

12 ANGRY MEN (50th Anniversary edition)
MGM/Fox Home Entertainment

You take 12 men from different walks of life, give them a tough decision to make and put them in a hot, stuffy room. This is a fairly simple recipe for fireworks.

And that is exactly what you get with 12 Angry Men. Henry Fonda leads a very talented cast in this legal thriller. Thriller might not be an accurate description; legal character drama is a little more accurate.

12 Angry Men tells the story of 12 jurors deliberating a first-degree murder case. A teenager has been accused of killing his father. If found guilty, the penalty would be death.

Simplicity is the key to this film. One set, little more than 12 actors and a very strong script. Aspiring directors should be made to watch this film so they can see that sometimes, simple is good.

This was Sidney Lumet's directorial debut, but you would never guess it. He does a masterful job, giving us a tight, gripping character-driven drama that will hold your attention until the very end.

For extras, we get a commentary track with USC professor Drew Casper. The track is fairly interesting, though from a scholarly perspective. Casual fans will likely not sit through it, but film buffs should enjoy it quite a bit.

Beyond a Reasonable Doubt: Making of 12 Angry Men clocks in at around 23 minutes. It gives us your basic look behind the making of the film. Included are comments from Lumet as well as actor Jack Klugman (Juror #5).

Inside the Jury Room is 15 minutes long and talks about the battle between accuracy and drama.

12 Angry Men is a great film. It is nice to see it get a decent release and this is certainly worth owning.

Jeremy Lynch

THE ASSASSINATION OF JESSE JAMES BY THE COWARD ROBERT FORD

Warner Home Video

The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford is set after Jesse James' heyday, and Jesse is living under an assumed name with his wife and two children. He hires Bob and Charlie Ford to help him and his brother Frank (played by Sam Shepard) rob what turns out to be their last train. Charlie is played by the usually fantastic Sam Rockwell (*The Green Mile*, *Galaxy Quest*), and Robert by Casey Affleck (*The Ocean's movies*, *Gone Baby Gone*). Bob has idolized Jesse James his entire life, and read all the fictional novels that painted Jesse James as a modern day Robin Hood; but he becomes disenchanted when he meets and rides with the real thing. Slowly he discovers he will never be like the outlaw, or realizes he doesn't want to be like him anymore. So the only way he can realize his dream of fame is to be the one who turns Jesse James in to the authorities. But from what we know of history (and the title of the movie) this doesn't quite work out how Robert wants.

The Assassination of ... is a very enjoyable movie; visually it is stunning and the director knows how to make the audience experience the tension that the characters feel on screen. When members of the James gang are nervous and not sure what Jesse is going to do, YOU feel it. "Is he going to kill him? Is he going to kill ALL of them? I DON'T KNOW! I should have read more history! I want my mommy!"

Pitt is good as usual, very believable as the outlaw with piercing blue eyes. Casey Affleck has been a huge surprise of the last couple of years. He was very good in *Gone Baby Gone*, and is just as good here as the idolater turned disenchanted (made up word). The extras on the DVD are just a few commentary tracks by people you don't care about. I care about them, but you won't.

Randy Otteson

BATTLESTAR GALACTICA: season 3
Universal Studios Home Entertainment

Season three of this wonderful show had a longer wait for the release than the previous seasons did, but it was worth the wait. This season really amped things up a bit with the search for earth, some major confrontations with Cylons and also did a really nice job of adding to the mythology of the show.

Season two left us with a large number of the remnants of the colonies on a planet they were calling New Caprica and as the season ended we saw the Cylons arriving. The rescue of the people from the Cylons took up the first story arc, but it resonated through the rest of the season. The occupied planet had obvious parallels to the Nazi invasion of Europe with humans joining a police force working for the Cylons and people doing what they need to do to survive. There would later be trials and confrontations because of this.

While there is no "normal" for this group of humans wandering the stars things get back to what has become their routine. They continue their search and are ever moving forward.

This season had the wonderful writing as always expanding the characters and filling in gaps of their pasts. We start to see changes in people as well. The humanoid Cylons start to be more than just killing machines and four new one are revealed toward the end.

All in all a great season and wonderful viewing experience. The special features are very nice, behind the scenes features, and some extra stories that were originally aired on the web.

Jon Jordan

BIONIC WOMAN: Volume One

Universal Studios Home Entertainment

The fact that this set is called volume one implies that there will be more, at least on DVD. From what I understand the show is dead on the air. Strangely they just had a huge debut in the UK.

Bionic Woman didn't re-invent any wheels here. Some of the plot ideas and the character types are very familiar. Government type black ops, secret agents coerced into working with the group that saved their lives. Disgruntled ex-agents sabotaging things. But what makes this show watchable, even enjoyable if not taken to seriously is the people in the show. Jamie Summers is given bionic powers without consent and becomes an agent for the group that gave her the powers.

Jamie is played by Michelle Ryan who gives the show a fresh new face and not the typical skinny Hollywood type. Migeul Ferrer is her boss and is really great in the role, part hard ass part mentor. Also along for the ride are a partner to help her learn the ropes and a computer geek genius who helps Jamie when she's in the field. Also an older woman who is a shrink. A lot of the cast seems very similar to the cast of *La Femme Nikita*.

Strangely, many guest roles are filled by actors on *Battlestar Galactica*, though not so strange when you realize that it's the same producer, David Eick. In fact in a few scenes I noticed sets used in *Battlestar*, including Starbuck's apartment.

Does the show deserve to be saved? Maybe. Should the remaining episodes be on DVD? Definitely. It's an entertaining show that doesn't expect a lot from the audience, it is what it is, fun entertainment.

Jon Jordan

B.L. STRYKER

B.L. Stryker was one of several series aired on a rotating basis as *The ABC Mystery Movie* (1989-1990). Burt Reynolds starred as an ex-New Orleans cop whose talent for empathizing with violent criminals and killers almost drives him over the edge. Before that can happen, he moves home to Palm Beach, Florida to live the life of a boat bum.

In the premiere episode, Stryker reluctantly helps the Palm Beach PD when a serial rapist's m.o. resembles that of one he

apprehended years ago. The case becomes personal when Stryker's young friend (played by Kristy Swanson) is victimized. Stryker is aided in his investigation by his best friend, ex-boxer Oz Jackson (Ossie Davis), and by psychiatrist Diane Decker (Helen Shaver). Created by Christopher Crowe (who had written for the 70s Hardy Boys/Nancy Drew series and the 80s Alfred Hitchcock Presents), Stryker seemed to borrow background from several crime fiction favorites (notably Travis McGee and Spenser), with a dash of TV's Magnum thrown in, but Reynolds's easy charm kept him grounded. Co-produced by Reynolds, Tom Selleck, and several Magnum veterans, Stryker's TV movie length allowed cases to take their time. The work of novelists like Joe Gores and Robert B. Parker on some of the episodes also made it feel less like weekly TV. In the end I have to say Stryker wasn't his own man, but the collective talent of everyone behind the scenes let him show aspects of characters we may otherwise never see onscreen. The three-disc First Season set includes five episodes for a total running time of 470 minutes. Bonus features include three .pdf episode scripts accessible via DVD-ROM drive.

Gerald So

BURN NOTICE:

Universal Studios Home Entertainment

Michael Westen (Jeffrey Donovan) is a government agent that is kicked to the curb (given his burn notice) by the government. With no idea as to how this came about, Michael tries to figure out just what happened. In the meantime, he uses his skills to assist others.

Hanging with Michael is his buddy Sam (delightfully played by Bruce Campbell), a semi-retired intelligence agent that spends most of his time drinking and leering at young ladies and his ex-girlfriend Fiona (Gabrielle Anwar) who has ties to IRA.

Michael also has to deal with nagging from his mother (Sharon Gless).

The show has reminded me a bit of the Rockford Files with a nice mix of action and humor along with just enough emotion to prevent us from seeing Michael as a cartoon character.

Burn Notice is one of the reasons one should have cable television, it likely would not survive the soulless wastelands of network TV. If you missed it on TV, pick this set up and prepare yourself for some serious fun.

Jeremy

DAMAGES: Season one

Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

The addition of original dramas to cable television has resulted in some incredible shows: The Wire, Dexter, The Sopranos, The Shield, Rescue Me...the list is a long one.

2007 saw FX offer up a show that may very well end up sitting up at the very top with some of the aforementioned shows.

Damages is a stellar drama that seems to delight in the murky shades of gray that are all too common in the everyday life.

Who am I kidding?

If my life had a even a portion of the malevolent drama this show has, I would be under my bed hiding.

Glenn Close stars as Patty Hewes, a high-powered New York attorney whose reputation for ruthlessness is only exceeded by her reputation as a winner. Good lawyer? Sure, but with as much empathy as a barracuda.

Hewes is handling a class action suit against Arthur Frobisher (Ted Danson in his most charming and most sinister role to date), the CEO of a fortune 500 company. Mr. Frobisher is being sued for defrauding over 5000 employees. While Arthur clearly is a shit, he just might not be as big a shit as we think. Not surprisingly, this case is massive and is going to require every trick that Hewes can think of (and she can think of quite a few) to come out on top.

With these two very twisted leads, the show needs somebody a

little...fresher. Enter Ellen Parsons (Rose Byrne), an ambitious young lawyer fresh out of school. She joins Hewes very reputable firm to get her career off to a strong start, but soon finds herself heading down a path that makes her question her own moral compass.

Honestly, to go too far into the twisting, turning plot would spoil much of the fun. I will say that the intention of the show is to keep you guessing and it certainly succeeds at that.

Among the extras is a nice featurette about class action lawsuits. Very nice since I nothing (Well, I have likely absorbed a little from L.A. Law and the first couple seasons of Boston Legal) about the legal system. Class action suits are not usually the subject of films and television so the enlightenment was much appreciated.

Willful Acts: the making of Damages and Trust No One: Insight from the creators of Damages are both enjoyable featurettes that compliment each other. Because of the complexity of the series, these are actually pretty nice. They give insight into the process and what they hoped to achieve, both critically as well as commercially, with the series.

Also included are a couple of commentary tracks (that include Close, co-star Zeliko Ivanken, Writer/creator Todd Kessler, writer/creator Glenn Kessler and a few others) and some deleted scenes.

So much of today's television panders to the lowest common denominator, offering little of substance. When something special comes along, it needs to be grabbed with both hands and treasured. You would be doing yourself, and the series, a disservice if you pass Damages by. Pick up a copy and treat yourself to some of the finest television of 2007.

Jeremy

Hustle Season 4

BBC/ Warner Home Video

This season has a cast change as the leader of our merry band of con artists, Mickey Bricks, is in Australia. Danny steps up to lead and over all does a nice job of helping the troops make some cash. They also bring in a new member to train in the art of the con. As a real treat for us Yanks there are two episodes here in the states, one with guest star Robert Wagner.

As always this is full of clever writing and wonderful dialogue. The cons seem so easy and seamless and yet there are elaborate and well planned. I especially love the fact that they play into people's greed and that the people getting scammed really deserve to be hustled. I really enjoyed the episode when they pull off a scam with a racehorse.

This is something I think everyone will enjoy.

Jon

IN THE VALLEY OF ELAH

Warner Home Video

On *Inside the Actors Studio* Will Smith said of his Men in Black co-star, Tommy Lee Jones; 'I'm with Tommy Lee til the wheels fall off.' Amen from me. I've seen pieces I liked better than others, but I've never once thought he phoned it in. And he surly didn't phone in "*In the Valley of Elah*" where we see the heart of a retired MP spit and polish guy who remakes the bed in his motel room to military specs and pulls a wet shirt out of a Laundromat dryer to put on when he speaks to a woman, bleed out through the creases in that great road map of a face. The man does nice work and I think this is one of his best. I also don't think it got its due. He and Susan Sarandon are simply awesome (in the old! sense of the word-I don't know how the hell they use it now).

Hank Deerfield gets a phone call telling him his son better get back to Base PDQ (pretty damn quick) or be listed as AWOL. Last Hank knew Mike was in Iraq. No phone calls, no Mike. What's up? He goes to the Base to find out, finding out all too soon that Mike has met with the foulest of foul play. But it doesn't make sense. Mike

was a good kid and a good soldier, why would somebody cut him to pieces and burn the body? Why indeed?

Military Police don't really want to know and the Civilian Police (Charlize Theron) can't be bothered until some things Hank points out at the crime scene he brow beat her into taking him too start to add up for her. It is very much to her credit that she was not blown off the screen by this TLJ behemoth.

Susan Sarandon only has a few scenes in the film but my lord is she good in them and the Morgue scene with she and Tommy Lee will pin you back in your chair like a centrifuge ride at the Fair.

These two veterans should get some kind of campaign ribbon for this film.

I always worry about giving away too much of the story in the review, so I sometimes think I give too little. Let me just say if you are a Tommy Lee Jones fan, rush out the door, knock the paper kid off his bicycle and get to the video store PDQ.

There is a decent documentary in the specials and an extra scene. No commentary.

This is a good story, a good mystery, with performances you won't soon forget. Written by Paul Haggis and Mark Boal with screenplay and direction by Haggis

Lee Crawford

JESSE STONE: SEA CHANGE

Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

Tom Selleck's fourth turn as Robert B. Parker's alcoholic police chief finds Stone distracted and drinking again after his ex-wife tells him she's been seeing someone. Coming to the conclusion that Jesse stays sober because his job requires it, Stone's therapist (William Devane), tells him to find a case, any case, in which to invest himself. So, Stone reopens a fifteen-year-old bank robbery that resulted in the death of a female teller. Meanwhile, an eighteen-year-old girl and her father stop into the police station accusing a visiting playboy of rape, and the brother of a hitman Stone set up to be killed comes after Jesse for revenge.

In terms of plot, this movie is the furthest departure from Parker's books so far; however the characters' dialogue and the story's moral center are as true to Parker as can be without becoming annoying. In fact, having read a synopsis of the book Sea Change, I find the movie's twists more realistic.

As with mid-season episodic TV, there are no life-changing events in Sea Change, but guests Kathy Baker and Sean Young fit nicely with the dependable regulars. Selleck's work in Sea Change earned him an Emmy nomination, but his performance in all four movies is worth watching.

The DVD is presented in widescreen with scene selection and optional English subtitles.

Gerald So

JUNO (2-disc set)

Fox Home Entertainment

For those of you not familiar with Juno, it is about a very headstrong teenage (Ellen Page) whose only sexual encounter leaves her with one in the oven.

She opts to have the child and give it up for adoption. She locates a couple (Jason Bateman, Jennifer Garner) that wants a child, but has been unable to conceive one.

While it does not sound like an ideal setting for a comedy, Oscar winner Diablo Cody delivers an outstanding script that, while occasionally feeling as though it is working too hard to be different, is sensational and feels realistic.

Normally, the extras are for film geeks, but I would recommend the two-disc set for everyone. The chemistry and talent of the cast is very evident in the extras and, as a result, these are quite fun to watch.

Cody makes the commentary track, which she shares with director Jason Reitman, fun and breezy. The deleted scenes and gag reel are standard fare.

LOVEJOY: Season 3

BBC/ Warner

Ian McShane returns as everyone's favorite antiques dealer/divvy (one that can tell real from fake antiques). There had been a few year gap between seasons one and two, but no such space between two and three. As a result, the cast chemistry is better than ever. By the third season, each of the principal actors had truly made the roles their own, as well as having really gotten familiar with one another. Watching this set, I had no trouble believing that these folk had known each other for years.

For extras, we get part 3 of Ian McShane's look at the series, as well as a Pebble Mill interview with McShane. I hope that at some point, they get the cast together to discuss the series. Nothing against McShane, but I would enjoy hearing from the others. You need not have watched the previous seasons to enjoy this, but if you do get this, I can promise you that you will order the others if only to feast on more Lovejoy goodness.

Jeremy

MIDSOMER MURDERS: Set ten

Acorn Media

Detective Chief Inspector Tom Barnaby (John Nettles) and Detective Sergeant Dan Scott (John Hopkins) are back in the tenth DVD release of Midsomer Murders.

For those of you unfamiliar with the series, Midsomer Murders is based on the characters of novelist Caroline Graham. Midsomer is a rural county in England that, despite its peaceful appearance, delivers a body count that makes most major cities seem tranquil and serene. Detective Chief Inspector Tom Barnaby and Detective Sergeant Dan Scott investigate these fatalities and always get the culprit.

This set features four feature length stories that originally aired, in England, in 2005.

One thing stands out from with this set: the violence has gotten a little more graphic. Not CSI graphic, but certainly more so than most quaint cozy-styled mystery series.

The overall quality remains high, the writing is strong and the mysteries actually have depth and move beyond the sad little tales Americans might be used to from Murder She Wrote and Diagnosis Murder.

This series is quite enjoyable. Personally, I tend towards more hardboiled fare, but the writing and acting of this series really impresses me.

We get no real extras to speak of. Since the show has been around for so long, it would be nice to get a featurette looking at the series and how it has changed over the years. Find out if the actors approach the roles any differently today than they did in those early years.

Overall, Midsomer Murders has maintained a high level of quality after 10 seasons, something few shows can claim.

Jeremy

NANCY DREW

Warner Home Video

I never read Nancy Drew as a kid. Never watched the series or movies and thus have no real attachment to the character. So my perspective on this film certainly might be different than that of others.

The film starts out with Nancy catching a couple of burglars in the act. Everyone is on hand for the capture, with the police grateful for her assistance. Everyone is happy with the wonder sleuth; everyone except her father. He, not unreasonably, fears for her safety.

The Drews head to L.A. for her father's work. Nancy makes a promise to avoid sleuthing while they are in La La Land. This proves more to be more difficult than she imagined. The film plays Nancy's crime fighting as almost an addiction.

Eventually, Nancy gives in to her need to peep and works to uncover the decades old secret behind the death of a faded movie star.

Nancy looks much the same as she did decades ago. Instead of portraying a Nancy from years gone by, we are given a very smart, polite small town girl with a fondness of old style clothing. The character is the butt of some jokes at first, but she wins most over with her brains and skills.

Nancy Drew is fluff, but entertaining fluff. There are no huge holes in the plot and everyone does a solid job. Emma Roberts is convincing and quite likeable as a smart teen whose first love is detection.

We get a smattering of extras, but nothing earthshattering. They certainly could have spent some time talking about the character and what she has meant to various generations over the years. Instead we get a look at the young actors and how they enjoyed making the film. Pretty much your standard fluff pieces.

While this may not live up to the lofty expectations of die-hard fans, Nancy Drew is an enjoyable light mystery flick. Truth be told, I have some doubt as to whether or not the current generation would have sat still for something more serious. ND was, I think, just what the doctor ordered for the kids of today.

Jeremy

THIRD WATCH: the complete first season

Warner Home Video

Over the years, we have seen plenty of police and medical dramas, but Third Watch gives them a slight twist: It combines them.

Third Watch tells the stories of the men and women firefighters, paramedics and cops of Camelot. Camelot is an area where the streets of King and Arthur cross. On these corners are the 55th precinct police station and Fire Station 55.

By using paramedics, firemen and police, Third Watch has a much wider variety of situations to draw from and, as a result of this, gives us one of the more compelling network shows of the last decade. Producers John Wells (ER, later seasons of The West Wing) and Edward Allen Bernardo have put together a fairly strong cast of characters. Some likeable, some not so much so. Most of the casting seems to work, as I had no trouble believing the actors in their roles. Many shows have one or two cast members that simply don't feel right, that was not the case here.

We are treated to one featurette: The Nights of Camelot, a 16 minute look at the show. Featuring comments from Wells and the cast, it offers up some interesting tidbits about casting and how some characters changed from concept to casting.

Also added is a gag reel. I have never been a fan of gag reels and this one does little to change my view.

While never a big hit, *Third Watch* developed a pretty devoted following and it is not hard to see why. The show regularly delivers engrossing stories with interesting characters.

Fans of intelligent dramas should give *Third Watch* a chance.

Jeremy