

21 JUMP STREET: Season two

Mill Creek Entertainment

Penhall (Peter DeLuise), Ioki (Dustin Nguyen), Hoffs (Holly Robinson Peete) and Hanson (Johnny Depp) all return for a second season of what was one of Fox's first real hits (and their definition of hit was fairly liberal back then). For those coming late to the dance, the Jump Street crew are young-looking cops that often go undercover in school to help fight crime.

Season two is a mixed bag, some episodes are quite strong, while others play like an after school special. Some of the stronger eps include Fear and Loathing with Russell Buckins that features the first appearance of Russell, an old friend of Hanson's that often gets him in trouble. I'm Ok, You need work sees Hanson go undercover, illegally to examine rumors of mistreatment at a private rehab center. This ep also features a young Christina Applegate. Champagne High also features the always entertaining McQuaid brothers (Hanson and Penhall) letting lose more than is really required. C'mon, who wouldn't want a chance to be a total delinquent in high school, knowing there are no repercussions for you? The McQuaids are total thugs that actually toss a driver off of the school bus and drive themselves (and the other students) to school.

But with the good comes the bad, preachy, oversimplified lessons about alcohol, drugs, intolerance and the usual teen issues. For the most part, the stories are fairly straightforward (i.e. simple) and generally manage to be entertaining.

It is worth noting that most of the original music is gone, but I think that was also the case when Anchor Bay released them years ago. The overall picture and sound quality is decent and the price of \$14,98 is hard to beat. Those of us that remember the dawn of the Fox network will have fun.

Jeremy Lynch

THE CLEANER: The Final Season

Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

William Banks (Benjamin Bratt) is a former addict. One day, when at the bottom of his life, he asked God to help him straighten out. If so, he would devote his life to being God's "avenging angel" and do everything in his power to help others clean up. William has put together a crew that has also battles vices and they offer up rather unconventional means to provide addicts with a chance to clean up and rejoin the regular world.

Unfortunately, William's mission, as well as his past demons, has left him estranged from his family. At the end of season one, William and his wife separated. Season two finds him working to rebuild that relationship and to establish a stronger bond with his two children. It seems to have taken him a long time to realize that his calling is not theirs and that his attempts to help others have often made their lives harder.

Season two sees the writing of the show improve noticeably. Each episode no long feels like an after school special. This season, the episodes often look at the reasons behind the addictions instead of simply going after the evils of drugs. We see the complexities of life, whereas season one often presented things as black and white.

The acting has been strong all along, so with the improved writing, The Cleaner became one hell of a good show and certainly one worth watching on a regular basis. If you have season one, you will be

thrilled at the shows improvements. If you skipped out on the first season, give this set a chance, I think you will be pleasantly surprised.

Jeremy Lynch

EDGE OF DARKNESS

Warner Brothers

Edge of Darkness is a case of whether this movie good enough to kill two hours. From its generic title to its generic plot, I'd say no. (My husband would say yes).

Barely.

Although I am not generally the type of movie goer who has to have every conceivable question answered, this one left some holes. Based on a mini-series, it's easy to see why condensing it into a two-hour production was probably not the best idea. The primary question I had at its end was why this Boston cop, seemingly devoted to his daughter, has let so much time pass without seeing her. Her boyfriend makes this clear in their first meeting. It is also the kind of movie, sadly, where people only get killed when their function in the plot has passed. With ruthless villains such as these would Craven (Mel Gibson) a smart investigator been given free reign to explore the circumstances of his daughter's death for two hours. Would her boyfriend survive as long as he did?

PLOT: Craven (Mel Gibson), a Boston cop, watches as his daughter get gunned down outside his house during an infrequent visit. The immediate assumption is that Craven was the actual target of the gunman. Emma Craven (Bojana Navakovic) works for a large Massachusetts corporation, Northmoor, whose actual purpose is murky. She has come home ill and before she can explain her illness, she's dead. Northmoor, of course, is not what it seems and Craven gradually learns its dark secrets.

Both Gibson and Ray Winstone do what they can to breathe credibility and life into an airless plot. Winstone plays an enigmatic agent whose purpose is questionable. The scenes between the two actors are the most interesting in the film. But most of the movie is either murky or boring and lacks the tension it needs to succeed.

Patti Abbott

FOYLE'S WAR: Set Six

Acorn Media

Michael Kitchen stars as Chief Superintendent Christopher Foyle. Foyle finds himself stuck at home during the war, but is kept plenty busy with murders, black-marketeers and other illegal activities. He wanted to join the armed forces, but had his app turned down. He has spent the war policing the town of Hastings and, as the war comes to an end, is now looking to leave his job behind. Alas, best laid plans of mice and men and all that rot...he sticks around for a while.

The three stories in this set cover the summer of 1945. The Russian House (June 1945) has Foyle tracking an escaped Russian POW. Whiling doing this, he finds himself in conflict with his former protoge Paul Milner, now a deputy inspector. Killing Time (July 1945) looks at racial issues as African-American soliders return home. The Hide (Aug 45) has Milner investigating the murder of a young lady with Foyle examines the case of an accused traitor that is making no attempt to defend himself. Throughout the course of the series, FW has taken great pains to be historically accurate and to properly reflect the issues and moods of the times. This continues to be the case here as we see

the chaos that the end of the war brings. For years, there were certain rules in place and now there comes great changes as England, and the world, prepares for a new era of peace.

Fans of British police dramas will certainly have fun and be sucked into Foyle's world in no time. This collection has only just aired in England so this is the first chance Americans.

Jeremy

THE FREAK OUT LIST

A Sexy Intellectuals DVD/MVD

Frank Zappa is one of my all time favorite musicians, hands down. I consider the man a genius. His music is layers and works on numerous levels so it is hardly surprising that so many people want to analyze and talk about his music. I've read a few books about FZ and a number of them come off as overly pretentious which to me is about making the author look smart and not about the music.

In his autobiography Frank Zappa shares a lot of candid thoughts and one of the things that I take away from it is that FZ had a problem with people who were willingly stupid. I bring this up because this disc is not for the casual Zappa fan who wants to listen to titties and beer. This DVD is something that is meant to make you think, as believe most of Zappa's music does on some level given the Ability he show for composition with his music and his No Fear attitude towards trying new things.

This DVD, THE FREAK OUT LIST gets it's name from FZ's first album, FREAK OUT and a list that was contained within of musical influences. This DVD explores these influences and how they had a bearing on the music FZ would do himself. And while I think a casual fan will not enjoy this, I found it to be fascinating. The people they bring in are music experts and Zappa fans. The music they discuss ranges from classical to jazz and doo wop. There is a bit of Zappa music and some interesting footage but this is more about the music that molded Frank.

If you are a true fan of music and especially of Frank Zappa I think you will enjoy this. If you knowingly spend money on Journey or the Jonas Brothers or Motley Crue, , this is way too smart for you.

Jon Jordan

GEORGE GENTLY: Series 2

Acorn Media

Based on the characters by novelist Alan Hunter, GEORGE GENTLY stars Martin Shaw as Inspector George Gently, a former Scotland Yard copper that now spends his time policing the North Country. Backing him up is Sgt. John Bacchus (Lee Ingleby) , who is sort of a putz. Not a bad guy, but not quite as great as he seems to think he is. Cocky and kind of stupid, not a great combination in real life, but it does make for an interesting fictional character. This knob often tests the patience of Gently and ends up learning a lesson.

The series is set in the mid 60s and uses the social changes to great effect. Race, abortion, pedophilia and more place roles in the show. None of them would be quite as shocking today, but small town England in the 60s? The show appears to have to gone to great pains to ensure authenticity and, to my eyes, does a bang up job. I am hardly a historian, but nothing stood out as being inaccurate. Inspector Gently seems fairly open-minded for the times, but one would imagine he saw plenty as an inspector for Scotland Yard and that all those years have brought him the wisdom to understand, or at least try to understand, the changes occurring around him. Bacchus, lacking that

wisdom, often is less understanding by what he sees.

Shaw and Ingleby both do an excellent job and are backed up by some exceptionally strong writing. Fairly solid mysteries, characters with depth and the fascinating backdrop of the 1960s make this well worth checking out.

Jeremy

LEVERAGE: The complete second season
Paramount Home Entertainment

Nathan Ford (Timothy Hutton)'s band of merry thieves are back for another season. After destroying their old, rather choice, HQ, the crew are now based out of Ford's flat, Said pad is above an Irish bar which provides temptation for the recovering alcoholic Ford.

When the season starts, the newly sober Ford reunites the crew Hardison (the hacker), Eliot (muscle), Parker (cat burglar and all around odd duck) and Sophie (grifter extraordinaire and aspiring actress,, she is as bad at theatrical acting as she is good at the con) for a one-time job that results in a whole new bunch of adventures. Midway through the season, Sophie take some time off (actress Gina Bellman was pregnant) and calls on fellow grifter Tara Cole (Jeri Ryan) to take her place. Things start off a little rough, but Tara soon earns the trust of the crew and finds her place.

While totally unbelievable, **LEVERAGE** does an excellent job of making things **SEEM** plausible. They do a good enough job that you are able to forget that this stuff could never actually happen. Everyone seems to have fun, and Hutton is given some baggage and issues that allow him to do the heavy lifting in terms of acting. The result is a fun show that is not total fluff.

I can't really think of a bad thing to say about the show. I have totally fallen in love with Parker (and it appears that Hardison has as well) and will follow Ford and co until the end of time (or the end of the show, whichever comes first).

Jeremy

THE LORD OF THE RINGS:

In 1978, using traditional painting and drawing as well as rotoscoping based on live action, maverick animator Ralph Bakshi (*Fritz The Cat*, *Heavy Traffic*, *Cool World*) was the first to show a story with the daunting scope of *The Lord of the Rings* would translate to film.

The variety of techniques employed don't always make for smooth viewing and some liberties are taken with the story, but I found it easy enough to follow and was riveted wondering how each character would be depicted. It's amazing how heavily Peter Jackson's live-action saga seems to borrow from Bakshi's movie.

I would call this a family film, but at the same time there is realistically animated violence and blood. The movie might receive a PG-13 today, and I'd recommend it to viewers that age and above, whether or not they've read Tolkien's books or seen Jackson's saga. An excellent introduction to a fantasy epic.

This release includes one Blu-ray disc and one DVD, with a featurette on Bakshi's career. It's great to

experience the movie in 1080p and Dolby TrueHD 5.1, but enough film defects remain that I wonder how much restoration was possible.

Gerald So

MIDSOMER MURDERS: Set 15

Acorn Media

And back we go to the most dangerous county in all of the U.K. Midsomer is home to enough murders to scare off most Baltimore gangs. With characters from the novels of Caroline Graham, MM offers up entertaining tradition English village murder mysteries, with just a touch of humor and perhaps a sly wink to we gentle viewers.

John Nettles returns as Detective Chief Inspector Tom Barnaby, with Jason Hughes also back as Detective Sergeant Ben Jones, his promising young sidekick. Nettles has been playing the role of Barnaby for 14 years, yet still has a spring in his step and offers up energy and enthusiasm. The stories themselves are nothing new, but still have wit and charm enough to keep us coming back for more.

These episodes originally aired, in the U.K. in 2008 and have not yet seen the light of day on this side of the pond. Three tales are included: Blood Wedding has Barnaby and Jones dealing with some deaths that have been triggered by an upper class wedding. Shot at Dawn finds a generations old feud between the Hicks and the Hammonds is reignited by WW 1 memorial. Left for Dead: A series of deaths related to a construction site may be linked to the disappearance of a boy decades earlier.

We do get an entertaining featurette entitled Super Sleuths that looks at the first decade of the show and has comments by Nettles and Caroline Graham as well as numerous others.

Midsomer Murders may well be the best traditional mystery series made. After over a decade, the show continues to provide enjoyable tales. Set 15 is well worth checking out for those that prefer their crimes with a little tea.

Jeremy

SCARECROW AND MRS. KING: Season One

Over the last few years I've re-visited a lot of TV shows I remember from years past. Sometimes the experience is a good one, my memories were right on and the show is still fun and well done and they hold up. Other times I watch a show again for the first time in twenty years and wonder what the Hell I was thinking when I first watched and enjoyed it.

Scarecrow and Mrs. King falls somewhere in the middle for me. I never watched it when it was on, by fall of 1983 I was spending my nights out on the town being twenty something and didn't have much time for TV. Watching it now it feels very dated because of the clothes and technology.

It also seems weird that Kate Jackson would take a role in which she is a housewife who is supposed to be a bit helpless but lucky. Mrs. King is raising two boys and her mother lives with her. Mom is a pain in the ass and nowadays her role as meddling Mom would not work. Mrs. King stumbles across an agent of some spy type network who hands her a package. She ends up helping to save the mission for the spy and the group he works for brings her into the fold as no one would suspect she's a spy.

Scarecrow is played by Bruce Boxleitner, not someone you would go to when you need depth of

character as his default acting chops is to grin and look pretty. I don't buy him as tough enough to do the action and he doesn't really play as clever enough to be a good spy. This would be the guy I'd have driving the car and waiting while the mission was done by real agents.

The rest of the cast is pretty much the same, no one is really stretching here and the roles could have been swapped out and no one would really notice. The writing is also very bland with some outrageous plots. More often than not I find myself thinking I would be a better spy than any of these people.

Now, I'm not saying the show is all bad, it's not. But this is most definitely something anyone under the age of 35 is going to watch and be bored. As a over the age of 40 person myself I found it entertaining in the way I find a lot of television to be, I have it on and watch while I do something else. It's pleasant enough to have on while I do other things as the plots are not really challenging. Kind of the same formula that worked for Murder She Wrote and other non-threatening shows. It was kind of nice to have on before we went to bed to help us wind down.

Final word? While most of our readers won't find this to be a show they need, it might be a nice gift for the Grandparents.

21 episodes, and no extra features.

Jon