

21

### **Sony Pictures Home Entertainment**

I thought I might have a suspension-of-disbelief problem with 21 as I read Edward Thorp's 'Beat the Dealer' when it came out in the late 60's, spawning a veritable cottage industry, coupled with my firm belief that you can not beat a negative expectation game over the long haul. I realize counting is supposed to make it a positive expectation. Sorry, I'm not convinced.

But...21 is a darn good yarn. Well written and acted with characters you can care about. What's not to like? MIT whizkids recruited by their Professor (Kevin Spacey) drill like crazy in card counting and take on Vegas, jobbing the Casinos for millions. The stuff that dreams are made of.

It's a character study of the effects of too much, too soon and is well handled, following Ben Campbell (Jim Sturgess) as he transforms from a likable geek to...well something less, dumping his two equally geeky friends after a year's worth of work on a robot car to be entered in a contest to his falling out with the Professor after a quarter of a million dollar screw up and his beating by Casino security to show him the error of his ways.

There is a second disc of extras including a copy of the film for your computer (assuming your computer is newer than mine) including the cast explaining the game and card counting.

21 is a good film and a good time.

*Lee Crawford*

### **THE BIG EASY: season one**

#### **MPI**

This cable TV adaptation of the 1987 Dennis Quaid-Ellen Barkin film premiered on USA Network in August 1996. Produced by Sonny Grosso and Larry Jacobsen, the series combined ensemble cop drama and romantic comedy.

In the pilot episode, Anne Osborne, attorney for the U.S. Department of Fish & Wildlife, arrives in New Orleans, and Det. Remy McSwain is assigned to be her escort. Younger and more open to each other than their movie counterparts, TV's Remy and Anne (Tony Crane and Susan Walters) had a flirtatious chemistry that spiced up the typical murder investigation.

The series also starred Northern Exposure's Barry Corbin as Remy's uncle and boss, Chief C.D. LeBlanc, and Karla Tamburrelli as Remy's smart-mouthed partner Darlene Broussard. Shooting on location in New Orleans gave the show luscious backdrops and an offbeat pace.

Though they showed considerable heat in the pilot, Remy and Anne's relationship deepened convincingly over the first season's 22 episodes. I thought it had gotten to just the right place when the season ended. A second season of 13 episodes aired but, without Walters' Anne, it became a more conventional procedural.

The Season One DVD set includes all 22 episodes in fullscreen format on 4 discs. There are no extras or scene selection, but I'm glad to be able to watch the show after 12 years. I still remember a lot of the characters' dialogue and mannerisms. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the show is also a bittersweet postcard of New Orleans as it was.

*Gerald So*

### **THE BIG LEBOWSKI: 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary edition**

#### **Universal Studios Home Entertainment**

Long considered one of the Coen Bros weaker films, The Big Lebowski has built up a cult following over the years. After watching it again, it is easy to see why.

Once the again, Joel and Ethan have given a cast of fine actors very colorful roles to inhabit.

Watching the performances, you get the impression that Bridges and company had a lot of fun playing in the strange world of The Dude.

This release contains a fairly enjoyable collection of extras. As I said, the cast and crew seem to have had a lot of fun on the film and that really comes through. Many featurettes have actors going through the motions, saying the same things every time around, but the Coens seem to remind folks just why they started acting in the first place.

A lot of love is evident here.

So pick up a copy and spend some time with Donny, Walter and the Dude, you won't regret it.

*Jeremy Lynch*

## **BIRDS OF PREY THE COMPLETE SERIES**

**Warner Home Entertainment**

When my Editor asked, "How was Birds of Prey?" I said, "Better than I expected". Come on, it's a six year old Super Hero TV series. You do the math. It struck me that while true this was a bit lukewarm in the review department.

I had enjoyed it more than that. For one thing I watched it all, something I don't always do with a series (keep that under your hat) and found a lot to like about it. The characters are a cut or two above what you would expect as is the dialogue, with Alfred the Butler (Ian Abercrombie) emerging as my hands down favorite. In the final battle he snaps a shotgun closed and tells the villainess (Mia Sara, looking VERY different in close cropped blond hair) to; "Buttle this."

The story arc of the Huntress (Ashley Scott), daughter of Batman and Catwoman, and the cop (Shemar Moore) is nicely handled, although it sometimes felt as if the writers had just gotten a new Psychology book and wanted to get their moneys worth tagging everyone's foibles. Oracle (Dina Meyer) formerly Batgirl, and Dina ((Rachel Skarsten) round out the Birds.

This is a better than decent series that will not overtax your grey matter but will entertain. You could do way worse.

*Lee Crawford*

## **BOSTON LEGAL: Season four**

**Fox Home Entertainment**

When BL announced their annual cleaning house, and dumped several cast members, the one bright spot with was the addition of Emmy winner John Larroquette (Night Court). While Mr. Larroquette has been enjoyable, the constant changing of cast has had a very noticeable impact.

The cast chemistry has never been weaker and the quirkiness of the show is now starting to feel forced. Seeing Denny having fake tear ducts installed so he can seem emotional...yeah, it was as sad as it sounds.

Not surprisingly, the long term cast members (Spade, Shatner and Bergan) all seem to work well together, but it is the new faces that often seem out of place.

Lest you think I am completely unhappy with the show, it still has many fine moments, and Candice Bergen and James Spader both continue to deliver excellent performances.

Fans of the show will likely have fun here, but the magic BL had at the beginning has faded.

*Jeremy Lynch*

## **CITY OF VICE**

**Koch Vision**

Set in the 1750's this is a crime drama that sees the formation of the Bow Street Runners under a pair of brothers recently made Magistrates of Winchester. Famous novelist Henry Fielding (Ian McDiarmid), author of Tom Jones and his blind brother John (Iain Glen) put together the beginnings of the first police force in London and the episodes on this set follow their first cases and the problems they encounter. Cut throat gangs who kidnap and steal entire households of belongings, brothels run by scheming ladies, murders of clergy and even serial killings. This is a refreshing take on procedurals and the time period makes it even more interesting. London is booming and the things society today takes for granted just haven't been able to keep up. The poor are ultra poor and the rich are oblivious. There seems to be no real law and order. As the Fieldings start to work they make strides in their goal of making the city they live in safe.

Wonderful sets, wonderful costumes and plenty of action make this a show worth watching and I plan to watch it again and again. I also hope there will be more because now I'm hooked.

*Jon Jordan*

## **COOL HAND LUKE**

**Warner Home Entertainment**

*What we got here ... is a failure to communicate.*

That is one of the most legendary lines in film history. Even seeing the line in print brings Struther Martin's voice into my head.

Unlike some "classic" films, Cool Hand Luke holds up over time. Sitting down with this, I was afraid that my mind had elevated CHL to a level it did not deserve...my fears were unfounded as it is every bit as good as I remembered.

Luke Johnson is a prisoner on a southern chain gang. Luke refused to be broken, and escapes more than once. While he is respected by the prisoners, the guards and warden obviously want to break him.

CHL got star Paul Newman an Oscar nomination, and co-star George Kennedy took home the statue for Best Supporting actor.

Since Paul has retired from acting, the only way to experience the serious mojo he had is to revisit some of the many classics of his past. Cool Hand Luke certainly fits into that category.

*Jeremy*

### **DIRTY SEXY MONEY: Season One** **Disney Home Entertainment**

When Dirty Sexy Money first debuted, I did not know what to make of it. DSM tosses equal amounts of humor, humanity, absurdity and drama into the mix. For most shows, this would result in an unequal mess. DSM has, this far, managed to pull it off, with rather impressive results.

Nick Fisher (Peter Krause of Six Feet Under and Sports Night) is an attorney with a wife and daughter. Early in his career, he vowed never to make the same mistake his father did: Let his work rule his world.

Now the very job that owned his father threatens to swallow him: Nick's father was the attorney for the Darlings, one of the richest, most powerful families in New York. They make Donald Trump look like the paperboy.

Not surprisingly, the Darlings require an enormous amount of attention (I.E. hand holding).

This is not your parents evening soap, this is night-time drama for a new generation.

DSM has a strong cast, with Donald Sutherland and Jill Clayburgh are excellent as the parents, and William Baldwin really shines as son being pushed thrust into greatness (ala JFK).

For extras, we get a look at the style behind the show, no small feat considering the Darlings are supposed to be among the wealthiest and most stylish folks in the world. We get a look at the clothes and penthouse. Also included are some pretty standard "behind the scenes" bits where the cast talks about how much they love the show they are on...what the hell are they supposed to say??

Sadly, the writers' strike caused the season to end rather abruptly, with many plotlines left in the air. That said, I can't wait for season two.

*Jeremy*

### **HAWAII FIVE-O: Season Four** **Paramount**

Season four of this show, shown originally in fall of 1971-spring of 1972, is another masterpiece. The writing is top notch and you can see that the writers understood the need to mix things up. We have episodes with international intrigue like the two part The 90 Second War, cases with simple theft turned sour like as in the episode with Vic Morrow and John Ritter called Two Doves and Mr. Morrow. There is a wonderful episode with Buddy Epsen as the leader of a scam to use stolen travelers checks. Hume Cronyn is back as the villain with a million faces in Odd Man In. Such issues as serial killing and blackmail are common as are episodes with McGarrett trying to keep the mob out of Hawaii. The plots hold up well and in a lot of cases the police work they show is ahead of its time. Forensics play a big part and so does the knowledge of needing cases to hold up in court.

Once again the driving force of the show is McGarrett and his drive to see justice done. While he is obviously a swinging single, nothing interferes with work, not even the government. McGarrett also has a relationship with his fellow detectives and treats them with respect. All members of the Five-O team are important and no one man makes it work solo. He assumes each officer can do any job assigned to them and they seem to always come through. I think television writers of today's shows could learn a few things from watching these episodes.

The Islands of Hawaii made it easy to entice guest stars on to Hawaii Five-O and anyone familiar with television from the seventies and eighties is sure to recognize people throughout this season. 24 episodes strong this set doesn't have any special features, but who cares! The show is great, and again I recommend it highly.

*Jon Jordan*

## **LIKE FATHER LIKE SON** **Koch Vision**

This is a drama that originally aired as a miniseries. It features Robson Green of *Wire in the Blood* fame and Jemma Redgrave. Green plays Dominic Milne and he is a teacher engaged to Dee Stanton. Aside from her son not being happy with the family changes things seem to be going great. However things soon change as a murder of a local girl bring out secrets from the past. Dee's first husband is a convicted serial killer and when her son finds out his world is shattered. Dominic is also put under suspicion when he is accused of something at school involving the dead teenager.

While this could certainly be called a crime drama what it really does is examine how people react to change and stress and how people can be torn apart and drawn back together. The real story here is about family. Green and Redgrave are wonderful in the lead roles. Somerset Prew is amazing as the teenage son Jamie. His range from anger to fear and confusion is that of a seasoned veteran. Director Nick Laughland did a nice job of controlling the pace and building the tension. This is a perfect example of why British television is so good at crime drama.

*Jon Jordan*

## **MANNIX – Season One** **Paramount**

I have been saying for years that I want *Mannix* on DVD. When I got a chance to meet one of the co creators last year at a festival we both agreed that the show needed to be on DVD. And now it's here.

When this show first aired in 1967-1968 I was 4. There were eight seasons, so when the show finally stopped airing in 1975 I was 12 and an avid viewer. My parents were pretty cool and let me stay up and watch the show with them. My memories of the show are hazy, I remember *Mannix* hitting a lot of people and I remember a lot of scenes done outside. My biggest memory is that I loved it. So now it's 40 years later and I am watching the first season, and it does my heart good to say the show is still indeed great.

Season one has Joe Mannix working at Intertect, a security and investigations firm on a corporate scale run by Lew Wickersham. As we learn later in the season, Joe and Lew have a history, one that includes fighting together in a military situation. Lew like his offices run tight, only one paper on a desk at a time, and most of the work is done by the computers. Of course in 1967 the computers were huge goliaths running giant tape spools and spitting out hundreds of punch cards and generating a lot of paper. Joe is an anomaly at Intertect, his desk and office are a mess and he is not really a believer in the power of computing. Mannix relies on legwork and talking to people to get his information. The first season plays heavily into the relationship between Lew and Joe. I've seen it said they didn't get a long, which is untrue. Lew knows how good Mannix is and quite often after scolding him about something he turns away and smiles. And the truth is, Lew is always there if needed, though it's not often that Joe needs help. Later seasons have Joe working on his own, though Lew does pop in occasionally.

Mannix handles a variety of cases in the 24 episodes here. Missing persons, art forgery, kidnapping and all the staples of a typical fictional PI. What makes this something special is the fact that he really cares what happens. He has a low bullshit tolerance and doesn't care for injustices. What makes this fun is the fact that Mannix has no problems beating the crap out of people. He gets hit too, and shot, but he always gives better than he gets. He also drives a really damn cool car (a 1968 Toronado). Mike Connors really took on this role with full gusto, he did a lot of his own stunts and you can tell he's enjoying every minute.

The extra features are nice. There is a two part conversation with Connors and Joseph Camanella done right before the release in which they talk about the show and the fun they had. There is also a clip from *Diagnosis Murder* in which Mannix has a cameo. There are also audio introduction from Connors on a lot of the episodes. This show inspired a lot of people, both screenwriters and novelists. After watching this first season I can see why. I plan to have the whole set on my shelves and they will be getting a lot of use.

*Jon Jordan*

## **New Street Law Season Two** **Koch Vision**

After the first season we have a handle on who Jack Roper (John Hannah) is, or so we think. This second season brings a few more surprises our way as the law firm sees some staff changes and changes in the relationship between the characters. While each episode see the barristers going to court and doing what they do so well, we also see them struggle with the lack of funds and the personal lives impacting on the office.

Hannah is easy to watch in this role that could very easily become just another preaching lawyer. He makes the decisions made believable and logical. And while not really someone I would be pals with, I would want him defending me. Also starring are John Thomson (Cold Feet, Blackpool) and Lisa Faulkner (Murder in Suburbia, Holby City).

One of the things I really enjoy about this show is the fact that they manage to change my opinion of a few characters. A few people who I started out really liking have become people I want to see bad things happen to, and a few characters I found to be rude and unlikable have since redeemed themselves.

This is a clever show and something I could easily re-watch.

*Jon Jordan*

## **RESCUE ME: Season Four** **Sony**

Anyone who has seen this show knows that it is full of bittersweet moments. Leary's character Tommy Gavin is a man troubled by many things and in turns tends to make many bad decisions. The people around him are similar, if not to the same extremes. But what makes this such a great show and so utterly watchable is the fact that everyone on this show is so believable. There is definitely some extreme behavior, but I've know people who have acted like this for real. Every episode I watch has me rooting for these folks to succeed, yet leaving me not the least surprised if they don't.

Season Four sees a different Tommy Gavin than the one we met in season one, he's sober, he quit smoking, and he seems more mature. He's struggling with his problems and trying to find answers. He still battles the urge to drink, he has questions about his faith and his job and his family. The season opens with Tommy facing arson charges. There is also a new baby boy in the house and there is a question about whether it is Tommy's or his dead brother's. Members of his firehouse are all struggling with relationship issues and there is a tragedy early on that changes the dynamic at work.

I think what this season is about is not so much redemption, but acceptance. Accepting that you can't control life, only make the best of it. There is a wonderful little speech at the end in the last episode by Lou at a baseball game that compares life to baseball that really wraps it up nicely. This is immediately followed by one of the best-acted scenes I've ever seen Leary do. He and his Father played by Charles Durning are having a real bonding experience at a ball game. This is the front of a montage showing various characters with the Cars "let the good times roll" playing in the background. As the camera comes to rest on Leary and Durning and then pulls back and fades into the credits I got choked up. Sadness, understanding and satisfaction filled.

Bittersweet to the very last, and some of the best TV I've ever watched.

*Jon Jordan*

## **RISKY BUSINESS: 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition** **Warner**

Tom Cruise stars as Joel, a respectful, white, upper-middle class Chicago boy. His biggest worry is making his father happy by getting into a top-notch school.

But all that changes when his parents go on vacation. His friend orders him a call girl, but this lady ends up being very tall, very black and very masculine.

Wendy gives Joel Lana's phone number. Lana is what Joel wants; she is "what every white boy off the lake wants."

After an unforgettable night of whoopee (A phrase from an old game show), Joel's like turns to chaos.

Before his parents get home, Joel will be chased by "Guido the killer pimp", put his father's Porsche in Lake Michigan, make love on a train and have a Princeton entrance interview whiling hosting an escort party for his friends.

While Risky Business may sound like a basic teen sex flick, it is a very fun, very well made film. Tom Cruise was just another young actor, but Risky Business made him a star. While Cruise is great, Curtis Armstrong (Moonlighting, Revenge of the Nerds) steals many of the scenes he is in.

After over two decades, it is fun to revisit this really good film.

So go out and pick up a copy. Remember, sometimes you have to say "What the F\*\*K, make your move."  
*Jeremy Lynch*

**SAVING GRACE: Season one**  
**Fox Home Entertainment**

In my lifetime, there have been a fair number of television shows with a religious theme (*Highway to Heaven*, *Touched by an Angel*, *Seventh Heaven*). Each of these shows seemed to be aimed at the Middle American, church-going family. After the Sunday evening family meal, everyone gathers around the television to watch a wholesome show full of goodness.

Saving Grace ain't that show. Grace Hanadarko (Holly Hunter) is a chain-smoking, hard drinking, foul-mouthed, sexed up Oklahoma City police officer. She would likely cause the cast of *Touched by an Angel* to weep and give up.

One night, a very drunk Grace hits a man. After praying for assistance, she is visited by an angel named Earl (Leon Rippy). At first, she does not believe he is an angel (Perhaps because he looks like he just came from a Lynyrd Skynyrd reunion concert), but he ultimately convinced her of his divine nature.

Earl has been assigned to help to guide Grace, and this is no easy task since she often ignores him.

Religious shows are not my cup of tea, but Saving Grace shattered any preconceived notions I might have had about it. It is not a Christian show, but rather a crime show with a spiritual theme to it.

Holly Hunter is an excellent actress and here she does an amazing job. Grace does not easily fall into any one category or stereotype. She is a very flawed character that struggles to be a better person, despite those flaws. I am sure that there are many of you that have passed by Saving Grace because of its religious nature, but you should give it a chance. I think there the smart writing and complex characters will draw you in and make you a believer...in the series.

*Jeremy Lynch*

**TORCHWOOD Season Two**  
**BBC Worldwide**

Season two of this Dr. Who spin off is even better than the first. This crew of people who are off the radar acting to keep Earth safe from various alien threats deal with things the average citizen on the street could never imagine. Cardiff England is the home base for these heroes and even they manage to be surprised by some of the things they see.

We find out more about the enigmatic Captain Jack and most of the characters go through some changes. The wedding episode in particular was a lot of fun as a shape shifter wrecks havoc during Gwen's nuptials. The opening and ending episodes also feature James Marsters as Captain John Hart who has a past with Jack. Freeman Agyeman also shows up in a few episodes reviving her role from Dr. Who as Martha Jones. John Barrowman is really the biggest reason to watch the show, he is utterly charming and engaging and is the perfect action hero. The rest of the crew is also given more of a chance to shine and I really hope they comeback for a season three.

Fast paced and loads of fun this season is funny, and sad and action packed.

The American release is in Sept.

*Jon Jordan*

**VERTIGO**  
**Universal Studios Home Entertainment**

Prior to this release, I had only seen Vertigo once. A strange thing since I have seen most Hitchcock (Notorious, North by Northwest, To Catch a thief, Spellbound) so many times I can almost recite the entire script! My initial impression was that it was enjoyable, but not Earth shattering.

What a difference twenty years can make. Maybe I was not watching closely, maybe I was too young. Whatever the case, my impression of Vertigo has dramatically changed for the better.

Over the span of his career, Hitchcock pushed the envelope. His creativity paved the way for future directors.

Vertigo is one of his most daring films and is a technical masterpiece.

While Vertigo has been on DVD for some time, the quality has always been lacking. This release features a wonderfully crisp transfer. The folks that handled the restoration did an excellent job. This release also contains an excellent batch of extras, a nice mix that will appeal to both film buffs as well as the casual viewers. Frankly, I can't imagine any self-respecting film library not having a copy.  
*Jeremy Lynch*

### **Wire In The Blood Seasons 4 and 5 Koch Vision**

As most readers of Crimespree probably know this series is based on the characters by Val McDermid in her wonderful series of books. Robson Green has really done a nice job of making the character live and breathe. In order to let the viewer in on his thoughts Green has adopted a number of mannerisms to take the place of the reader "seeing" his thoughts. He has brought Tony Hill to the screen in a wonderful way and the portrayal is one of a sympathetic slightly nutty genius who is both vulnerable and at times childlike with his obsessive nature. It's truly captivating and every minute is a joy to watch.

Season four brought a change of cast from Hermione Norris (who was in season 6 and 7 of Spooks or MI-5 as it's called here) as Carol Jordan to Simone Lahbib as DI Alex Fielding. As much as I enjoyed the first three seasons with Norris I really like Simone Lahbib. The character of Alex is obviously similar as they both fill the same role in Tony Hill's life, but I find Alex Fielding to be a bit more personable and honest. I also think her being a single mother adds to the relationship between her and Tony.

The other two main characters are still here, Mark Letheren as DS Kevin Goeffries and Paula Handy as DC Ashley Vernon. Both Kevin and Ashley have grown since season one, both appearing more confident and better detectives. The relationship within the team is also stronger.

Season four consists of 4 episodes, Time to Murder and Create, Torment, Hole In the Heart and Wounded Surgeon. The last of these is especially good. A convict that was put away due to Tony's help (His first case) may be released due to DNA testing. Tony questions his own judgment and his abilities. I also really enjoyed Hole in the Heart which looks at the Freemasons. Torment was based on the book THE TORMENT OF OTHERS, and though has a few changes was wonderful.

Season five is also four episodes, The Colour of Amber which centers on an Amber alert and a child being killed, Nocebo which looks at voodoo and strange religious habits, The Name of Angels which has a wonderfully fiendish killer at work, and wraps up with Anything You Can Do which introduces someone from Tony's past and has a series of killings which may be being done by a team of killers.

The story telling here is strong and engrossing. Each episode while totally watchable on its own becomes much stronger as part of the whole. No cheap tricks or gimmicks, the audience is treated with respect and intelligence. This is one of the great crime dramas and I can't wait for season six on Disc. There is also a single episode which has Tony in Texas releasing in August so it should be available when our next issue ships.

Each episode is about 90 minutes, and season five has a new set of interviews including Val McDermid. Val also made a cameo in season four.

*Jon Jordan*