

CALLAN – Set One

Acorn Media

I never really thought about Edward Woodward's life before *The Equalizer*. I mean I knew he had to have had an acting career prior to it, but I did not seek it out.

But Acorn Media has brought this little gem to my attention and I am glad they did.

Airing from 1967 to 72, *Callan* stars Woodward as an assassin for an unnamed British Intelligence service. Over the years, the job has taken its toll on Callan and he now finds his conscience weighing rather heavily on him. To make matters worse, he is all too aware that as time passes, his role in the org becomes less secure. There are younger men coming up in the ranks that easily could take his place.

Callan offers up an excellent look at the cold war as well as the toll that serving your country can take on you. With excellent acting (Woodward won a British Academy of Film and Television Arts award in 1970) strong scripts, *Callan* is a show that is more than worth the price.

Jeremy Lynch

DOLLHOUSE - Season One

Fox Home Entertainment

Did Dollhouse start slowly?

Oh yeah!

It was only my faith in Joss Whedon and my Editors even greater faith that kept me keeping on. Good. It has raised the ante by several times and it has turned into a real thriller/who dun it, who's the inside man (or woman, my bet) What is Alpha (we just found out who, Alan Tudyk of *Firefly*, playing Wash on steroids and then just the steroids. Nice piece of work I didn't see coming) and just what exactly the hell is going on here?

For those of you who don't know, the Dollhouse is an seemingly huge company that finds people in trouble, legal trouble not apparently other kinds, and make it go away if you sign a five year contract after which they erase your memory and personality and program you for whatever job they have. Concubine, spy, hostage negotiator, gigolo, what have you. Thus there are several stories going on at once. The jobs. the dolls, in the main Echo/Caroline played by Buffy the Vampire Slayer alum Eliza Dushku, the FBI Agent everyone keeps telling the Dollhouse is an urban myth, and management, fronted beautifully by snooty English babe Olivia Williams.

It is a different and damn good watch.

Lee Crawford

THE FRIENDS OF EDDIE COYLE

Criterion Collection

In what may be the finest performances of his long and acclaimed career, Robert Mitchum plays small-fish gunrunner Eddie "Fingers" Coyle in director Peter Yates's film version of George V. Higgins's brilliant and highly influential crime novel. Forlorn and forsaken, Eddie is maneuvered into becoming a snitch for the cops as he works the seedy underbelly of Boston. He knows it's a death sentence if he's found out by his various crooked colleagues, but at his age he can't handle another stretch in the can.

Mitchum gives a wonderfully nuanced and understated performance. His expressive features describe all the conflict and desperation that Eddie feels as he does his best to keep from being overwhelmed by heartless "friends" with agendas and a manipulative treasury agent. Mitchum claimed to have put his whole soul into the role, and it's easy to believe him. He's surrounded by some of the best character actors of the time. Peter Boyle, Richard Jordan, Alex Rocco, and Steven Keats all turn in top-notch performances as men even shadier than Eddie himself.

Paul Monash's faithfully adapted script is compelling, convincing, and razor-wire taut. The dialogue is pitch-perfect poetry of the gutters. The location shooting in Boston and environs along with the semi-documentary style to the film lends an already dark and realistic movie even more gritty authenticity. The deceptively simple story shrugs forward step by step in the finest film noir fashion, advancing to an inevitable, gut-wrenching, yet subdued finale. A true cinematic gem, this is one of the best American crime films of the 70s.

The Criterion DVD release package features an informative commentary by director Yates as well as a booklet

which includes two lengthy essays: a retrospective on the film by critic Kent Jones and an excerpt of Grover Lewis's 1973 Rolling Stone profile of Robert Mitchum, from on the set.

Tom Piccirilli

THE FUGITIVE Season Two, Vol. Two

CBS/Paramount

The second part of season 2 aired starting in January 1965, and is mid run for the show that aired until 1968. There were a total of 120 episodes and Roy Huggins got writing credit for every one of them. Huggins also wrote for Rockford Files and other shows through the 70's that crime fiction lovers will remember. His résumé is like a history of television from a great era of TV.

Fugitive was above all else a character piece, moving Dr. Kimble from situation to situation in each episode, a different town and a variation on his being on the run. It manages to stay clever throughout though there are some episodes that stand out more than others. Nicest Fella You'd Ever Want to Meet is a great episode set in Arizona with a sheriff in a corrupt town. Scapegoat puts Kimble in a precarious position as he needs to possibly compromise himself to save someone from

being wrongly accused of a crime, something way too close to home for Kimble. David Janssen was so great in this role. I really liked him in Harry O, but The Fugitive is really some of his best work. This is a show that really shows how to use tension and pacing and let the actors shine.

There are some complaints from people that are irate over changes in the music on the show. I never saw it when it aired, but I can't understand why CBS or Paramount would make the change. The series is obviously doing o k with sales because they keep releasing the show on disc, so why not spend a couple more bucks and leave the music in tact? In any case,

I still think this is a great show, and I'll take which ever version they can put out. I can't wait till I have it all and can do a monster marathon with the whole series.

Jon Jordan

HAWAII FIVE-0 – Sixth Season

CBS/Paramount

Once again I have truly enjoyed another season of this great show, it holds up so well as far as storytelling and plots go that it makes a lot of newer shows look silly. The show uses actual forensics and utilizes computer technology probably totally up to date for its time (1973). The realism of the police work is what give this show it's edge.

Season six brings some very entertaining episodes in as well. There is a high entertaining episode (One Big Happy Family) with Slim Pickins as the head of a family of serial killers that moves from place to place wacking people and taking money. Episode 1 titled Hookman has a killer with hooks for hands using a sniper rifle. I really like the episode with a group of pimps trying to take out a gangster (played by Barney Miller star Gregory Sierra), also featuring another Barney Miller star, Ron Glass. Even Pat Morita in a small role. Another great episode has the Five-0 crew trying to catch a group of businessmen killers who have a wonderful scam based on inheritances. The show is a true showcase of great television actors of the seventies and the acting is actually pretty damn good for TV of that time.

Classic television that deserves a place on the shelf of any fan of top cop shows.

Jon Jordan

LIE TO ME - Season One

Fox Home Entertainment

Tim Roth stars as Dr. Cal Lightman, psychologist that is an expert on reading body language and facial expressions. He has the ability to read people in a way that seems to be pure fiction.

Except that it is not. Lie to Me is based on the work of Paul Ekman on microexpressions. There are minute reactions that are almost universal. We often react with a microexpression, it happens in a fraction of a second and we don't even know we did it.

Dr. Lightman heads up The Lightman Group. They are hired by third parties, including law enforcement and the government, to ascertain the truth. His crew includes Dr. Gillian Foster (Kelli Williams) who is both a friend and

a colleague to Dr. Lightman. Eli Loker (Brendan Hines), an odd duck that has a policy of "radical honesty" that causes problems. This character is the one that I could do without. Rounding out their crew is Ria Torres (Monica Raymond). She is one of a rare handful that can naturally read people. What Dr. Lightman trained years for, she can do naturally.

LTM reminds me of Numb3rs in that it is a procedural with a gimmick. Numb3rs has done an excellent job of fleshing out the characters over the course of the series. About halfway through the season, the powers that be seemed to realize that there was only so much that they could do with the truth reading. They have clearly made efforts to establish the characters' backgrounds and make it easier for the viewers to connect with them.

I am a big fan of Roth and found this show quite interesting. Whether or not it grows old remains to be seen, but they seem to be on the right track.

Jeremy Lynch

LIFE ON MARS - Season One

Acorn Media

As surely as Black Books is the reason we got a region free DVD player, Life On Mars is the reason we were meant to have one. But now, my law abiding subscriber, this too can be yours.

Acorn Video is releasing season one of the original, Edgar winning series, Life on Mars. A grand excuse to sit up and revisit what is perhaps my favorite television since I, Claudius and most certainly "don't miss TV".

Sam Tyler is a contemporary DCI on the track of a killer when he is violently thrown back into time. His I-Pod turns into an eight-track and Bowie belts out the title tune. Is it coma? Is it insanity? Is it that time just before the pearly gates where you ask who really shot Kennedy? Was Diana murdered? Where did I leave my car keys?

Life on Mars stars John Simm & Philip Glenister . They are the heart and soul of this 8 hours of television but their backup deserves kudos as well. Every role from small to large is played with gusto. They have excellent material to work with. Written by Tony Jordan, Ashley Pharoah & Matthew Graham each episode has its own arc but plays into Life on

Mars long term story as well. Who is Sam Tyler and which childhood memories are true? When we first meet Sam we see a copper who's become more of a case manager than police. He no longer listens to his gut. Gene Hunt his 1970s DCI and partner cop who'd be more than comfortable within the work of Bill James. He's bent but not broken. Working

together the two men find a balance of policing sure to satisfy any procedural fan.

The music that pulses throughout the show is top notch and perfectly paced. The use of cinematography (watch for the greens and the reds) is top notch. The directors are top notch in the wrangling of this preposterous concept. It pulsates with vitality in every frame. Set direction is also breathtaking.

My favorite episode may be the first, or perhaps it's the one where Sam meets his mother. It may be the episode where the station loses a prisoner in the cells and Sam has to get to the bottom of it. Oh Hell, who am I kidding, I love them all

It all comes together to create some of the most imaginative and rewarding television I have ever seen. Perhaps you've seen the American rendition and are thinking you'll give Life on Mars, U.K. a pass. Do not deprive yourselves, readers. The scenes with the Ford Granada alone make this set worth every penny.

Ruth Jordan

MISSION : IMPOSSIBLE - Season 6

CBS/Paramount

Another long standing favorite from TV which is well appreciated on DVD is Mission Impossible and this 6th season sees a few minor cast changes again. Introduced this season is Lynda Day George as Lisa Casey. Sam

Elliot is also in a number of episodes as are a lot of great television actors. Look for an episode called Encore with a small role by William Shatner and Billy Dee Williams in The Miracle. It's also nice to see Greg Morris and Peter Lupus have a larger part to play instead of just the heavy lifting guy and the gadget guy.

The appeal of this show is obvious, it was big budget, action packed and filled with adventures most people can only dream of. In the height of the Bond popularity this show was a can't miss. And while some of the things they did don't hold up well just because of the passing of time, the fun overload is undeniable. There are

far worse ways to pass the time, and compared to most new television, this series is GOLD.

Jon Jordan

PIE IN THE SKY - Set one

Acorn Media

Tony award-winner Richard Griffiths (perhaps best known as Harry Potter's uncle Vernon) stars as D.I. Henry Crabbe. After being injured, Crabbe opts to retire and, with the help of his wife Margaret (Maggie Stead), open a small restaurant. This restaurant, named Pie in the Sky, specializes in simple meals made with fresh ingredients. Crabbe is all set to leave his crimefighting ways behind him.

But that would not make for much of a mystery show, would it?

No sooner has he put on his apron, when he finds himself facing (false) bribery charges. His old boss, Assistant Chief Constable Freddie Fisher knows that Crabbe's skills were a large part of his own success and is not ready to let go of him.

So now Crabbe splits his time between the kitchen and the crime scenes. Not only does he have to deal with the day to day challenges of running a restaurant, but he also has to be at the beck and call of Fisher whenever a tricky crime arises. While this is an interesting scenario, Pie in the Sky never moves beyond being mildly entertaining.

For me, part of the problem is that Crabbe is...well, an ass. There really is not too many other ways to put it. His arrogance is mind boggling. While it is amusing to watch him tear into Fisher, his attacks on virtually everything else gets to be a bit much. To make this type of character work, you need to show a softer side so folks can get behind him. Sadly, we see precious little of that softer side.

I don't want to say the show is a total loss, as Maggie Stead is good as his long-suffering wife, and some of the restaurant scenes are interesting. I will also say Pie in the Sky did get better as the set went on. It looks like the writers slowly got used to mixing the mystery and food. Perhaps come set two, the show will have found it's groove.

The show apparently was pretty popular in England, so it is possible that I simply am not seeing what many others did. Food fans will likely enjoy the show, but straight-forward mysteries fans may find too little crime of substance. As I said, the show got better over the course of the episodes so I am interested in seeing how set two plays.

Jeremy

SAVING GRACE - Season Two

Fox Home Entertainment

Overall Saving Grace is a damn impressive show. Hunter is utterly amazing, but the entire cast does an exception job. In particular Laura San Giacomo and Tom Irwin have really stood out. Laura is Rhetta, Grace's best friend, a forensic scientist for the police department. Tom is Grace's brother, Father John Hanadarko. Those two spent a lot of time attempting to get Leon's sentence turned into life instead of death. They did an excellent job of displaying power amounts of emotion, without overacting. While each episode had it's own story, the season built up to the battle over Leon's death sentence. I won't spoil it for you, both the final episode is fantastic and left me exhausted and emotionally drained.

The future, I think, is quite bright for Saving Grace. Season two saw the show find a nice groove, Holly did not seem to try so hard to make Grace edgy. Of course some credit must go to the writing staff. By mid-season, you had no problem believing these folks were close to one another. Overall, season two saw Saving Grace stand tall as one of the best dramas on television.

For those of you unfamiliar with the show, Holly Hunter plays Grace Hanadarko, a chain-smoking, hard drinking, foul-mouthed, sexed up, but very good, Oklahoma City police officer.

One night, a very drunk Grace hit a man. After praying for assistance, she is visited by an angel named Earl (Leon Rippey). It takes time, but Earl convinced Grace that he is an angel. The man she hit (which was a sort of dream), was Leon Cooley (Bokeem Woodbine). Cooley is on death row for killing a guard. Not only do Grace and Leon both have Earl as their last chance Angel, but also share some sort of bond. In the final episode of season two, we find out that Leon knew Grace's late sister (who was killing in the Oklahoma bombing), having helped her with a flat tire.

For Leon, Earl's job was to help prepare him for heaven and bring him calmness and peace in his time of need. During the first two seasons, Earl worked to help Leon find his way to God, to help him develop his own relationship with him. It was especially interesting to see Leon convert to Islam. He thought he would lose Earl, only to open his eyes and see Earl still there, smiling. Earl explained that God does not care what name you use or your manner of worship, only that you do.

Jeremy Lynch

TAKEN

Fox Home Entertainment

CIA counterterrorism specialist Bryan Mills (Neeson) has retired and moved to Los Angeles to reconcile with his estranged daughter Kim (Grace). Against his better judgment, Bryan allows Kim to travel with a girlfriend to Paris and, fulfilling his worst fears, they are kidnapped. Fortunately (and conveniently), Bryan is on the phone with Kim when Amanda is taken, and he's able to gather some crucial clues about her abductors. He flies to Paris and begins hunting them down.

I had some qualms the scenario and supporting acting leading up to the kidnapping. Maybe I was just anticipating the action. That action is paced well enough that I didn't dwell on the plot conveniences. At the same time, Neeson's presence alone makes Mills believable as a bumbling dad and ruthless operative. Mills also does enough detective work so I can't call this a pure popcorn movie.

A sequel to Taken is already in the works, and while I don't know what the plot could be, I know I want to see it. The DVD includes the theatrical and unrated cuts of Taken, with a commentary in French (with English subtitles) by director Pierre Morel, cinematographer Michel Abramowicz, and Michel Julienne, and a somewhat sleepy commentary in English by co-writer Robert Mark Kamen. There are also a making-of featurette and footage from the movie's premiere (both in French) and a breakdown of how several stunt sequences were shot.

Gerald So

THREE DAYS OF THE CONDOR

Paramount Home Entertainment

For those that are looking for a high energy, fast-paced thriller, 3 Days of the Condor is not for you. If you want a smart thriller with great acting, 3 Days will make you think Christmas has come early.

Robert Redford stars as Joseph Turner, CIA analyst codenamed Condor. Now before anyone starts to think of Bob (Old pals call him Bob...sometimes Robbo) lurking in alleys and trading shots with Russians, his job is scouring through books in search of anything that might be a code. His office is doubles as a publishing house. One day, Condor is given the mundane task of picking up lunch for the office. Getting stuck with this job saves his life. While he is gone, a crew of men slaughter all of his co-workers. Justifiably freaked out. Turner finds a payphone and calls in the incident. It turns out that somebody within the Company is behind it.

The rest of the film sees Turner struggling to stay alive long enough to find out what he might have accidentally uncovered and take actions that will secure his future, not financially but in the breathing and staying alive sort of way.

While it may sound like many films you have seen before, Condor is, as I said, not a rock em sock em action flick. We follow a very scared and very paranoid Turner as he attempts to figure out what is going on. Some of his actions are more luck than super skills. He seems like a very smart man in over his head. It is those smarts (as well as a healthy dose of paranoia) that keeps him alive. Each time he is faced with a challenge, he rises to the occasion, often just barely. Condor does an excellent job of maintaining tension while allowing us to have faith in Terry.

Redford does an excellent job, as does Faye Dunaway, Cliff Robertson and Max Von Sydow. Von Sydow plays the head of the assassins. His performance is fantastic and presents a quiet professional simply doing his job. Sydney Pollock's direction conjures memories of vintage Hitchcock. Most of the characters are actually pretty subdued. No over the top villains. Even those that must be considered "baddies" have compelling reasons. The realities of global politics plays a role, yet Pollock avoids being preachy or self-righteous. Everyone's motivations make total sense

Condor is presented in 1080p with a ratio of 2.35:1. Condor looks very nice. While the film still has the same drab overcast look, the details in things like clothing really stand out. There is only a very small amount of grain, but I did not see any signs of DNR. I guess the best compliment I can pay it is to say that it looks very

natural.

Sadly, we get hosed in the extras department. One freakin' theatrical trailer. Readers of our reviews (OK, my reviews) have heard this before, but Paramount really needs to step up when it comes to providing bonus content. Especially on films of a certain level of relevance. Condor is a classic and deserves at least a little love.

Condor is smart and subtle, with only a few action scenes. And those few are very well done. Embrace the Condor, you will be glad you did.

Jeremy