

AN AFFAIR TO REMEMBER MGM/Fox Home Entertainment

Once upon a time Leo McCarey made a movie. It did very well. 18 years later he remade it, and it did even better. 37 years later it was remade again ...and sucked. I guess I can't really say it sucked, I never watched, but I heard bad things [editor's note: yes, it sucked]. It went: *Love Affair* (1939) Irene Dunne, Charles Boyer; *An Affair to Remember* (1957) Cary Grant, Deborah Kerr; *Love Affair* (1994) Warren Beatty, Annette Bening.

(Oddly enough Cary Grant and Irene Dunne did a couple cookie cutter "Romantic Comedies" together. Movies that were basically the same: guy and girl, same girl and other guy, first guy and other girl, first guy and first girl cannot live without each other, the end [or Fin]. They just changed the circumstances a little bit.)

For the *original* remake Leo McCarey got Cary Grant. Ah, Cary Grant. Cary Grant can make even the fluffiest tear-jerker good. Well, except *Penny Serenade* (also starring Cary Grant and Irene Dunne. See Above), which wasn't so much a fluffy tear-jerker, as much as it was a "depressing, stab you in the heart, confirmation that the humanity is doomed, so what's the point in trying"-er. I felt like the writers said, "Hmm. This isn't depressing enough; what else can we heap on this poor couple?" Think of a summer Hollywood action movie where each stunt and/or explosion is more spectacular than the last; now replace stunts and/or explosions with depression.

BUT this is about *An Affair to Remember*, and not *Penny Serenade*. The first half of *An Affair to Remember* is actually a pretty good romantic comedy. The second half is actually pretty damn good too. Is it a chick movie? Heck yeah. But a chick movie with Cary Grant in it.

The story goes: Grant and Debrah Kerr meet on a boat ride to America, where they are both set to marry their respective significant others, and fall in love (with each other). Lamn the duck! Wait I mean, damn the luck. Blah, blah, then something happens. There is laughing, there is crying (not necessarily in that order).

The new release has several good bio-mentaries on the the two leads, the director, and the movie itself. I say go buy it, if you like Cary Grant or good love stories. If you don't like Cary Grant, go buy *Arsenic and Old Lace*, *North By Northwest*, *His Girl Friday*, *To Catch a Thief* and *The Philadelphia Story*. If you still don't like him after watching those, you need to go to the doctor and make sure you're still alive. (As Groucho Marx said: "Who are you going to believe, me or your own eyes?").

Randy Otteson

BLUE MURDER: SET 2

Acorn Media

Caroline Quentin continues her excellent performance as DCI Janine Lewis, a woman who must juggle messy crimes with a messy home life as a single mother of four kids. Watch just one episode of this dandy British detective series and you'll be addicted to the characters, the intelligent writing and the cool Manchester accents.

These four new episodes are grittier, with a little more concentration on developing the supporting characters, especially partners and team clowns, DS Shap and DS Butchers.

The Spartacus Thing: A former cop is murdered just after his release from prison after serving a too-short sentence for killing his wife. Janine must determine which of the dead wife's 15 relatives, all of whom have confessed, is guilty of the crime. DS Shap penchant for breaking the rules lands him in a dangerous situation.

Make Believe: A three-year-old child goes missing from a playground. A child's body is found in a drainage culvert. Is it the same child? Janine must deal with some disturbing news from her estranged husband. DS Butchers tries to take the easy way out and ends up cocking up the investigation.

In Deep: The body of a petty criminal is found at the bottom of a lake. The investigation leads Janine to a group of old college buddies who suddenly begin dying in a strikingly similar manner. The partnership of Butchers and Shap begins to show some cracks. Steady Eddie: Janine is on the phone with her teenaged daughter when, yards away, a fellow officer is slain along with the prisoner he is escorting. Janine must find the killer while also helping her family deal with the reality of her dangerous job. The investigation unearths evidence that the dead officer may not have been what he seemed. The two-disk set contains no extras.

Naomi Kreuger

CHINATOWN: Special Collector's edition Paramount Home Entertainment

Chinatown's place in history is assured. The passage of time has not diminished its greatness. Set in the 1930s, Chinatown is a story of power and the dark influence it can have on men.

Jack Nicholson is Jake Gittes, a former cop turned private detective. Gittes is good, his skills fall just short of his ego.

After being made the fool, Gittes puts all of his energy into finding out who was behind a scheme in which he was made a pawn.

After being tricked into discrediting her husband, Evelyn Mulwray (Faye Dunaway) hires Gittes to find out who was behind the scheme to ruin her husband's reputation.

Gittes uncovers a plan to privatize the ownership of water and thus make millions off the drought that is currently wrecking havoc on L.A. county. The trail leads to Dunaway's father (John Huston in a brilliant performance) and gives us one of the most memorable endings in cinematic history.

Chinatown's excellence is not limited to just one thing; the story, the cinematography, the score, the acting...all hit the mark. The Gittes character is a fascinating one. His flaws are evident (His past failings haunt him, he clearly has racial prejudices and is not as clever as he thinks he is) and Jack (as all of us close personal friends call him) takes these aspects and uses them to create a character that steps beyond the usual prototypical noir/hardboiled protagonist archetype.

From a technical stand point; this disc is a definite step up from the previous Chinatown DVD. The picture is sharper and that alone would make it worthwhile to purchase.

But the icing on the cake is an excellent documentary. This four-partner features Jack Nicholson, Roman Polanski, writer Robert Towne and producer Robert Evans. Each gives their own insight into not only the making of the film, but their thoughts on it now and its place in cinematic history. Polanski and Towne each discuss the famous disputed ending. Polanski wanted an ending darker and more tragic than what Towne had originally written. In the end, Polanski won out and delivered what has become a truly legendary finale to an already classic film. Towne now agrees that Polanski was right.

Any fan of noir fiction or film needs to have Chinatown in their collection. No library can be considered complete without it.

Jeremy Lynch

GONE BABY GONE

Buena Vista Home Entertainment

Affleck's choice for his directorial debut is somewhat surprising and yet makes sense at the same time. On the one hand, he is adapting the work of an author whose material has already produced a modern classic crime drama (*Mystic River*) so the bar is already set fairly high. To make things even riskier, he cast his brother in the role of the headstrong protagonist. Few, other than Ben, saw Casey as leading man material.

Yet the story is set in a Boston, which he is clearly familiar with, and it is that familiarity that drew him to it. This production was sort of a

homecoming for the director.

It turns out that Affleck's instincts were correct on all counts; his directorial debut delivers the goods. His choice of lighting and the types of shots he used emphasize and accentuate the blue collar grit of this Boston. We have all heard about setting being a character and this is certainly true here.

Affleck not only directs, but also co-wrote the screenplay with his childhood friend Aaron Stockard. It is not Ben's first time doing this, as he won an Oscar (with Matt Damon) for *Good Will Hunting*. Based on the Dennis Lehane novel of the same name, GBG tells the story of a pair of Boston private eyes and their search for a missing child. The mother leaves the child alone while she goes out for some fun. When she returns home, her four year old daughter is missing from her bed. While the cops are doing all they can, the girl's aunt turns to Patrick (Casey) and Angie (Michelle Monaghan), a pair of neighborhood private investigators. She hopes the locals might talk more to them than the police. This search leads them into the drug world as well as that of pedophiles and questionable cops.

The performances are uniformly good. While I expected no less Morgan Freeman and Ed Harris (Thought Mr. Harris seemed to occasionally confuse intensity with loudness), a couple of folks really stepped up and delivered. Casey Affleck, in particular, surprised me. My previous encounters with him were in the Ocean films (*Ocean's 11* and *whatnot*) in which he played a fairly amusing goofball. Here he leaves all that behind with a performance that should erase any doubts folks might have about his ability to play a dramatic leading role. While his Patrick is not the one I envisioned, it works just fine. The film does not go overboard to convey the hardness of his character, but there are a couple of scenes where Patrick is backed into a corner that show us he is not someone to be crossed. His performance is understated yet powerful. I know Amy Ryan only for her role on season two of *The Wire*. Here, as the mother of the missing child, she is a tour de force. Her performance is worthy of an Oscar nomination, here is hoping the Academy is paying attention.

The fine acting does not stop at the top; most of the lesser characters (the various lowlife scumbags and neighborhood losers) are well defined and nicely played. These well-done minor characters give the film an extra touch of realism. Anyone looking for a popcorn thriller or run of the mill cop flick might want to skip this movie. Yes, there is a crime but GBG is more about morality and the choices we make in life. It points out that not everything is as simple as right or wrong, and that all of our decisions have consequences. The moral complexity of the script is extremely impressive.

One especially powerful scene finds Patrick giving in to his emotions and killing a pedophile. The police and even Angie praise him, but his own conscience torments him.

Are good intentions enough?

As a big fan of the book, I was both curious and apprehensive about how the film would differ from the source material. While there are some very noticeable changes (mainly in characters), none of them hurt the story and some likely aided in the transition to screen. Overall, Affleck has stayed faithful to the spirit of the book, including the ending.

The ending remains controversial, and is one that will likely have viewers disagreeing as to whether or not it was the right choice given the circumstances. Nobody is going to walk out of this film with a spring in their step or a smile on their face. Frankly, any movie that provokes thought or evokes a strong emotional response is one step above most.

For extras, we get a commentary track with Ben and co-writer Aaron Stoddard. One thing that is very clear is that Ben is very hard on himself when it comes to his career. He repeated points out mistakes he made or how he could have done something better. Dude, you made a good film. Be happy with it!

Also of interest for fans of the book will be the talk of the book and how they fought to make sure the story and narrative was clear enough for filmgoers without sacrificing the subtlety of the Lehane's novel.

Also included are a couple of featurettes and some deleted scenes. Of note are some scenes show more chemistry between Patrick and Angie. The "alternate ending" is nothing special. It features minor changes.

Overall, GBG is a very good film. The acting is constantly strong and the feel is very blue collar. It would have been all too easy to gloss this up, but Affleck stayed loyal to both the novel and his childhood community. For that, we can all be thankful because it is a big part of what makes this film so damn good.

Jeremy

HAWAII FIVE-O: Season 3 Paramount Home Entertainment

This long running police drama was a huge success in it's run from 1968-1980. Over the years the cast would see some changes, even losing Dano in the last season. The one constant was Jack Lord as Steve McGarrett. Jack Lord had been acting for a while, he played James Bond's CIA liaison in *Dr. No*, and in the year previous to *Hawaii Five-0* he played a mob lawyer on the first season of *Ironsides*. But most people remember Lord for his role as McGarrett, in fact it defined his career from that point on. In fact Lord moved to Hawaii and lived there the rest of his life.

Filming the episodes on the Islands and using locals as crew and actors added an authentic feel to the show. Hawaii was actually almost an unpaid character on the show, almost every scene is back dropped by the islands and it really gives the show a special look. The fact that it was all done in Hawaii also made it easy to get guest stars as they would be treated to a week in the sun. Season three brought back Martin Sheen and also had Vera Miles and Hume Cronyn. Watching these episodes is almost like watching a who's who of character actors from the 70's. You might not know the names, but you've seen the faces on man other television shows.

What really makes the show work for me is two things: I love the characters interaction with each other. There is a light heartedness and familiarity between them that comes across as very genuine. The other aspect is the procedural aspect. The fact that they are solving crimes seems very believable, Unlike some modern shows like *Law and Order SVU* where the characters seems to luck into solutions after questioning three people and talking to a shrink, or the *CSI* show where the labrats do all the work and the cops sometime tag along. Steve McGarrett and his crew are smart cops who can trust each other and aren't afraid to get their hands dirty when they need to. McGarrett trusts his cops to do their jobs and doesn't need to constantly tell them what to do.

Hawaii Five-0 is classic television and its influences are still seen today. The show holds up extremely well and I would recommend it to anyone who love cop shows or shows with great action. That opening them sets the pace and the show just flows from there.

Jon Jordan

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE Season 3 Paramount

Season three is the '68-'69 season and the cast is the same as season two. The budget seems even bigger though as our crew of black ops goes around the world making it safe for Democracy everywhere they go. Double agents, dictatorships, gangsters and espionage are just another day in the office as these specially recruited agents use their unique skills for the furtherment of

American interests. While some of the situations today seem a bit dated at the time they were very pertinent. One of my favorites is when the Impossible Mission Force (IMF) infiltrates a play behind the Iron Curtain and changes it to discredit a politician. This is a great show with loads of style and some really entertaining episodes. While a little dated, more because of the politics than anything else, it is still a real joy to watch.

Jon

THE MOD SQUAD: Season 1, Volume 1 Paramount Home Entertainment

Prior to watching this, the name *Mod Squad* conjured mental images of schlock and all that was cheesy 1970s. Add to that the wretched remake (Thank goodness nobody has let Scott Silver direct again) of a few years back and I could not imagine any good coming of watching it.

But after actually seeing the show, I have to say it was better than I thought it would be. I enjoyed it quite a bit.

The *Mod Squad* was created by Buddy Ruskin. Ruskin was a former L.A.P.D. cop that actually worked with a special youth squad. His own experiences were the inspiration for the show. Clarence Williams III, Michael Cole and Peggy Lipton all star as youth that, after getting in trouble with the law, are given a chance to avoid jail time by working as undercover cops. Because regular cops are/were so square, these kids would have an easier time infiltrating the youth subculture.

Cheesy sounding? Yeah, but in a good way.

Included here are three featurettes. *Forming the Mod Squad* is your basic "here is how it all came together" segment. It runs a little under 15 minutes, with the original stars delving into their memories (though Williams, the biggest star of the bunch, is absent.) and offering up some anecdotes. Having not been very familiar with the series, I found this fairly interesting. There is also a shorter segment that talks about the era (late 60s) and how *The Mod Squad* fit into those very turbulent times.

The final bonus feature has Louis Gossett jr., Leslie Ann Warren and Tyne Daley all talking about their appearances on the show. While enjoyable, it is a bit odd since only Gossett is actually seen in this bunch of episodes.

Nobody is going to mistake *The Mod Squad* for great television, but the style and overall vibe of the show make for a fun trip back to the late 60s. Can you dig it?

Jeremy Lynch

ROUGH DIAMOND Acorn Media

Rough Diamond aired in England as *Diamond Geezer*, a title I feel they should have kept, but knowing how phobic we in the US are about age I understand the change. The series contains four episodes, runs just under five hours, and stars David Jason (Sir David Jason to be precise) as the aforementioned geezer, criminal mastermind.

The pilot episode finds the hero(?) Des, a limping, stuttering simpleton, in prison working as the tea boy and being abused or pretty much ignored. This is the starkest in the series--and maybe the best storywise-- although not necessarily the one I enjoyed most. It gradually comes to light that he neither limps nor stutters and is anything but simple. He's using prison as an airtight alibi for a robbery he's planning. A big honkin' heist of ten million or so in diamonds.

The last three are more cinematic in that they had prettier things to film than a prison and convicts, i.e. the south of France and the better parts of London. I had no idea what I was getting into in this series and was very pleasantly surprised at how much I enjoyed it.

The stories are well done and complex and the players are quite good. My small complaints, and they are small, is that they decided to go a bit Robin Hood with the character--I preferred him as a scallawag; and a speeded up action sequence ala Benny Hill and all kung fu movies. It was in fact a martial arts moment but I found it distracting. Still this is good entertainment and when they release more it would take no convincing to get me to watch it again. The specials are a bit thin: written interviews and filmographies.

Lee Crawford

WILD WILD WEST Season 3 Paramount

24 episodes filling over 20 hours worth of DVDs season three is just the ticket for people sick and tired of television flying past as if directed by someone with attention deficit disorder. The shows follow a formula but don't rely on chases and speeding camera shots. The action plays out quickly but the camera allows you to see everything.

As Robert Conrad's career moved forward we found that his acting skills were a bit limited, his character in Baa Baa Black Sheep is very like Jim West, however in this show it's fresh and entertaining. The agency that West and Gordon work for may very well be the predecessor to the people Jack is working for in 24, but it was a simpler time and seems like more fun. And the truth is this show is fun, I don't think they ever meant people to walk away from viewing this with thoughts of politics or deep meanings, it was a unique take on the western format, and it also played with the fun of the James Bond books. 40 years later I still enjoy the show. And part of me still wants a train car like they have.

Jon

THE WIRE: Season 4 Warner Home Video

I should warn you; this is not so much a review as it is a valentine to an incredible season from the best show on TV.

Over the course of the first three seasons, *The Wire* set the bar pretty damn high. They created rich, dynamic characters, that never fit the clichéd archetypes we commonly see, and put them into complex stories that go beyond the simple parameters of good and bad.

But season four not only rises to the challenge, but actually raises the bar to a level that will likely not be cleared by another show anytime soon.

All of the regulars are back, with some new faces as well. Season four revolves around four 12-year-old boys as they head into eighth grade. As the season goes on, each of these boys find his life heading down a different path, often not the one that seems obvious.

Whereas previous seasons have looked closely at the politics of the law enforcement and the battle on drugs, this season gives us a rather brutal look at education, one that can't help but leave you feeling more than a little depressed. These kids start out behind the 8 ball and have an uphill

battle even if they are motivated to learn to improve their lot in life. Since many have no such motivation, their future is pretty much sealed before they even complete middle school.

This storyline could have been very preachy, but the four young actors do an amazing job and really bring the characters to life, making them so real that you can't help but become emotionally invested in their future. While we have come to expect this from *The Wire*, seeing actors in their early to mid teens deliver the goods in such a compelling way is damn impressive.

But while these boys are a focal point, their stories are simply some

of the many that occupy the season. Surprisingly enough, never does the show become convoluted or confusing. It manages to always give us clarity in the storylines and keep them on track.

Credit must be given to the writers for developing such rich storylines that evolve from one episode to the next. All of the characters are fleshed out and, as I said, do not fit into neat stereotypes. Not all of the dealers are evil, not all of the cops good. We see cops that are not particularly likeable (Some are downright assholes) work hard to uphold the law, while dealers that are likely decent folk slinging crack because that is what they know.

That no Emmys were handed up for this is perhaps the greatest crime in television.

Quite simply, season four cemented The Wire's claim on the title of "the best crime show in the history of television." What we have here isn't simply "must see" TV but "must see again and again" TV. If you own seasons one through three, you must buy this. If you have never visited the world of The Wire, order all of them now and prepare yourself for crime television nirvana.

Jeremy

ZODIAC: Director's Cut

Paramount Home Entertainment

Reviewing Zodiac has proven tough for me. I never posted a review for it's theatrical release because I struggled to figure out exactly what I thought of it.

On the one hand, Zodiac is beautifully shot and well acted. Fincher and crew have painstakingly gone over all records to provide as accurate a telling as possible. They deserve credit for this as most filmmakers would have crashed

and burned with as ambitious a project as this.

But while it is factually accurate with excellent pacing and acting, I walked away from this wondering exactly what was the point? Why was it made?

To me, Zodiac felt like the big screen version of one of the true crime shows that are always on A&E (I can hear the late Paul Winfield narrating it in my head).

Zodiac is based on the book by Richard Grayson. Grayson spent over a decade following this case, trying to uncover the true.

To me, a better film might have been made by taking a closer look at Grayson and his obsession with the Zodiac. He lost/quit his job, lost his wife and kids, for this. What was it that made this a fair trade? Was it something that we, the casual public, couldn't see? It was touched on a bit in the film, but never tackled in depth.

Out of everyone involved with the Zodiac case, Grayson was most affected by it. Why not explore that? Show us the impact of these killings. At this point in time, the Zodiac is just one of many high profile serial killers to terrorize portions of America in the 20th century. Give us a look inside Grayson and how he perceived this case.

This is the director's cut. The strange thing about this is that Fincher had right of final cut built into his contract so theoretically should be no need for this. But here we are, just 3 months after it's initial DVD release, with a director's cut. The difference is four minutes that have little impact on the overall film. Since it is just four minutes, I can't help but wonder why they were cut in the first place. What is the difference between 158 minutes and 162?

The bonus features are first rate. One look at these and it is clear just how much this project meant to Fincher and company. What we get is a mix of behind the scenes features and true crime documentary footage. Anyone with even a casual interest in the Zodiac case will really enjoy this stuff.

Fincher also provides us with a commentary track that is stellar. The commentaries on his past films (Se7en, Fight Club) were excellent and he continues that trend here. Some nuts and bolts commentary

about the technical aspects of filmmaking, but also plenty of anecdotes about the shoot and his time with the cast and crew. A second commentary is also included, one with castmembers (Jake Gyllenhaal, Robert Downey Jr.), producer Brad Fisher, screenwriter/producer James Vanderbilt and author James Ellroy. This second track is also worth checking out; as we get plenty of interesting chatter from the actors while the other three really dig into the original case as well as the research that went into preparing for the film.

The second disc of extras is simply amazing. As I said before, Fincher spent an inordinate amount of time doing research for this film and the evidence is here for our viewing pleasure.

The extras are broken into 2 different headings: FILM & FACT. Film gives us a look at the making of the film. Interesting, but pretty much the kind of stuff you would expect.

The most interesting stuff is under FACT. We get two documentaries that combine for about 2 ½ hours of pretty damn fascinating stuff. The first gives us a look at the entire case, with new interviews with those close to the case, including some survivors of the attacks. The second focuses on the primary suspect, Arthur Leigh Allen. This includes friends, family and even some of the investigating officers.

I would say that the FACT portion alone is worth the price of this set.

Overall, this is a very impressive DVD release. The "director's cut" is not the draw here, it is the extras that make this an essential package for any fan of either director David Fincher or the actual case of the Zodiac Killer.

Jeremy