

BOSTON LEGAL: Season Five
Fox Home Entertainment

Reviewing season five of BL is tricky. On the one hand, the quality is certainly better than that of season four, the weakest season in the history of the show. But while it had sparks of vintage BL, it still did not match the magic of the first couple.

Creator David Kelley worked with ABC to secure a fifth season as he wanted to be able to give Danny, Alan and co a proper send-off. Watching this, it is clear they were all aware of this and worked extra hard to make these final 13 episodes.

The result is enjoyable, though occasionally too far over the top. I love the fact that Kelley and co have no qualms about taking the characters places that not all actors would be comfortable going. But there are some moments that left me rolling my eyes.

That said, the ending is absurd and vintage Boston Legal. In the end, we all knew that Alan and Denny would live happily ever after. From start to finish, BL was about the power of friendship and true love. So while I am sad saying goodbye to Denny Crane and Alan Shore, I can't help but smile at the memories they have left me with.

Jeremy Lynch

THE CLOSER: Season Four
Warner Home Entertainment

Kyra Sedgwick returns as Brenda Johnson, head of the special homicide task force called Priority Homicide for the fourth season of this critically acclaimed series. Thank goodness, because three seasons would not be nearly enough for a show this good!

Season four goes deeper into Brenda's personal life. She and FBI agent Fritz move into an apartment, which results in more than a few problems, and deal with the hassles of planning a Wedding! While their relationship continues to grow, Brenda still seems to struggle with the fear of the loss of her independence. The Closer continues to be one of the better dramas on television and Sedgwick has really come into her own with this role. The numerous Emmy nominations are warranted.

But credit should also go to the supporting cast as well as the writers. The storylines manage to avoid the cliches that often plague cop shows after a few seasons. The dialogue and stories maintain a very high level of quality.

Fans of The Closer will love season four and those that are not familiar with the show will quickly become fans.

Jeremy Lynch

CRACKER: The Complete Collection
Acorn Media

Buy this.

Really, it is as simple as that.

In 1993, one of the best crime shows, if not the best, in the history of British television was created. Robbie Coltrane stars as Eddie Fitz Fitzgerald, a forensic psychologist whose vices include chain-smoking, heavy-drinking, infidelity, gambling...you name it and Fitz likely does it in excess.

Fortunately for him (and us), he is utterly brilliant. If he was not, odds are good that he would have ended up in a gutter long ago, and we would have lost hours of fantastic television. Fitz has a deep understanding of people and is often able to create amazingly accurate profiles of suspects, and is able to not only get a feel for suspects, but tear them down in the interrogation room. It should also be noted that his co-workers and family often find themselves on the receiving end of this sharp mind. Fitz is not a person that folks should engage in a battle of wits or wills.

Not only is this a top level police show, but an outstanding psychological study of humanity. The show does not glorify Eddie's failings, he often comes across as unlikable or worse. It is this unflinching portrayal of Fitz, and those around him, that makes this show so fascinating. Cracker also avoids making the criminals into one-dimensional McNasties. All characters, cops and criminals, come across as very real people with motivations that usually make sense to them. "Understandable, not justified." is one such way that Fitz describes them.

This set features the 11 original stories (23 episodes in all) as well as the 1996 and 2006 telefilms.

I don't think that the U.S. has ever gotten a character as flawed as this, though McNulty (of The Wire) did remind me of Fitz a bit. An attempt was made to adapt Cracker for America, but they made the softer less abrasive and took away much of what made it so good. There are plans to try again, hopefully they learned from the first mistakes of the first.

Cracker: Behind the Scenes was made to promote the 2006 telefilm and is included here. It covers the entire series and contains interviews with most of the cast and crew. A decent summary of the show, but I should warn that it contains spoilers so I suggest you watch it after having seen the entire series.

I will end this review with the same words I started it with: Buy this. Fans of serious crime television can't pass this set up. Buy this.

Jeremy Lynch

**GET SMART
THE COMPLETE SERIES
HBO**

Don Adams will forever be remembered for his role in this television show. At a time when the world was embracing thrillers and spy movies Buck Henry and Mel Brooks this show was the perfect spoof. Poking fun at the genre and doing it with a mostly straight face. Running from 1965 to 1969 the show had five wonderfully funny seasons and made stars out of not only Don Adams but also Barbara Feldon and Bernie Kopell and had a numerous television greats on it. James Caan was actually in two episodes.

Adams starred as Agent 86 who worked for Control, one of those secret government agencies always on the lookout for spies. Their main adversaries were Kaos who wanted to rule the world. Each episode Agent 86 and 99(Feldon) thwarted a plot and saved us all. All the while the cast plays it serious, or at least pretty serious and it is still hysterical to watch. The DVD set has loads of extra features including a never before seen roast for Adams on his birthday at Playboy Mansion, Bloopers, a Tribute to Don Adams, loads of interviews and more. The show has inspired fan clubs and websites which are still active. A fan favorite and with good reason. Digitally remastered and in a wonderful package this is a great piece of television history to own.

The show also inspired a number of movies and even cartoon called Inspector Gadget (Adams did the voice).

Jon

**INTELLIGENCE: Season Two
Acorn Media**

For those that are not familiar with this stellar show, Intelligence focuses on two people: Jimmy, a head of crime in Vancouver that is looking to go legit and who loves his family more than money and power, and Mary, a key figure in the law enforcement community in Vancouver. While she does seek to uphold the law, she also is focuses on gaining power and climbing the ladder to the top. These two have an uneasy alliance as each attempts to both help and exploit the other. Season two finds Jimmy trapped in Seattle. He initially attempts to surrender, but ends up on the run and being framed as a cop killer. Once he does return to Vancouver, he looks to go legit, but both the law and the crime world seem unwilling to let this happen.

Mary finally in appointed the head of the Asian Pacific region for CSIS and finds things only getting more complicated as everyone seems to have their own agenda. Things get especially tricky when the target in a key investigation has ties to the U.S. Government.

Intelligence is one of the best shows that never made it. Season two builds on the characters established in season one and delivers a level of quality not often seen in television. Both seasons one and two are must own sets for anyone that enjoys smart, well-crafted television. I can't recommend Intelligence strongly enough.

Jeremy

**THE INVADERS: Season Two
CBS/Paramount Home Entertainment**

This is the second and also final season of Invaders. The premise of this show developed by Larry Cohen is something that is kind of a template today, but back in 1967 it was pretty new. A man discovers the presence of aliens and no one believes him, he is on the run trying to prove the truth. The only other show I know of that did this was a cult UK show called The Omega Factor (Koch Vision). The premise was later taken to great heights by X-Files, but back in '67 this was really new.

The show stars Roy Thinnes, who's career is filled with many roles, including spots on Oz and Sopranos. Thinnes plays architect David Vincent who episode to episode is on the run, and trying to save Earth, whether anyone believes him or not. At first look it's kind of cheesy by today's standards, but truthfully it is a load of fun to watch. The colors are vibrant in the way the sixties show were, un afraid to make the most of the new color technology for TV. There were also a bunch of guest stars, early in their careers. Gene Hackman, Ed Asner, Richard Anderson (A TV staple of the 70s), Suzanne Pleshette, Ed Begley, and Wayne Rogers.

Unlike a lot of Sci Fi shows they didn't really rely too much on special effects. Given the special effects at the time it's probably just as well. Dr. Who may have seemed cool when the sixties shows aired, but they look really dated now.

26 episodes worth of Season 2 are now out, and some website are offering both 1 and 2 together.

The Invaders was brought back for a miniseries in 1995 that was basically universally hated. Thinnes had a small role in it.

Is this a must own show? I would say not really. Is it worth watching? I enjoyed it for what it is and for what they were trying to do. If you keep in mind where we were in 1967 and give them a little slack for that the show is pretty fun to watch.

Jon Jordan

MIDSOMER MURDERS: Set Twelve

Acorn Media

It is time to return to Midsomer County, a lovely, well to do county on the English countryside that has an extraordinarily high homicide rate.

Based on the characters of Caroline Graham, MM is a delightful series of English Cozy mysteries. That in and of itself is nothing new, but the series understands just how insane it is for one little county to be the home of a remarkably high number of murders, some of which are quite nasty. With a wink and a nudge, MM sends us along with Detective Chief Inspector Tom Barnaby, a low-key copper with a razor sharp mind, and Detective Constable Ben Jones as they try to keep the county killers in line.

Lest anyone new think that this is a parody of the traditional English mysteries, it is not. It is a subtle blend of mystery and black comedy, with the creators seemingly taking great pleasure in coming up with bizarre (and brutal) ways to off folks each and every episode. It is clear that the makers (along with Barnaby and Jones) realize just how insane it is that Midsomer County has enough murders to keep the cops of Homicide: Life on the Streets busy.

Fans of Murder She Wrote, Maddock and their ilk will almost certainly enjoy this series, but the appeal certainly goes beyond the lovers of cozies. Anyone that knows me knows I prefer my murders hardboiled, yet I honestly enjoy the adventures of Barnaby.

Midsomer Murders is one of those shows that can be enjoyed on a number of levels. If you take it at face value, you have a well-made cozy series. If you look more carefully, you have a show that takes great delight in playing with the genre with a touch of snark and oh so dry wit.

Jeremy

QUANTUM OF SOLACE

Fox Home Entertainment

Daniel Craig's second turn as James Bond shows a level of continuity new to the Bond franchise. In fact, the highest compliment I can pay Quantum of Solace is I believed it takes place twenty minutes after 2006's Casino Royale. That said, perhaps because of its ties to the previous film, Quantum of Solace doesn't make much of a mark on its own. Captured at the end of Casino Royale, Mr. White (Jesper Christensen) escapes interrogation when M's (Dench) personal bodyguard betrays her. Bond pursues the traitor and remains driven to uncover more about the secret, pervasive organization behind Vesper Lynd's death. His pursuit crosses paths with Camille Montes (Kurylenko) who is herself seeking vengeance for her murdered family.

Quantum of Solace succeeds in furthering the development of Bond's character and the trust between him and M. It also offers satisfying resolution to Casino Royale's loose ends, and may be worth watching just for that. However, while Craig, Dench, and the other returning actors are all on their game, the film's pace doesn't give new characters like Camille and crooked environmentalist Dominic Greene (Amalric) much time to make an impression. I welcomed the chance to reconsider them on Blu-ray. They still pale in comparison to Casino Royale's iconic Vesper and Le Chiffre, but many characters would.

Director Marc Forster makes some unusual stylistic choices for a Bond movie. For example, he inter-cuts Bond's first footrace with a horse race. For the most part, though, he stays true to the tone of Casino Royale and contributes his keen feel for locations.

Extras: The most in-depth feature is "Bond on Location", which follows the film's production from country to country, and runs about 30 minutes. Other features are brief and include the music video for Jack White and Alicia Keys' title track "Another Way to Die," stunt training with Olga Kurylenko, profiles of key crew members and director Marc Forster, composer David Arnold discussing the film's score, and the film's theatrical and teaser trailers.

Gerald So

SIMON & SIMON: Season Two

Shout! Factory

Thank God for TV on DVD! I used to watch Simon & Simon when I was a wee lad. I LOVED it. But a few years ago...maybe it was last month...I saw an episode and said, "CRAP! That SUCKED! Oh, woe it me! Has nothing from my youth survived time? I weep with disappointment and vexation!"(That last one was a quote from Dickens well...probably a paraphrase).

But thanks to TV on DVD, I watched the second season of Simon & Simon and Allah be praised, I was not the little moron I thought I was when I was a kid. I am certainly an adult moron, but that is a different matter.

The second season of Simon & Simon was not a FANTASTIC, life changing bit of TV watching. But it IS a lot of fun. Once you get past the 80s plot lines to the core of the show, the brothers Simon. Gerald McRaney and Jameson Parker have so much chemistry together, it is hard to believe they are not real-life brothers who grew up together. ...except for the fact that they look NOTHING alike!

The bases for Simon & Simon is: Gerald McRany plays the older slovenly Vietnam Vet brother who lives in his boat in his brothers drive-way. Jameson Parker is the Preppy clean-cut kid brother. Of course the now cliché Odd Couple ensue, but are still very funny between those two. The two brothers own a San Diego detective agency together and that gets them into all sorts of mischief.

They also seemed like regular folks instead of super sleuths. That was, for me, part of the charm. I thought I could grow up to be just like them. I didn't, but it gave a boy a dream to aspire to.

Season Two of Simon & Simon starts out with the cross over Magnum, P.I. episode that had people who were fans of both Simon & Simon AND Magnum wetting themselves. Luckily I was only a fan of Simon & Simon at that time (So I didn't wet myself until I got this DVD set...aHEM!). It was not until Magnum started on reruns and I would watch it after school when I realized what a great show Magnum was.

Randy Otteson

SONNY ROLLINS: SAXOPHONE COLOSSUS

Acorn Media

Full disclosure: At one point in my novel Big City Bad Blood (Editor's note: Do yourself a favor and buy this book!), Ray Dudgeon needs a spiritual lift, and he listens to Sonny Rollins. Rollins is my favorite living tenor sax player. Suffice it to say, I'm a very big fan.

Robert Mugge's 1986 documentary chronicles two very different Rollins performances, and provides remarkable insight into the man and his methods.

The first show, a beautifully filmed outdoor concert at Opus 40 in Saugerties New York, features Rollins with his regular quintet. As the film opens, we find Rollins launching into a 15-minute solo that Mugge wisely leaves intact. This breathtaking solo provides ample evidence of why many consider Rollins the world's greatest jazz improviser. The Opus 40 concert footage alone is worth the price of the DVD, and then some.

The second concert, filmed in Tokyo, is the world premiere of Rollins's Concerto for Tenor Saxophone and Orchestra. For Rollins fans, this is fascinating stuff, but it is not as well filmed (Mugge only had two cameras and had to cover with b-roll of general "life in Tokyo" footage that seems incongruous with the music). Still, it offers a rare glimpse of a musical genius stretching out and bravely tackling new forms. And there are moments of stunning beauty in it.

Throughout the film, Mugge weaves interview footage of Rollins and his wife/manager Lucille, and this material does a great job putting the music in context and revealing the man behind the horn. Rollins frankly addresses his early struggles and talks about his self-imposed exile from the jazz scene, while also taking justifiable pride in what he's achieved. He sees his music, and himself, as a work-in-progress, and you cannot help but be impressed by his honesty and humility. Also woven throughout the film is commentary by three leading jazz critics. These interviews represent an articulate love-fest, but they give additional insight into Rollins's methods, and help place him in context of the Jazz pantheon.

For the final sequence, Mugge returns us to Opus 40 as Rollins brings the house down with a fantastic performance of Don't Stop The Carnival. A perfect caper to an extraordinary experience.

Quibbles: Cutting away from the solo in Don't Stop The Carnival to see one more interview clip was a mistake. That was such a beautiful solo; we should've been allowed to hear Rollins build his ideas all the way to their conclusion. Perhaps the Opus 40 concert will someday be released as a complete concert film; if it is, I will be first in line to buy a copy. In the meantime, this DVD is a must have for all Sonny Rollins fans, and jazz fans in general. I suspect it will even convert some of the jazz-curious.

Sean Chercover

THE WRESTLER

Fox Home Entertainment

I grew up watching wrestling. I stopped in the mid 80s, but rediscovered it in the mid 90s when guys like Eddie Guerrero, Chris Jericho and Benoit came along. As an adult watching it, I became all too aware of the impact it had on the bodies of the performers.

Reading stories of steroids, painkillers and sleeping pills gave this fantasy world a harsh dose of reality. In the last 15 years, dozens of wrestlers and former wrestlers have passed away.

When *The Wrestler* came out, I was a little skeptical of it. I had no doubt it would show the brutal toll, but was afraid that that would be all it showed, that we would get a dark, depressing film that made us want to hide under the covers for several days.

I am happy to say I was wrong. *The Wrestler* is depressing at times, but it also shows the humanity of the performers. Many have been calling this Mickey Rourke's comeback, but anyone that saw *Sin City* knows it was the role of Marv that really got Rourke back on track. There are certain similarities between Marv and *The Ram*. Both want love, yet question whether or not they are worthy of it.

Rourke plays Randy The Ram Robinson, a broken down wrestler that is getting by doing shows at bingo halls, school gyms and community centers. His glory days are past him and he simply strives to get by, though still taking some pride in what he does.

Rourke has garnered massive amounts of praise, all of it justified, but Marisa Tomei and Evan Rachael Wood both deserves kudos for very compelling performances as well. Tomei plays Cassidy, a dancer at the local strip club. Randy wants a relationship, but Cassidy resists. Wood plays his daughter, who is less than thrilled to see her father. At the end of the day, Randy simply wants to connect with those around him. That is something that is easier said than done.

But my comments are mixed for director Darren Aronofsky. He does an excellent job incorporating the world of wrestling as a backdrop for this story but, at times, *The Wrestler* is overdone. Sometimes less is more.

You hardly have to like wrestling to enjoy this film. You don't even have to know wrestling, you simply have to have a heart.

Jeremy