

BARNABY JONES The First Season
Paramount Home Entertainment

OK, I'll admit it. When this was on I made fun of the old guy solving crimes. But because of my mother's love for crime fiction TV shows I watched every week. Back in the day nobody did these shows as well as Quinn Martin and this is one of the shows I've been waiting for on DVD.

The opening premise is actually great, Jones comes out of retirement when his son is killed. He continues to solve crimes with the aid of his daughter in Law played by the AWESOME Lee Meriwether. Like Cannon the first thought is to wonder what the Hell this guy is doing working as a PI. But though he's not chasing bad guys down alleys he has worlds of experience and you believe it. That's in part to Buddy Epton being good at what he does. What he also does is really make you like the guy. I love the pilot. Great story telling Murder In The Dollhouse is an episode about an author being killed for something in his book, a plot that was popular in those days but still works great. Sunday: Doomsday is a wonderful beat the clock episode as someone is planning to kill

Jones and lets him know ahead of time William Conrad is in the pilot as Frank Cannon. The second episode has William Shatner. The character of Jones was also on an episode of Cannon, The Deadly Conspiracy in 1975's season 5 of Cannon. The crossover was a nice touch and is still used on occasion today. The show ran for 8 seasons proving you don't have to be young and pretty to be success on TV as a detective.

I loved watching these again, and as an adult I can appreciate just how well they were done. I can't wait for more!
Jon Jordan

CANNON Season 2 Volume 2
Paramount Home Entertainment

The early seventies was a great time for television detectives, some better than others. The networks were run by people who had a more realistic view of the world and understood that not everyone is thirty and beautiful. They actually cared about stories. Political correctness was not running amuck. And for me it was the golden age, the shows that would shape how I would read and watch television for the rest of my life.

William Conrad was a well known dude in the early seventies, he did a lot of voice overs and he was a trusted face on commercials. He seemed a natural for his own show. And he was. As a man who was pretty damn big it was obvious there would be less physical confrontation than we were used to on Rockford Files or Mannix, but that was fine because even at his large size Frank Cannon could take care of himself when he needed too. And seeing him pull a gun and toss out a wisecrack was totally believable. It was also nice to see him actually solving cases. And in pre-political correctness days people smoked, made jokes about the big man's weight and acted like people.

Season two part two has less recognizable actors unless you are a genius on TV character actors from 40 years ago. But the stories are solid. I really liked THE SEVENTH GRAVE which has a forensics guy tampering with evidence and the other serial killer episode, CATCH ME IF YOU CAN was great too.

The only negative I have is the transfer to disc is not as clean as it could be. But really, back in 1972 who would have imagined that all these shows would be collected and released for viewing again? And it's a minor quibble. There have been a few complaints about some of the CBS show being released in two volumes per season, but I think it's a marketing point and actually helps sales.

This is classic seventies PI stuff and fans of crime fiction should see this. It has in its own way influenced some of the great crime fiction we read today.

Jon Jordan

JUSTICE LEAGUE: CRISIS ON TWO EARTHS
Warner Home Video

In an another dimension, Lex Luthor (Noth) is the last surviving member of the Justice League. In a last-ditch effort to save his Earth, Luthor crosses dimensions and enlists the help of the newly-formed Justice League we know and love. All the actors are well-suited to their parts, but James Woods stands out for his quietly calculating portrayal of Owlman. Brother of a Bruce Wayne who was murdered along with his parents, Owlman (Thomas Wayne Jr.) grew up with Joe Chill as a role model. Learning Luthor has crossed dimensions, Owlman sets his mind to destroying Earth Prime, which would destroy all other Earths in turn.

Jonathan Adams also stands out as Martian Manhunter, who falls in love with the U.S. president's daughter in the alternate dimension. The president's daughter resists the evil versions of our heroes and works to convince her father to stand up them as well.

There are the requisite hero vs. villain battle royales, but since the characters are evenly matched, I didn't find them especially dramatic. The final turn of the tide was something of a deus ex machina.

To me, the movie is about sixty percent of why this is a must-own. Also included are a hard-boiled 1970s-style Spectre short starring the voices of Gary Cole and Alyssa Milano, the live-action pilot episodes of Wonder Woman (Lynda Carter) and Aquaman (Justin Hartley), and a sneak peek of the next DC direct-to-DVD feature Batman: Under the Red Hood. These are in addition to the usual Bruce Timm-picked cartoon episodes and previous DC animated trailers.
Gerald So

THE MEN WHO STARE AT GOATS **Anchor Bay Entertainment**

Although no goats were harmed in the production of THE MEN WHO STARE AT GOATS, the audience didn't get off as easily. Watching it, I thought back to the movie "1941" and rumors that surfaced at the time that the entire cast and crew were under the influence. I wondered if having a good time on a movie set (drug-induced or otherwise) turns out to be bad idea. You can easily imagine this group of veteran actors intimidating a fledgling director and running off with the production. You can also see that all this "wondering" meant that the movie wasn't holding my attention. The jokes were so broad, so lacking in wit, so repetitive in nature, it wasn't much fun. I can enjoy a silly comedy and have done so for years, but political humor needs a more sure-footed director than this film had, a better script, a more focused point of view. If you compare it to Dr. Strangelove, for instance, it plays like a student film. Ewan McGregor in a lead role seems to be there solely to be the butt of jokes about Jedi Warriors. If he is to be the film's sane center, he needs to have something more to do than raise his eyebrows and duck.

It is 2003 and Ann Arbor newspaper reporter (McGregor) tries to prove his manhood by embedding himself in Iraq. He is immediately pulled into the looney orbit of a member of the New Earth Army, Lyn Cassady (Clooney). Clooney persuades him that through skills learned at the hand of Bill Django, (Jeff "Lebowski" Bridges) the New Earth Army will, well, do what, I never completely understood. Most of the film examines what these skills, learned during the Vietnam Era, are. Some of them are funny and I don't want to step on the few laughs in the film by detailing them. After a while, and I mean perhaps thirty minutes, we've seen the best of the humor and the plot goes completely off the tracks. At times, the film is preachy (what probably drew Clooney to it), and at times it seems to have no point of view other than, "What should we toss out there next."

Hopefully Clooney's next outing Up in the Air will be a goat of a different color.

Patti Abbott

MURPHY'S LAW Series two **Acorn Media**

James Nesbitt is back as Tommy Murphy, an undercover cop whose job is his life. While the character of Murphy is from the novels of Colin Bateman, these tales are created for television. Playing a character already established in novels can't be easy, but Nesbitt seems to have really taken hold of Murphy and made it his own. He did a great job in series one, but seems more at ease here.

Series two first aired in the spring/summer of 2004 and contains six episodes. It is definitely darker (which I'm told becomes the norm in the later series) than the first, but there still some humor to be found. Over the course of series two, a regular is killed, Murphy poses as a priest, a homeless man, and a car thief and ends with Murphy coming into possession of the name of the man killed his daughter. As I said, a regular leaves, but Sarah Berger comes on board as DI Hilary Clark and does a nice job.

After just ten episodes from the first two series, MURPHY'S LAW has my undivided attention. A damn good show that has me already bugging Acorn for the next batch!

Jeremy

UP IN THE AIR **Paramount Home Entertainment**

Ryan Bingham (Clooney) works for an organization that functions like a hitman in corporate downsizing. He doesn't particularly enjoy sitting across the desk from someone who's just been socked with the news of their termination, although he prides himself on doing it well. What he does enjoy is the carefree life his profession allows him to live. His home is 'up in the air,' the place he spends over three hundred days a year. He has few if any real attachments and this hotel/jet life speaks to some need in him.

He is not the only one leading this peripatetic life-Alex Goran (Farmiga) is also on the move in her job and they hookup where their schedules intersect. They have agreed on a relationship with no strings, one which suits their lifestyles. A young woman (Kendrick) comes to Ryan's boss with a new idea. All of his corporate hitmen can be easily replaced by a web-chat version of the termination notice. The savings will be considerable. (Of course, she is now the hitman whose invention will eventually terminate Ryan). Ryan takes her on the road to persuade her that termination via web-chats is even more heartless than termination via Ryan. We now have the road movie "up in the air" as the duo touch down in various ports. Both learn something from the trip-but the movie manages to veer from being either preachy or

predictable. (Some of the terminated employees were played by recently terminated employees in Detroit). One caveat-Clooney is a little too slick for the part. It is hard to believe his apartment, even if only used a few days a year, would be so basic. It is hard to believe that the accumulation of miles he speaks about several times would mean much to him. He had no rapport either physically or emotionally with his family. You can't buy the fact he was ever born into it. But he has real chemistry with both actresses, real chemistry with the audience. Both women do an equally good job with their roles. It was a pleasure to watch a movie with intelligence, wit, a point. This is one of the increasingly rare US movies that manages to say something important and still entertain. Recent American movies seem bent to do one or the other. We have movies about the horrors of war, capitalism, poverty, ecological disaster. Or we have movies designed as a pure diversion. Although I felt Clooney was slightly wrong in the part, it was still one of the best movies of the year.
Patti Abbott

WISEGUY The collector's edition
Mill Creek Entertainment

WISEGUY starred Ken Wahl as Vinnie Terranova, an agent for the FBI agent with the Organized Crime unit. Vinne goes deep undercover to bring down the bad guys. To give him legit street cred, he is sent to prison for 18 months...talk about dedication. As a result of this, the series starts with him estranged from his mother.

The show ran from 1987 to 1990 and was innovative in that it carried a story arc as long as need be, not for merely one or two episodes. Later on, that would become a more regular occurrence, but it was not a common thing on television. Usually stories were wrapped up every week. It delivered a gritty, well-written story that could be enjoyed by the general public as well as those looking for something with more substance.

This set is NOT the complete series. The show had nine story arcs and only eight are contained here. The Dead Dog Records storyline, from season two, is missing because of music copyrights. While that may bother so, it is worth keeping in mind that this contains 67 episodes, some not previously released, and retails for \$44.98. The copyrights alone would likely more than double the price. To the best of my knowledge, that storyline has not previously been released (likely for that very reason).

The show contained some impressive actors with Kevin Spacey, Joan Severance, Jerry Lewis, Stanley Tucci, Ron Silver, Chazz Palminteri, David Strathairn and Billy Dee Williams all having regular roles on various story-lines.

The picture quality is mixed. There certainly is some pixilation present as well as some fuzziness. But the set is still very watchable. In fact, I have seen worse quality from the biggest studios. I review using a 51" Sony and that may well have made things a little more noticeable. But nothing was bad enough that it detracted from my viewing pleasure. Because of the music copyright issues, this is as complete a set as we are likely to get. It sucks to miss out on a good story like Dead Dog Records, but there is still a hell of a lot of good times to be had with this collection. It is certainly worth picking up.
Jeremy