book Ness by the same name. Episode by episode it is fun to watch, however if you know the real history of it watching in order could give you a headache as it's shown out of the real sequence. There are some interesting episodes in here and it's interesting to see television form this time period wondering how they would have done it today.

Ness is played by Robert Stack, deadpanned and deliberate. For the role he's playing it works.

If you are a fan of crime television today this may be too slow for you, however it is enjoyable if you are interested in Capone or Ness.

The only extra feature is an episode of the Lucy Show featuring Stack as Ness.

Jon

VERONICA MARS: SEASON 3

Warner Home Video

We just completed our viewing pleasure at Casa Jordan. Season 3 of Veronica Mars has left the DVD player and the story of the teenage detective and the City of Neptune is now done for Jon and myself.

I was not the typical Veronica viewer. I'm in my forties. I have grey hair & the middle aged middle. I viewed the program entirely with the DVD format (translation: as each season became available, my husband and I set aside a week to watch that season from beginning to end). From beginning to end. As a teen drama it's far better than anything Brenda and Dylan offered my generation and at time superior to that other kick ass femme, Buffy.

From a reader's point of view, my favorite season was certainly the first. The entire season played like a witty, contemporary P.I. novel. The P.I. was a high school junior whose entire life had been changed by the murder of her best friend. There were twists to the central crime aplenty. The clues lead in any manner of directions. And we all knew, as we watched, that Veronica Mars was going to get to the center of the story.

Along the way she did what she thought was right, what her teenage heart led her to do, and what the plot dictated.

The second season was in many ways stronger on an episodic level. The good, the bad and the ugly showing up in each chapter. The main "mystery" of the season, who killed Veronica's classmates, took a back seat to the weekly play. Veronica's relationships with her friends, classmates, clients, and father were explored more deeply. Recovering from Lily's death was a shared experience, and the complications from the first year's plot were allowed airtime while Veronica dealt with the knowledge that she was inherently good at her job and it was something she wanted to do with her life. At times she fought it, at times her Dad fought it and at times it even seemed as if she, her father, and we, the viewing audience might be mistaken about her. Perhaps this wasn't Veronica's calling after all. Still, as a reader I was a little disappointed. Much in the same way I was disappointed when Murder One decided to split season 2 into different story arcs. But I know I'm in the minority on this one.

Season 3 was snappy and well written on almost all levels. All of our favorite characters showed their "fatal flaws". Keith Mars detecting radar failed him in the very first episode and he caused a death. He allowed his emotions to overcome his "moral code". Logan Eccles continued to struggle with his heritage. In the end losing the girl despite their love. A surface of Logan appeared just after mid season. The charming knight that came to the fore in seasons one and two was on display. But underneath..... Veronica became more defined. Stubborn, obstinate, making unpopular plays because they were "right". Asking her friends to do things she knew could hurt them (What was Eli thinking?). With all the audacity of smart college freshman, she knew that her way was the right way, even when it wasn't. There were new characters (Pez, Parker, Dean O'Dell). Unlike the first two seasons, there were flaws in the individual cases. I'm still not satisfied with the conclusion of the rape story, the timeline still doesn't work for me. It's as if the editor forgot to tell the writer to outline. The Dean O'Dell story works but any reader of mysteries knew who done it as soon as the means was revealed. And yes I'm that snotty. I expect a smart show to remain smart on all levels. I'll suspend my disbelief enough to cheer on the girl who keeps stumbling across major violence in a safe community but don't give me a lazy mystery plot, dammit.

There were other pesky flaws. The dangling Fitzgerald plot seemed unnecessary except for jump-starting some of the minor sub-plots. And I'm sorry, we all know that Vinny is the sleazy P.I. but at the warehouse?

"Vinny wouldn't do this." I proclaimed. I was right.. that time. But the whole Sheriff race angle, he wouldn't have done that either. And yet he did. Mac was a brilliant misstep during season three. After

season 2 it was nice to see her overcome and share light hearted moments. She came into her own on a lot of fronts. But Mac as the girl who "gets the groove on". Kinda weird. A lotta weird. The redeeming of Wallace was a good thing, not that he needed much. After a rather strange storyline in season 2 it was enjoyable to see him make the right choice time after time. He was and is a great best friend.

Perhaps my favorite surprise in the whole season was Dick Casablancas. I didn't see his struggle coming and of all the characters on the show it's his development I'll miss seeing. More so than Logan's and Veronica's.

Which brings me to the end of the series. I'm giving it a B+. I have a feeling that the whole "Castle" storyline was intended to go longer. But because of or despite the cancellation of the show it was a shining example of what Veronica Mars, the "teen cult favorite" was capable of doing. Wallace figuring out what was going on with the sex tape and agreeing to go in harms way so his friend could get the answers she needed was entirely in character and brought us back to the first few episodes of season one. Logan's rage coming to the surface brought shudders, reminding me of "dear old Dad". The possible ramifications of his last fight (given the bit of back story we were given) and his apology to Pez assured that this is a character I wish I could see more of no matter what is going on in his love life. Keith Mars making the ultimate sacrifice for his daughter is as it should be. Mac working with the Super Computer to get Veronica the blackmail material she needs and the answers she wants? Let's just say "Girl Power Activate."

But the true end is Veronica. A gutsy and smart teenage girl. Getting to the bottom of it, damned the consequences. And if she made a mistake by not taking Dad's phone call? It was because she thought she could fix it. She almost did. Some things are beyond the capabilities of any one person to fix and when you cross that line of Moral ambiguity, not to mention indulging in petty theft... sometimes there are repercussions. If you're Veronica Mars you take them as a life lesson, allow yourself to process, and know that somehow the future will come, no matter what's going on now. Dad will always be there for you and you'll always be there for him. It's the note the viewers came in on and it's a fine one to leave Neptune on. So thank you to all involved with the production of this teleplay, you engaged a forty something for seventy two hours that she's very glad she gave up.

Ruth Jordan