

## Issue 34 DVD reviews

### **ANDY BARKER P.I.: The Complete Series**

Shout! Factory

CPA Andy Barker (Andy Richter) moves into a new office at the Fair Oaks strip mall and is promptly mistaken for the office's previous tenant, P.I. Lew Staziak. Hired to find a crime-fighting politician who may have faked his death, Andy inadvertently leads the Russian mob right to him. Staying on the case out of basic desire to see justice done, Andy finds he enjoys P.I. work and allows himself to be drawn into more cases.

*Andy Barker, P.I.* didn't make a splash with national audiences when it aired as an NBC midseason replacement in 2007, but as a Richter fan and mystery fan, I found it charming. Writers like Jane Espenson (*Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, *Battlestar Galactica...*) and Josh Bycel (*Psych*) smartly blended mystery, comedy, and drama, giving Andy and his strip mall cohorts a subtle chemistry viewers should appreciate on DVD.

There was Andy's worried but supportive wife Jenny (Clea Lewis), his eager movie buff sidekick Simon (Tony Hale), superpatriotic Afghani American Wally (Marshall Manesh), and eccentric retired hardboiled P.I. Lew Staziak (Harve Presnell).

The two-disc set includes all six episodes with commentary, a screenwriting featurette with co-creator Jonathan Groff, Jane Espenson, Josh Bycel, and Jon Ross, a gag reel, and a look back at the show with Conan O'Brien and members of the cast.

If the concept intrigues you, give it a try. You may find yourself like me, watching over and over.

Gerald So

### **CALLAN: Set Two**

Acorn Media

The late Edward Woodward stars as Callan, an assassin for The Section, a British government agency. Callan is no simple cold blooded killer, but he is also hardly your typical protagonist. Years of service have taken their toll as he struggles to survive not just on the job, but within the organization. One mistake and this valuable asset could become a liability.

This time around, Callan has just gotten out of a Soviet prison and wants to walk away. But, as I said, his former employers could turn on him in the blink of an eye. He ends up getting a promotion of sorts, something he is less than thrilled about. This promotion is not the result of a job well done, as inner organization politics are behind it. Staying alive in his new position could be more difficult than

Woodward is excellent here, playing a role that almost certainly at least partially inspired THE EQUALIZER. One could imagine Callan, years later, regretting his choices in life and looking to make amends. I have really enjoyed both sets of CALLAN and recommend them to fans of cold war thrillers.

This set also contains a couple of commentary tracks featuring Woodward. As a relative newbie to the series, I found them informative and worth listening to.

Jeremy Lynch

### **DAMAGES: The Complete Second Season**

Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

Legal juggernaut Patty Hewes finds a man from her past knocking on her door. Scientist Daniel Purcell (William Hurt) approaches her with news of corporate wrong-doing. But no sooner do they meet when Daniel's wife is murdered with Daniel being the prime suspect. But as Patty works to clear him, she finds herself not just facing off against a corporate giant, but the government as well.

In addition, Ellen (Rose Byrne) is still reeling from the death of her fiancée and is looking to take Patty down. She partners up with the FBI, but are the agents looking only to uphold the law or do they have more sinister interests? We also find Arthur Frobisher recovering from his near death experience. Arthur wants to put his past behind him and become a better man.

Season two was more than a little frustrating. While there were good performances, there was way too many plotlines. In addition to working on leftovers from season one, they added plenty of new ones. The result was an overly complex and messy show. As a result, some strong performances and gripping story progression got lost in the mix. You can only care about so much. Had this been a 20 episode season, it might have worked better.

I did enjoy it for the most part, but it could not hold a candle to season one. Fans of the show will enjoy this, just don't expect the same level of quality this time around.

Jeremy Lynch

### **FIGHT CLUB: Blu-ray**

Fox Home Entertainment

I feel like one of a handful of people who had never seen *Fight Club* or read Chuck Palahniuk's novel before getting the chance to review this Blu-ray release. Edward Norton plays the unnamed narrator, an auto insurance investigator fed up with the monotony of his life who attends support groups for sufferers of various ailments in hopes of curing insomnia. This works until he meets Marla Singer (Helena Bonham-Carter), who, like the narrator, attends multiple support groups but shows no sign she really needs them.

The narrator fixates on Marla until, on one of his many business flights, he meets flashy philosophical soap salesman Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt). After a fire destroys his apartment, the narrator moves in with Tyler, who introduces him to a nationwide underground network of fight clubs. Through these clubs, Tyler amasses an army of men, all similarly disillusioned with their lives and seduced into Tyler's destructive philosophy.

*Fight Club* seemed like just a dark, satirical social commentary until, about two-thirds through my first viewing, I saw the lines between the narrator and Tyler blurring. I realized *Fight Club* was also a commentary on identity and how dangerous it is to become detached from our actions. That message is as relevant today as it was ten years ago.

The Blu-ray release features four commentaries, with the director, cast, writers, and technical staff respectively, along with all the content from the 2-DVD Special Edition. Exclusive to Blu-ray are an interactive featurette on the sound design of *Fight Club*, footage of Fincher, Norton, and Pitt accepting a Spike TV award on behalf of *Fight Club*, and a search index. Gerald So

### **HUNTER: The Complete First Season**

Mill Creek Entertainment

Debuting, on NBC, in 1984, *Hunter* was hyped as a sort of Dirty Harry for television. Detective Rick Hunter (Fred Dryer) was a maverick cop that often broke the rules to ensure justice is served. Often clashing with his superiors, Rick is committed to protecting the citizens of Los Angeles, no matter what the cost. As the series begins, he has been assigned a new partner Sgt. Dee Dee McCall (Stephanie Hunter). Hunter's partners don't generally last too long, but McCall wins him over and they begin a partnership that lasts for the first several seasons.

I have to admit, I was surprised a bit by season one. My own memories are of the later seasons, in which the show is a tad softer. This season is more violent and Hunter is an edgier character, with some family ties to organized crime. I am sure there were good reasons for softening the show, but I found season one hella fun.

The show certainly feels dated (clothes and McCall's hair for started), but the stories still hold up well. Hunter and McCall have chemistry. And while Hunter can be brutal and rough, they do enough to show his more human side and that makes it easier to become emotionally invested in him.

As with the previous Mill Creek/Canell releases, this is a bargain release. Some of the original music is missing and the extras are minimal. But the price is right for those that are looking to revisit some prime 80s television.

Jeremy Lynch

### **THE INFORMANT!**

Warner Home Video

This has probably happened to you. You're in a dark theater laughing, finding nearly every scene, every voice-over, in a film to be hysterically funny. Yet no one else is laughing. Oh sure, your companions chuckle mildly from time to time, but probably so you aren't laughing alone. Now it's a black comedy you're viewing, but still. Silence engulfs the rest of the theater.

This was my experience with *The Informant!* So I spent considerable time second-guessing myself. Was it really that funny or was I supposed to be livid over corporate misdeeds? Was the protagonist the most amusing character I've seen in a long time or was my view of him as a completely ridiculous individual incorrect? I was outraged with his antics for sure, but the material was presented in a satirical fashion.

Plot: I will present it somewhat sketchily so as not to spoil your fun. Also, I must admit, some of the financial aspects of it eluded my math-challenged brain. *Informant!* is the story of Mark Whitacre (Matt Damon), a biochemist and executive at Archer Daniels Midland, who for an unknown reason in the early nineties, offered to aid the F.B.I. in an investigation A.D.M. business practice, specifically price-fixing in the agricultural industry. A.D.M. makes a lot of the chemicals you find on the ingredients label of products lurking in your kitchen cabinet. Much of Whitacre's story is told in voice-overs that extol the virtues of corn, his hands, and similar mid-western themes and values. He is sincerity personified with his family, his colleagues, the government.

But he is also enigmatic almost from the start. Why is he willing to tape hundreds of hours of conversations with his business associates? Why does he raise the stakes on the investigation at every turn? Why does he constantly endanger the investigation by talking to various people about it? Antics like this eventually begin to take a toll on his relationship with the agents, his lawyer, and other Federal officials. His behavior begins to jeopardize the very case he helped built. He seems completely unaware of what his collusion with the government will cost his career. But telling you anymore would ruin the fun.

The real charm of this movie is the way the story is told and Matt Damon's wonderful, likeable, modulated and endearingly

clunky performance. Marvin Hamlisch's music perfectly suits the mood. There is a zefulness that makes you realize this story would not have worked if it were told in a straightforward style—like so many whistle-blower tales. Or even like Soderbergh's earlier Erin Brockovich. It's the ludicrous and convoluted nature of the man and his deeds that make things interesting. And every time you think you have him figured out, he surprises, no, stuns, you. Highly recommended. And once you've seen it, explain exactly what he did to me.

Patti Abbott

## **THE LAST LULLABY**

thelastlullaby.com

Based on a book by Max Allan Collins this movie features Tom Sizemore as Quarry, an assassin for hire. Quarry has decided to give up the life and is leading a quiet existence. Circumstances put him in a strange position that has him rescuing a girl. As a reward, the girl's father offers him a onetime big pay day job. The job is not as cut and dry as it looks and Quarry makes the mistake of getting involved.

Jeffrey Goodman directed the film and really put his heart and soul into the work. It's clear that he understood what Collins was going for with the original material and Goodman's translation to film works well. Sizemore was a pleasant surprise. After being a tabloid star for years and having a number of unremarkable films it is really nice to see that he is still a great actor. The film also stars Sasha Alexander (NCIS) and Sprague Grayden (of 24).

Book to film is always a crap shoot, usually disappointing. This was a winning roll and I intend to watch for more from Goodwin.

The film is a small release, but is available here: [thelastlullaby.com](http://thelastlullaby.com)

Jon Jordan

## **LORNA'S SILENCE**

Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

I doubt that I will see a better film this year than Lorna's Silence. As someone trying to write, I was blown away by the ability of these two Belgian brothers to tell a fairly complex story in a completely lucid way. They achieve this, as Roger Ebert has pointed out with their earlier movies, (Rosetta, 1999, The Son, 2003, The Child, 2005) by putting one foot in front of the other. The camera follows Lorna from scene to scene. If this makes the movie sound flat or dull, it isn't. Arta Dobroshi's face, shown mostly in profile, keeps our attention throughout. There is something wonderful about the single person point-of-view in a movie. Its tight focus allows us to understand a character because we become one with them. Lorna is a young Albanian refugee living in Liege. She has a boyfriend, Sokol, she sees on occasion and makes a meager living working in a dry-cleaning store. She makes a deal with a hustling taxi driver, Fabio (Fabrizio Rongione) that she will marry a Belgian junkie, Claudy, to attain citizenship and then divorce him to marry a Russian who needs citizenship to peddle his wares and escape Russia. The Russian (Alban Ukay) has plenty of money to pay off the junkie for marrying Lorna. Lorna believes the money she is paid and her Belgian citizenship will allow her to marry her boyfriend and open a small cafe. The plan begins to go awry when the junkie (Jeremie Renier, in a mesmerizing performance) actually asks for Lorna's help in kicking his habit.

At first, she is able to blow off his overtures for aid, but he wears her down. The rest of the movie emanates from her divergence from the deal she has struck with Fabio. Although Lorna is not a prostitute, she shares their lack of esteem and is little more than another currency to the men in the film. The ending is enigmatic but satisfying nevertheless.

Patti Abbott

## **MYSTIC RIVER: Blu-ray**

Warner Brothers Home Video

The film version of Dennis Lehane's crime masterpiece comes to Blu-ray. For anyone that has lived under a rock in the past decade, Clint Eastwood directs Tim Robbins, Sean Penn and Kevin Bacon in a story of three lifelong friends and how an act of violence affects not just their lives, but the lives of those around them. The film picked up Oscars for Robbins (Supporting actor) and Penn (Best Actor) and with good reason. The stars turn Lehane's complex characters into flesh and blood, each managing to make the character their own while still being faithful to that which Dennis created.

MR is a visually impressive film and presenting it in HD only makes things better. Warner generally works hard to make upgrading worthwhile and this is no exception. Many studios are content to simply transfer the film and leave it at that. Warner takes advantage of the medium and gives us a product that looks like a million bucks. The gritty, blue collar neighborhoods of Boston come life here, the worn bricks of the buildings and scruffy clothes really stand out. The original color was pretty muted and is here as well, but the details are killer. Watching this again really made me appreciate just what an amazing job Eastwood did visually.

The extras are carried over from the DVD release with no new ones. But fans of the HD format will be more than happy with this release and will find this worth the upgrade.

Jeremy Lynch

### **NURSE JACKIE: Season One**

Lionsgate

When I first heard about NURSE JACKIE, I paid little attention. Oh gee, another medical drama...not too many of those around! Sure, Edie Falco is a good actress and the fact that it was on Showtime suggested it was not your parent's medical drama, but I was hardly waiting with baited breath for it.

But this show is an absolute delight. Imagine your standard television cop, the one that does not play by the rules and drinks too much. That is kind of what we get here. Jackie (Falco) is a fairly acidic character. She cheats, pops pills and, as she puts it, does not do chatty.

There certainly are aspects that we have seen before: Each episode brings tragic injuries with families that are just barely hanging on as a loved one is worked on. The hospital has more than it's share of problems as the system seems to be failing. These things have been seen time and time again on television. But NJ offers up a fairly impressive mix of those things with a fairly dynamic lead character. One that will almost certainly rub many viewers the wrong way. In some ways, she reminds me of Cal on LIE TO ME. A person whose ego is as great as their talent.

This set comes with a fairly strong collection of extras, with commentary tracks as well as a few featurettes. I look forward to getting to know Jackie a little better.

Jeremy Lynch

### **SOUTHLAND: The Complete First Season**

In the interest of full disclosure, I must confess I am part of the reason that NBC dropped SOUTHLAND. I did not come up with The Jay Leno show or anything like that, but I never watched SOUTHLAND. I heard good things about it and meant to check it out, but never got around to it. Too many shiny things in the Lynch house.

But the publicity garnered by it's cancellation, and subsequent acquisition by TNT, put it on my radar and I decided to give it a shot on DVD. Most folk seem to think it was quality television and I am always looking for that which does not suck.

Well, I am happy to report SOUTHLAND does not suck. Quite the opposite: it has the makings of something damn good.

John Wells has put together a cop show that, while having much of what one might expect from a network cop drama, with a mix of wide-eyed rookies and grizzled veterans struggling to follow the rules while trying to be as effective as possible, but it also offers up some style that, at times, reminds me of an independent film.

While there are numerous characters, the main focus is on rookie Ben Sherman and his world-weary partner John Cooper. Cooper quickly tells Ben that nothing he learned at the academy will serve him on the mean streets of L.A. And it just might get him killed. That is a hell of a way to start the job.

Because I never watched the show on NBC, I can't say what changes have been made. The cover declares this to be SOUTHLAND UNCENSORED and I have been told that means that some of the episodes have been extended.

Fans of crime television will certainly enjoy SOUTHLAND. Truth be told, it feels like a show that is better off on cable than network television. Hopefully enough of us tune in to TNT and buy this DVD set to ensure its future.

Jeremy Lynch

### **SPECTACLE: ELVIS COSTELLO WITH...Season one**

MVD Entertainment Group

Add Elvis Costello to the list of those that have their own talk show, but unlike most, Elvis seems to have something fresh to bring to the table.

Broadcast on the Sundance Channel, SPECTACLE: ELVIS COSTELLO WITH...is a delightful show with a simple premise: Elvis and his guest talk about, and play, music. Seems simply enough, but the shows success is in large part to Elvis himself. He is charming and smart and manages to make the interviews fun as well as in depth.

The show makes it's lofty goals clear right off the bat, with Elton John as the first guest. They do a good job of mixing jazz and pop, old school and new, with guests like Tony Lou Reed & Julian Schnabel Bill Clinton, Tony Bennett, The Police as well as Rufus Wainwright and Jacob Dylan. And while I am not a big country fan, the Nashville episode (featuring Rosanne Cash, Norah Jones, Kris Kristofferson and John Mellencamp) is wonderful. Kristofferson does a hell of a job (I know him more as an actor) and the entire crew brings down the house with Me & Bobby McGee.

To compare the show to Inside The Actor's Studio (the early shows before it became a joke) would not be inaccurate. As I said, the interviews are detailed, with Elvis and his producers having clearly done their homework. Also like ITAS, one does not have to be a fan of the guest to enjoy the show as Elvis has enough charm and class for some mid-sized cities. Here we get some backstage interviews with the performers talking about the show and their thoughts on Mr. Elvis. We also have Elvis talking about the show and how it came to be. In addition, Smokey Robinson takes us on a tour of the Apollo Theater. Very cool stuff.

This show is very fun and will be enjoyed by any music buff. You don't have to be a fan of Elvis to have fun here.

Jeremy Lynch

## **WHITECHAPEL**

Carnival Films and Television (A UK DVD)

About twice a year I order DVDs from the UK. Our buddy ALI KARIM brought some over for me during Bouchercon and I got a few more afterwards. One of the was WHITECHAPEL.

Whitechapel stars Rupert Penry-Jones who fans of Spooks (MI\_5) will recognize as Adam Carter. In Whitechapel he plays a copper, DI Chandler, on the rise in the department, making the right moves for a trip to the top. Chandler is given a homicide case with the thinking that a quick wrap up will help move him forward. It soon becomes obvious that the case is a bit too complex for that and that his detective skills are not up to the task.

There is a murderer re creating the crimes of Jack The Ripper and his attention to detail is disturbing. As the case progresses help comes from a suspect who is a ripper-ologist. He turns out to be the wrong man, but his insights help move the case forward.

As these types of things go, we get a chance to see DI Chandler become a better cop and earn the trust of the men under him. They eventually figure things out and the ending works.

All in all this is a fun 136 minutes. The acting is good, the production values are wonderful and they do a nice job building suspense. They also do a nice job of portraying the violence without being overly graphic. A bit clichéd at times but not to the point of being annoying. It's a fun film and I am truly a sucker for anything with Jack the Ripper themes. When the credits rolled I was glad I watched and will no doubt be popping it in for repeated viewings.

In the extra features one of the producers claims that no one has ever done an updated version of the Ripper killings. Really? Maybe she just doesn't ever watch TV or movies. Or she could just be a publicity machine spouting things to sell the show. Whatever the case, her comment is typical of the featurette about the production and it isn't really must see viewing.

Jon Jordan

## **ZOMBIELAND**

Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

ZOMBIELAND has gotten pretty sterling reviews and I can see why to some extent. There are many amusing, clever moments. The foursome is likable and you root for them to avoid becoming lunch. I am getting a bit tired of the Jesse Eisenberg/Michael Cera stock character—the bright but nerdy and wordy protagonist. I don't hate that role—yet—but I feel that day is coming fast. I advise both actors to seek out other parts.

PLOT-Zombies have quickly taken over most of the country. The plague began when someone ate a hamburger infected with mad cow disease. Our hero, Columbus, a quirky, phobic, list-making guy has become an expert on how to survive the zombies but meeting up with Tallahassee (Woody Harrelson) and two sisters, Wichita (Emma Stone) and Little Rock (Abigail Breslin) increases the odds of survival. This is basically a road movie after that with clever set pieces along the way. Each of the four has a destination of sorts where they believe they'll be safe. Zombieland is very bloody and violent, but all of the mayhem is of the cartoon variety.

A lot of Zombieland was fun, but there are far too many scenes of our heroes shooting zombies—and not in any unusual or interesting way. There are also a number of unnecessary scenes of them destroying things that don't need to be destroyed. If it were a serious meditation on what being in this situation does to mental health, it would be understandable. But it's a comedy so these scenes didn't work for me.

The best part of the movie—well, I'm not going to ruin it for you. That routine alone made it worth seeing for me. This is no SHAUN OF THE DEAD, but it will probably please a lot of people.

Patti Abbott