

Issue 28 DVD Reviews:

24: REDEMPTION

Fox Home Entertainment

I almost took a pass on 24: Redemption. I'm glad I didn't. This is vintage Jack Bauer, reluctant but efficient killing machine. Jack is a perfect pragmatist. He does what need to be done. No more, no less. He won't back down from the ugliness and he takes as good as he gives. And he gives good.

We open with Jack working (off some karma?) in a small boys school in some non-place in Africa for Carl, old friend and former comrade in Special Forces. A Rebel Colonel from a neighboring country raiding for 'soldiers', as young as eight, kills one and seriously wounds another of Carls' boys when they decide not to volunteer. As Carl races back with the wounded boy he calls Jack, who is leaving the school to dodge a Congressional subpoena, and says "Don't let them take my kids." He won't.

What follows is one of the best combat scenes I've seen in way too long. Oh there are lots with more explosions and gunfire than this, and heroes who have read the script and know they are not going to get hurt, much less killed, but this one is like watching out your back door. It's that real and Kiefer Sutherland has read the script but it doesn't show. You know they are not going to kill Jack off in hour one of twenty-four but you worry anyway. Damn good stuff.

The Specials are pretty standard but worth a listen as you have the star, writer and director talking about something that came together very much as they had hoped. The extra 10 minutes or so is extended scenes, many of which I wish they could have left in as they are nicely rewarding in their own right.

The others are 'Blood Never Dry' a report on child soldiers. An estimated ten percent of all the soldiers in the world right now are under thirteen. This is truly chilling. The Making of Twenty Four: Redemption and the first 17 minutes of season seven.

If this is any indication, the Twenty Four franchise has quite a bit of life left in it.

This is the intro to season seven but is a fine stand alone movie and if you missed it...well you missed something.

Lee Crawford

ADAM-12: season two

Shout! Factory

When I was given Season 2 of Adam-12 to watch and review, I fully expected to suffer. I remember loving the show when I was a kid and I was afraid of being as disillusioned as I was when I tried to relive my crush on Dominick Luca by watching episodes of SWAT on Hulu.com. (It was painful. That show is simply awful.) But I was pleasantly surprised with Adam-12. I watched episode after episode with great interest.

Adam-12 is just a straight-up, cop-on-the-street show, unlike anything we have today. There are very few car chases, a couple of foot chases and shoot-outs but not as many as we see today. It's just Malloy (Martin Milner) and Reed (Kent McCord) patrolling the streets, interacting with the citizens they are sworn to protect and serve. As in all Jack Webb productions, the stories are all based on actual cases from the files of the LAPD. One stand-out episode is Log 123 – Courtroom which deals with a case being dismissed on a technicality. This episode also includes a "Ride Along Fast Track", a series of captions that explain procedures and points of law and the definition of the word "hinky". I always wanted to know what that word means.

Season 2 extras also include commentary by two Los Angeles police officers who were on the beat when Adam-12 was on the air. It's pretty amazing how few errors these officers caught. Most of them are small like when Reed and Malloy are sometimes seen out of their car without their hats on, probably because it looks better on camera. In that era, they would have been written up for being out of uniform. The real officers point out only one glaring error: In the episode Log 143 - Cave, Reed and Malloy comply when a suspect holding a man hostage with a knife demands that they put their weapons down. In real life, we are told, an officer never holsters his weapon when a civilian is in danger.

The show would be worth watching just to see actor Martin Milner as Officer Pete Malloy. Milner is always a pleasure to watch because he embodies his characters without a hint of technique. He's the kind of actor who stands out even in supporting roles. He's also a darned, good-looking guy. I always go for the guys with a unique look. You can look at Martin Milner and know exactly how he looked in his grade school photos. (If his partner, Kent McCord, were as darkly handsome in his school pictures as he was in Adam-12, it would have been just plain weird.)

Another extra included on this set is a photo tour of the LAPD Academy where Reed and Malloy would have trained. You might recognize this building from a number of television shows, including Charlie's Angels and the perfectly dreadful T.J. Hooker.

Naomi Krueger

CSI: Season eight

CBS/Paramount Home Entertainment

Season eight saw the ending of the Miniature Killer storyline (You have no idea how pissed I was at the end of the season seven DVD set when I saw it ended on a cliffhanger.). While that storyline made season seven especially compelling, they do a bang-up job making sure that this season is not a letdown.

One of the most interesting storylines saw Warrick struggle not only with his failing marriage, but a drug problem as well. This is an excellent example of how CSI blends characters into procedural genre. Warrick's issues, along with the evolution of Grissom and Sara's relationship kept me hooked even when the technical aspects of the show failed to do so.

Also included is the crossover *Without a Trace* episode. While it would make sense to always have the other ep from crossovers that does not always happen, because of conflicting studios and distributors.

As with previous seasons, we are given an impressive array of extras that look at the characters, production and technical aspects of the show. A few less commentary tracks, but still a solid collection.

CSI continues to mix character with plot, and does so rather well. Fans of the series will enjoy season eight, as the quality remains high. Not too many shows can make that claim after eight seasons.

Jeremy Lynch

GEORGE CARLIN: IT'S BAD FOR YA

MPI Video

My grandpa Jack was a gruff, cranky old man. He drank too much, had a basement bedroom filled with bleak books about the Ukraine, and used to tell my grandmother to "Quit your babbling, woman!" and mean it. He also made up the best stories about half-horses and other nonsense, buried pocket change in a bucket of sand so my brother and I could harvest coins from the Magic Penny Garden, and took us for sundaes at the Dairy Queen. In addition, he owned--and wore--a baseball hat that said: *Wisconsin! Land of Cow Shit and Beer Farts*.

My grandpa passed away when I was in seventh grade, and so I don't remember if he was a George Carlin fan. I do, however, imagine they'd get along just fine. I like to think of the two of them, cussing and grumbling, shooting the shit up there somewhere...smiling down at me as I type this. (Just kidding about the last part. If you've seen *It's Bad For Ya*--Carlin's last HBO special before his death this past summer--you'll know why.)

George Carlin was an icon of American comedy, and a master of envelope pushing. In *It's Bad for Ya* he skewers faith, American rights, the afterlife, child worship, sports idols, the self esteem movement, George W. Bush, and death itself. It's oddly liberating to see Carlin, looking every one of his 71 years, actually *mocking death*, giving it his patented Fuck You. *It's Bad for Ya* may lack the lighter moments of some of his earlier specials, but it's one of Carlin's funniest in recent memory.

Special features include *Too Hip for the Room* (2007), which is excerpted from a candid interview with Carlin; it provides some fascinating insight into his evolution from a conventional comedian to a writer and philosopher, who used humor to inspire deeper thought. The other special feature must be seen to be believed: Georgie on *The Jackie Gleason Show* (circa 1969), *in a suit and tie*, with short hair, doing a clean, non-confrontational routine. It's almost more shocking than his main event joke about grandmas in hell. I'm just sayin'.

In accordance with his wishes, there were no public or private services held for Carlin upon his passing; so in a way *It's Bad For Ya* plays like an F-bomb laden benediction; an appropriate, offensive, hilarious, and thoughtful final bow for a brilliant career

Jill Lynch

HAWAII FIVE-O: Season five

CBS/Paramount Home Entertainment

The Fifth season brings us the first of the cast changes, not unusual for a long running show. Though being in Hawaii did limit some of the actors to choose from for the minor roles. Gone is Zulu as Kono Kalakaua and enter Al Harrington as Detective. Ben Koku. Harrington had been on the show before; in fact he played two different bad guys in season four. Also getting a more prominent role is Herman Wedemeyer as Duke, a beat cop who sometimes works undercover.

The guest stars keep flocking to the show as well. Most notably for me was a great episode with William Shatner as a PI. A friend of his was conned while on vacation by a team of blackmailers, Shatner goes undercover to nail them and get his pal's money back. This season also saw more episodes on a grand scale with puzzles and elaborate crimes to solve along with cases that have international impact

I can't say enough good things about Hawaii Five-0, it holds up well and to me a big part of that is the fact that they were using technology that was as up to date as they could at the time. It's the fact that the cases get worked and solved that make it so enjoyable. The characters are also much better than I remember from watching as a kid. The show also uses a lot of footage shot around the island on location and it only makes it even better.

If you want some damn fine entertainment on disc that is from a bygone era, this is the show you want. It's still some of the best TV made.

Jon Jordan

A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE (BLU-RAY)

Warner Home Video

Viggo Mortensen plays Tom Stall, a family man in small town Indiana. When an attempted robbery of his diner results in his killing the criminals, Tom is thrust into the spotlight as a hero. This publicity brings some unwanted attention when a mobster (Ed Harris) comes into town insisting that Tom is not who he claims to be.

To reveal any more would spoil the film. This gives you the set-up. The story itself is not what makes this special. It is the impassioned performances by Mortensen, Maria Bello (Tom's Wife) and others that draws you in and makes you want to understand what is happening and why.

William Hurt has a small, but important role that won him an Academy Award nomination for best supporting actor. His part takes up perhaps 15 minutes of screen time, but in that time he certainly makes an impact and reminds you just how good of an actor he is. Extras include a director's commentary that adds insight and makes the film all the more fascinating. Also featured is an examination of the two very minor differences between the U.S. version and the international version. It is amazing what minor changes can make a scene acceptable to the MPAA. Other features include footage from the Cannes film festival. While many films toss on bits and pieces simply to have bonus features, the extras here are welcome additions that add to the viewing experience.

The transfer to Blu-ray is a solid one, with the colors all sharp and the contrast is quite good.

Jeremy

THE MOD SQUAD: Season two

CBS/Paramount Home Entertainment

Long before Veronica Mars and Buffy, before 21 Jump Street and other shows with the same premise there was THE MOD SQUAD. Truly a first for television as Aaron Spelling and Danny Thomas brought this show to air using young people in a show for young people.

Captain Adam Greer played deftly by Tige Andrews (who was all over television including the Phil Silvers show and Police Story) and he brings these three troubled teens together to work for the cops. He manages to reach them and can work with them in way that doesn't make them feel they are "selling out to the man".

The three young cops are Pete Cochran (Michael Cole) who is from a rich family he can't identify with, "Linc" Hayes (Clarence Williams III) from Watts and Julie Barnes (Peggy Lipton) an idealistic flower child with family issues of her own.

Greer uses the kids to go undercover in places where regular cops can't and as a result we obviously get a look at a lot of the culture of the times as they go after drug dealers, con men and other criminals. The show, is obviously a bit dated because of the way it relies heavily on the times (just as 21 Jumpstreet feels very 80's) to set the feel. This doesn't really take away from the enjoyment though as it feels partly like a snapshot of the times.

The second season has the actors all feeling more at home in their characters and they come across a bit more natural. The real strength come from Clarence Williams III who seems to be totally natural in the role. Some of the episodes have a familiar feeling, but the interpretation on the show works. In My Name is Manolete we see shades of Dickens Oliver Twist, there is also a classic plot redone here with Pete being drugged and framed for murder.

The show also still feels strangely relevant even though its 40 years old. A lot of the social issues are still with us, illiteracy, stalking, poverty, racism and stereo typing. In fact it's kind of sad that so many of the things that cause hassles on the show are still with us, I guess all that really changes is the music and the clothes.

On a personal note I'd also like to add that I love the fact that in most episodes Linc finds an excuse to leap through the air and tackle someone. It really seems like they were having a lot of fun doing this show.

Mod Squad is still an entertaining show and while it may not be as hard hitting as it was when it came out, I think there is still a lot to enjoy here.

Jon Jordan

PLANET OF THE APES (Blu-ray)

MGM/Fox Home Entertainment

Planet of the Apes was a staple of my childhood. Saturday and Sunday afternoons saw replay after replay, with me lying on the floor watching Charlton Heston treated like some sort of animal (I later saw him the same way, though for political reasons).

This is the first time I have revisited the film in almost two decades. I watched most of the series during my teen years, only to realize that many of them are nowhere near as good as I remembered.

Fortunately, the original flick still has mojo!

For those that may not be familiar with the film (The young whippersnappers), Taylor (Heston) is an astronaut that finds himself on a planet where intelligent, talking apes are the dominant species and humans are mute primitives. I am not going to go any further with the plotline, in case you have not seen the film.

Looking at his career, I could not help but notice that Apes appears to be a turning point for Heston. The late 60s and early 70s saw him playing heroes and loner type characters. Prior to that, his claim to fame was historical pieces (10 Commandments, Ben Hur).

PotAs is a damn good film; it does an excellent job of mixing mainstream fun with a strong, deeper message. They deliver exciting action scenes while using clever imagery and cinematography to create a visually impressive, alien world.

The film is delivered in 1080p/AVC MPEG-4 format. It looks better than I expected, but is a bit faded. The audio is DTS-HD 5.1, but we are still using a very old audio track so there is not too much surround some going on here.

Two audio commentary tracks are provided: Actors Roddy McDowall, Kim Hunter and Natalie Trundy join makeup artist John Chambers for one, with Composer Jerry Goldsmith handling the other. Also included is a text commentary track with Eric Greene, author of *Planet of the Apes as American Myth*.

There is a documentary entitled Behind the Planet of the Apes, featurette from 1968, a make-up test for Edward G Robinson, some footage of McDowall on set, dailies and outtakes (that sadly have no audio), a teaser trailer and photo gallery.

Planet holds up well after all these years. Smart but still exciting, it is a film that deserves to be in the collection of film fans everywhere. With no other copies of this film, I am happy to have this. If you already own it, I can't see the point in picking up the BD version, unless you are set on converting your entire collection to HD.

Jeremy

REAPER: Season One

Lionsgate Home Entertainment

On his twenty-first birthday, lovable slacker Sam Oliver (Bret Harrison) discovers his parents sold his soul to The Devil (Ray Wise). Now, in addition to his job at The Work Bench, he's doomed to be The Devil's bounty hunter, capturing and sending escaped souls back to Hell using random "vessels" (anything from a handheld vacuum cleaner to a toy truck).

The premise may sound far-out, but Sam and his Work Bench buddies Sock (Tyler Labine) and Ben (Rick Gonzales) have an easy chemistry and can't-miss dialogue clearly influenced by Kevin Smith (who directed the pilot). Ray Wise, meanwhile, can go from charming to menacing in a blink.

At first frustrated at his predicament, Sam gradually matches wits with The Devil, but his progress never feels obvious or preachy. Early episodes follow a freak/vessel-of-the-week formula, but several larger storylines develop mid-season.

Reaper's fate as a series was uncertain until just before The CW's upfront presentation in May, when the network ordered a 13-episode second season.

The five-disc Season One set includes 18 widescreen episodes, commentary on the pilot by co-creators Michele Fazekas and Tara Butters and producer Deborah Spera, deleted scenes, and a gag reel.

Gerald So

RIGHTEOUS KILL

Anchor Bay

A couple of seasoned the NYPD, Detectives Turk (Robert DeNiro) and Rooster (Al Pacino) find themselves investigating a series of disturbing murders: Somebody is offing the dregs of society and leaving behind poems. That is not the disturbing part, as the dead are felons and are clearly scumbags (and film works hard to tell us this). No, the disturbing part is that it looks like the killer is a cop.

RK gives Al and Robert a solid supporting cast: Turk's lover Karen, a forensic specialist with kinky tastes (Carla Gugino), a pair of ambitious up-and-comers Ted Riley (Donnie Wahlberg) and Simon Perez (John Leguizamo) and Lieutenant Hingis (Brian Dennehy), the stern boss who wants these murders solved!

The games start right off the bat with a grainy recording of Turk "confessing" to the murder of 14 criminals over the course of his 30+ years as a cop. Footage of this is spliced throughout the film.

I can't imagine that anyone believed this. As a matter of fact, I started resenting the film pretty damn quick; it was nowhere near as clever as it thought it was.

RK is a leaden, cliché filled stinker that staggers around, trying to be suspenseful and smart, yet failing miserably. It works hard (too hard) to keep the viewer guessing, but I figured out where we were going at about the 30 minute marker.

With such a strong cast, games are not needed, simply tell the story and let the stars shine. Instead, we are subjected to endless twists and turns, as well as countless flashbacks and other gimmicky stunts.

It felt like the person behind the camera took a class or two, and then hijacked a production. Somebody stop this guy before he strikes again! Director Jon Avnet has a spotty history (88 Minutes, Up Close and Personal) and I can't help but wonder what RK might have been in the hands of a superior director.

Overall, RK is an entertaining film that could have been a hell of a lot more. Fans of Pacino and De Niro will have fun here, but it should have been much more.

Brandon Lanter

ROMAN HOLIDAY:

Centennial collection

Paramount Home Entertainment

There is not much to say about Audrey Hepburn that has not already been said. From the early moments her her career, she was the kind of girl that men fall in love with and women want to be. Even now, 55 years after her first major film role, her performance seems utterly fresh.

In Roman Holiday, Audrey Hepburn plays Princess Ann, future queen of an unnamed European country. On a goodwill tour of Europe, Ann spends day after day greeting dignitaries and attending formal functions, but the confines of her restrictive schedule and stuffy routine begin to wear on her, and by the time she reaches Rome she is ready to burst. Enchanted by a village dance she sees through her bedroom window, Ann sneaks out of her room, past the royal guard, and into the city itself.

Along the way she meets handsome American reporter Joe Bradley (Gregory Peck), who has just gambled away the majority of his paycheck. One he realizes Hepburn's true identity, he knows there is a fortune to be made off the scandalous tale of a princess on the loose, and so he agrees to show her the city. Joe and "Anya" naturally end up having the time of their lives--drinks are thrown, secret service men are evaded, romance blooms--and by the end of the night, a wrenching decision must be made.

Listen--you know you crime buffs need a break from all of the violence and gore in your Netflix queue. If you have not seen Roman Holiday--and even if you have--get to the store and buy yourself a copy, for this film is an absolute delight. For history buffs, it plays like a postcard time capsule of Rome in the fifties. For film geeks, there is an entire disc filled with extras: Audrey Hepburn featurettes, a restoration doc that show how much work went into cleaning and polishing the film back to its original glory, retrospectives on costumes, the Hollywood blacklist, and Paramount in the '50s--even a photo gallery that you can click through at your leisure. The only small complaint I have is that that only Hepburn's Paramount pictures are mentioned, making it seem as though she went straight from Holly Golightly to goodwill ambassador; but that is hardly a deal breaker.

Do I need to mention that this film is appropriate for all ages, and would look great under the tree--totally classing up your array of Christmas socks, beer nuts, and Grand Theft Auto? ...I'm so on to you.

Jill Lynch

SUNSET BOULEVARD: Centennial collection

Paramount Home Entertainment

My first glimpse of Sunset Boulevard was in the television version of Trading Places. Don't remember the scene? Well, the scene wasn't in the theatrical or VHS version--might be on the DVD, but don't quote me on that. There was a scene in the TV version that shows Paul "I was in every movie in the 80s" Gleason's character actually steal the stock information for the Dukes. A security guard that is guarding the information is watching Sunset Boulevard. I said, "I need to see that movie. Because I love William Holden and he was just shot in that scene!" So I ran out and bought it, and said, "WOW! What a fantastic movie." That was in the mid-to-upper 80s. Probably closer to "late" to almost "not" 80s. I watched it again the other day for the latest DVD release and said, "WOW! What a fantastic movie."

If you're thinking I just ruined the movie by telling you William Holden gets shot...you're wrong. I will even tell you...He DIES! HA!...and Darth Vader is Luke's father! No, I am not ruining it for you: the movie opens with William Holden dead in a pool, then flashes back to how he got there.

William Holden plays a down on his luck script writer in Hollywood, who meets an aging former movie star. That is all I am going to tell you about the plot and story. Let me tell you it is creepy, sad, and VERY dark. There is arguably only one redeemable character in the whole movie and it is played by Jack Webb (yes, THAT Jack Webb! DUHN DUH DUHN DUHN "Just the facts, Ma'am"). I say "arguably" because you could make a case for one other, but you would be wrong. Well, Cecil B. DeMille's character is redeemable, but he plays himself so that doesn't count. And say what you want about Gloria Swanson's over-acted portrayal of the aging star, but she was SUPPOSED to over-act. The character was a drama-queen.

We get a lot of special features. As matter of fact, they had to put them all on a second DVD. There are featurettes about Sunset Blvd., Gloria Swanson, William Holden, Paramount Pictures in the '50s, and even one about Edith Head, the famous costume designer who recently died.

Randy Otteson

THE SPY WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD

Criterion Collection

Alec Leamas (Richard Burton) is a hardened British spy. He has been in the game for years and professes to have no real set of beliefs. If one were to believe Alec, his job is not a calling to protect country and queen, but simply his job.

The events of The Spy Who Came in from the Cold test put Alec's comments to the test. After a long career, Alec is approached with a very different mission: Alec is to "retire" and make his disgruntlement known, then eventually "defect" and give the Russians false info. As with any good spy film, there is a considerable amount of duplicity. More than once, I was unsure who was playing who. I am not going to go into the story any further; it should be experienced without too many spoilers. I will say that as Alec gets further and further into his mission, he finds himself starting to realize that there are things that matter to him.

The Spy Who came in from the Cold is a fascinating look not simply at the spy game or the cold war, but also humanity. The core message seems to be that you must believe in something. It does not matter what, but that without a core set of beliefs, you will also certainly get lost the sea of ideologies that bombard us with their messages on an almost daily basis.

Visually, this disc looks outstanding. There are no noticeable scratches or blemishes. I don't know if any restoration was done, but I can't imagine a nicer transfer.

There is a new interview (39 minutes) with le Carré. The author is refreshingly candid in his answers, but I suppose one feels the freedom to express ones opinion when you are in your 70s. He offers up some fun anecdotes and takes some shots at Paramount. The Secret Centre: John le Carré is a 2000 BBC documentary that gives us a detailed look at the life and career of the author, including comments from those in the intelligence community at the same time as le Carré.

There is an audio interview with director Martin Ritt that is from the mid 80s. He talks about his career and his political views. Richard Burton is the focus of the 1967 BBC piece *Acting in the '60s*. In a sit-down interview, Burton talks about his career both film and stage. Spy is only mentioned briefly. We get a look at five key scenes with cinematographer Oswald Morris. I found this fascinating, as he talked about not only how the scenes were shot, but why.

By putting the name Criterion on a package, the bar is automatically raised fairly high, but this set is delightful and offers up a fair amount of insight not only into the making of the movie, but in the careers of those involved.

I highly recommend it.

Jeremy