

21 JUMP STREET: THE COMPLETE SERIES

Mill Creek Entertainment

Peter Dinklage (Penhall), Dustin Nguyen (Loki), Holly Robinson Peete (Hoffs) and Johnny Depp (Hansen) were the first television stars for the fledgling Fox television network. On 21 JUMP STREET, they played baby-faced cops stationed out of an old church and worked undercover at local schools (mainly high schools at first, but colleges later on). The show, and the actors, were fresh and different and Fox found a niche audience that was devoted to Jump Street.

The series was a mixed bag some episodes are quite strong, while others play like an after school special. The cast remained the same for the first few years, then many of the regulars either left (Depp) or worked a reduced number of episodes. By the final season, only Hoffs and Captain Adam Fuller (Steve Williams) remained. By that time, the show was just barely hanging on.

The early seasons are the best, as the cast had some nice chemistry. Penhall and Hanson were especially great and worked well (acting-wise) together. Some of the best episodes had them working together as The McQuaid Brothers, a couple of delinquent brothers that showed the two letting loose more than need be. One episode finds them hi-jacking a school bus and driving everyone to school themselves. Another finds Hanson dealing with seeing his girlfriend gunned down before his eyes. But with the good comes the bad, preachy, oversimplified lessons about alcohol, drugs, intolerance and the usual teen issues. The show is at it's best when they focus on the teens themselves and the all-too common feelings of isolation and loneliness. For the most part, the stories are fairly straightforward (i.e. simple) and generally manage to be entertaining.

As with other Mill Creek releases, the original music is gone and the packaging is pretty basic. But the price is great and can't be beat. This set is great for folks that want to take a stroll down memory lane without paying too much.

Jeremy Lynch

ASHES TO ASHES Series 3

E1 Entertainment

As I type this it's been 15 minutes since I saw the end of this show. I watched both seasons of Life On Mars as soon as they came out on DVD in the UK. I've gotten each season of Ashes To Ashes as soon as they were available as well. It's safe to call me a big fan.

Ashes to Ashes didn't start as strong as Life On Mars. The first season was good, but more because of characters I loved and I have to admit, I love the setting in 1983. So, Season 1, good but not great. Season 2 was much better, partly due to some behind the scenes squabble about the strength of season 1. Season 3 is something I've looked forward to with much anticipation, especially after hearing that people loved the ending.

Three opens with Gene Hunt on the run after shooting main character Alex. As she comes out of her coma Gene is there and they go back to work. Waiting for Gene is a man named Jim Keats who is investigating the squad with the hope of shutting them down.

While they continue to work cases Alex looks into the fate of Sam Tyler, our hero from Life on Mars. She also starts to see a ghost, a young man who has been shot. Her investigations work as a nice subplot through out, leading towards a big finish. Along the way each of the characters has a moment, almost a revelation, where we see them at their best and we get to know some more about them. The thing we come to realize is that this show is really about Gene Hunt, and by the time you finish you'll see what I mean.

Strange happenings and weird coincidences abound, which is par for the course. It makes for a wonderful cop show with traces of horror, humor and SciFi throughout. By the time the last episode is on I think I've got it figured out. Ruth was close, and I had some pieces of it. I will say that fans of both

Mars and Ashes will be happy. It makes sense, it made me happy and it impressed me. I was even surprised.

Now I need to watch it all again, which I may do once a year for quite a while. This was pure brilliance.

Jon Jordan

EUREKA Season 3.5

Universal Studios

Season three of this SyFy original show was interrupted by the writers' strike a while back. They went ahead and did the second half and called 3.5. The show has a fun premise, Colin Ferguson is a regular cop who comes to this strange town full of science geeks all working for a corporation that is making the world better through science, in a fun way. Jack Carter stays on as Sheriff with his daughter who over the seasons settles down and learns to love the town and its quirks.

This run of the show opens up with Carter replaced as Sheriff by a robot, though by episode two he is back in place. The characters are familiar to us now and to each other. Of course while this is good for the show, it also means it may get a bit stagnant. Though it was still fun, they added a new character named Tessa who is an old friend of the woman running General Dynamics who eventually plays a bit of a romantic foil for Jack.

Fans of the show will enjoy the characters they love and its filled with the strange and weird goings on that could only happen in a place where science and innovation is the norm, with an open mind to the future. There is also a return for an episode of a great character played by Matt Frewer. I like this show a lot and this latest DVD was every bit as fun as all the others before it. If you are a fan, pick it up, if you haven't seen it yet, check out season 1.

Jon Jordan

THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO

Music Box Films Home Entertainment

For those of you who loved Steig Larson's novel, *THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO*, you're in for a treat. The film, directed by Danish director Niels Arden Oplev and released in the U.S. last week, is just as good. Maybe better.

The novel, for anyone who's been on Jupiter for the past few years, is about the search for a wealthy Swedish businessman's niece who disappeared 40 years ago. The first of a trilogy, *DRAGON TATTOO* introduces two unlikely allies: investigative journalist Mikael Blomkvist, and Goth hacker extraordinaire Lisbeth Salander.

Although it became a mesmerizing read, the novel started off slowly, and, for me, was too long. Not the film. All the excessive bloat has been stripped away, and once the film starts, it doesn't slow down. The pacing and suspense – and the sense of impending evil -- builds incrementally but relentlessly, until I was on the edge of my seat. And I already knew the ending.

At the same time, the film is remarkably faithful to the plot and its underlying themes. All the important plot points are in the film, and the gloom and chill of the Swedish winter (and its inhabitants) are nicely reinforced by the photography.

That's not to say some of the characters don't get short shrift. We barely see Erika Berger. Dragan Armanski, Lisbeth's boss and staunchest ally prior to Blomkvist, barely makes an appearance. Moreover, the final chapters of the book in which Lisbeth takes down Wennerstrom are also truncated.

Just like the book, which was hard to put down, it was difficult to turn away from the film, even for a moment. Watching Blomkvist and Salander unravel the truth piece by piece was just as satisfying as reading it in the book. Seeing the chilly Vanger family slowly come apart was, too. I could see the

homage to Larson's book in many scenes: for example, the cottage where Blomkvist stayed on the estate was perfect; so was Lisbeth's apartment. I also enjoyed seeing what looked like genuine "screenshots" off Lisbeth's computer, rather than something created in post with special effects. However the room in the basement was more high-tech than I remembered.

All the characters are sharply drawn, but the star of the film is clearly Lisbeth. Noomi Rapace, the Swedish actress who plays her is just as I'd imagined her in the book: small, dark, wiry, with plenty of piercings. She is silent during much of her onscreen time, but the intensity in her eyes speaks volumes. Her anti-social behavior led reviewer Roger Ebert to say she might have had a form of Asperger's Syndrome. I hadn't considered that when reading the book, but after seeing her on screen, it wasn't a hard leap. Blomkvist (played by Swedish actor Michael Nyqvist) plays off her ferocity with a calm I didn't appreciate in the book; in fact, at times he appears almost naïve. The other characters underplay their roles quite well; the only character who might over act is Lisbeth's sexually abusive guardian.

Speaking of which, the violence in the film is graphic and seemed more visceral than in the book. Whether it's the translation from page to screen, or whether the director emphasized violence to make a point, I'm not sure. But even my 21 year old daughter, who usually is up for anything, had to turn away at times.

At two and a half hours, it's a little long, but given the scope of the book, not excessive. The time passes quickly, and I was sucked in. In fact, it's hard to imagine that Hollywood can do anything to top it. If you liked the book, I highly recommend the film. You won't be disappointed.

Libby Hellmann

HUNTER: The Complete Series

Mill Creek Entertainment

From 1984 to 91, Fred Dryer played Detective Rick Hunter, a gruff cop that had no problems bending the rules to keep the citizens of L.A. Safe. When the show debuted, Hunter was hyped as a Dirty Harry for television. As the series went on, the character became more nuanced and the show softened. That is not to say it was playing to the Murder She Wrote crowd, but Hunter went from walking (and occasionally crossing) the line to being a more of a team player, albeit a rebellious one. During his career Hunter, like Dirty Harry, had gone through many partners. At the start of the show, Sgt Dee Dee McCall is assigned to work with Rick. She manages to survive the partnership and, over the course of the series, the two develop a strong bond.

The show certainly feels dated (the clothes and hair styles are excellent examples), 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. Dryer is not a great actor by any means, but he has plenty of charisma and does well enough here.

HUNTER holds up fairly well, but is best looked at as nostalgic fun. If this was a \$100 set, I would be a little more hesitant to recommend it, but with the bargain price, it is safe to say you will get your moneys worth.

Jeremy

JESSE STONE: NO REMORSE

Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

The sixth TV movie starring Tom Selleck as Robert B. Parker's police chief Jesse Stone will be released on DVD July 27. The second of the series not based on an existing Parker book, *No Remorse* finds Jesse relieved of his duties as police chief by the Paradise town council, but he still manages to help out his old force as well as State Police Capt. Healy (Stephen McHattie). The main plot involved seemingly random killings. Speculating on motive with several friends, most

notably ex-cop-turned-streetwise counselor Dix (William Devane), Jesse is eventually able to hit on a suspect and motive for the killings. In the fashion of Parker's books, Jesse proceeds to sweat his main suspect until the suspect is ready to confess.

Like the previous Stone movies, *No Remorse* has a slow-burning pace seldom seen on TV anymore. All the movies are similar in tone, but unlike weekly episodes, they don't air often enough to become monotonous, and each movie does push the series arc into new territory. Each movie's ratings success has made sequels possible. This one leaves room for a sequel, too, ending with Rose Gammon (Kathy Baker), Suitcase Simpson (Kohl Sudduth), and Jesse all awaiting the town council's decision on their future.

Gerald So

THE JONES

Fox Home Entertainment

Director Derrick Borte apparently spent some time in the advertising business and knows the lengths it will go to in selling products for customers. Here we have an all-American family settling into a McMansion in a very affluent suburb. At first I was reminded of "The Riches," but unfortunately it's not nearly as wacky or subversive as Cable television fare, which is increasingly a problem for movies. Shows like *Treme*, *Justified*, *Mad Men*, *Men of a Certain Age* and so on are undercutting movies such as *THE JONSES* by being smarter, edgier, fresher.

The Joneses move into a new house in a new neighborhood and immediately begin impressing their neighbors with just how cool they are. They dress better, drive nicer cars, have better running outfits, and sports equipment. They look pretty darn good, too. Soon this charismatic foursome is influencing consumer purchases in their new town. Eventually this has repercussions for their neighbors and themselves.

SPOILER ALERT-The Joneses are a family for hire, in effect. A marketing unit put together to influence their neighbors and sell products their agency is hired to sell. This sounds subversive, and it is, but not nearly subversive enough. (Twenty years ago, style watchers followed "early adapters" at the high school my children attended to see what styles they'd influenced. I guess it took marketers this long to catch on to it).

This movie played like a crime story without a real crime. (It also played like one long commercial for Audis and golf clubs). The Joneses were not a real family, but where's the crime in that? (I have one of those families living next door to me). And, of course, this was basically a romance by the film's end, the only tension being whether Mr. and Mrs. Jones would become more than a marriage in name only and whether they would ditch their jobs. David Duchovny continues to show his limitations as an actor. The wink and a nod are getting tiresome. And Demi Moore continues to play an automaton. A real disappointment.

Patti Abbott

LIFE ON MARS (U.K.):

The Complete collection

Acorn Media

There are many good television shows out there. There are a number of excellent ones. But there are precious few that are truly magical. Ones with top notch acting, great chemistry and world-class writing. *Life on Mars* is one such show.

We have reviewed seasons (excuse me, Series) one and two here in the past. so if you have followed our advice and acquired them, there really is not much else to say other than Good Work! But for those that still have not opened their wallets, you have another chance. *LIFE ON MARS: The Complete U.K. edition* is waiting for you.

Sam is a lead investigator in modern day England. After being hit by a car, he awakes to find himself in London...in the early 70s. Is he dead? Mad? In a coma? Or has he actually traveled back in time?

These are the questions Sam asks himself as he takes his place in on a squad led by Gene Hunt. Hunt is a foul-mouthed, boozing, slightly bent cop that has little patience for those that oppose him. Yet as the series goes on, Sam and Hunt come to respect one another and appreciate what the other has to offer.

LOM does an excellent job of mixing crime storylines with Sam's struggles to figure out what has really happened and how he can get back to his own life in modern day. SS and FSD are incredible here. The character of Gene Hunt initially seems like an embodiment of damn near every cop cliché from that era, but good writing and great acting keeps him from being a cartoon and quickly establishes him as, IMO, the main reason to watch LOM.

Do yourself a favor, pick up a copy today and get ready for one of the most engaging cop shows in the history of television. Just be sure to get the U.K. show and not the short-lived U.S. Remake.

Jeremy

THE RUNAWAYS

Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

Does it make sense to say that sixteen year old actresses do not often have the depth of experience or the necessary chops to play sixteen year old girls like the ones in the band The Runaways? Or that biopics only succeed about ten percent of the time? I think these are the two most compelling reasons for the failure of The Runaways to ever catch fire for me. This was a film I wanted to like—but didn't much.

The Runaways tells the story of the formation of the hard-rock group of the same name in 1975. Although Joan Jett is the most familiar name in the band, this story, based on Cherie Currie's book, is mostly seen from Currie's perspective. It is her family situation we come to know (slightly) and it is her addiction to drugs we watch play out.

Kim Fowley, a hard as nails male rock manager of the era, put this group together, based on the notion that a female group could be as hard-hitting and as raucous as male groups of the time. This need to match The Stones or David Bowie in wildness and chutzpah sunk this group in a short time. The girls had one or two quasi-hits, took a trip to Japan, and disbanded after Currie left the group, half-dead from drugs and family problems. Jett went on to further success; Currie finally straightened out and counseled other drug abusers. She is now a chain-saw artist.

For about twenty minutes, this film had the energy and verve it needed to succeed. But then it settled into the usual clichés about the post-sixties era and drugs. It was directed much like a rock video. Supporting actors were embarrassingly amateurish. Only the performance of Michael Shannon, as a drill sergeant manager, held much interest. Ideas such as lesbianism seemed only to exist for brief titillation. I don't know the sexual preferences of Jett and Currie, but these issues needed to be more fully explored or dropped. Jett was involved in this production. I think she would have been better served by telling her own story rather than the one of Cherie Currie and The Runaways.

Patti Abbott

SANCTUARY Season 2

E1 Entertainment

This is an original television show made in Canada. Last year I got to see the first Season on DVD and was really thrilled by the show. Great back story, wonderful characters and a cool premise. A woman named Dr. Helen Magnus (Amanda Tapping) runs an institute called The Sanctuary, a worldwide group that studies and protects Cryptozoological creatures and other strange beasts. Season One ends with a cliff hanger as Magnus' daughter is captured and brainwashed to be used against her by a group known as Cabal.

As the second season opens they finish off this story line and we are introduced to more of the other members of this institute from around the world. A great episode takes place on an oil rig with Magnus and her right hand man with them in the water. I also really enjoyed the episode towards the end with

the Bollywood over tones, including a great dance number.

This season is a bit darker and the situations feel a bit more dire, but they still place a plot of emphasis on characters and it's a joy to watch. The extra features include an appearance at comic-con which proves it is moving beyond cult status. I can't wait for more.

Jon Jordan

SAVING GRACE: The Final Season

Fox Home Entertainment

I first discovered Saving Grace when I reviewed season one. It sounded hokey, so the plan was to watch half the episodes and write up my general impressions. I did not see any way I would make it through the entire season and was imagining Touched By an Angel with a badge. It blew me away and I have been a fan ever since.

I wish I could say that season four sees Grace and co head off on a high note, but truth be told, it is the weakest season of the show. The acting remains strong, but it feels as though these episodes were written by a half a dozen folks, each with their own vision for how things should be. There are inconsistencies and storylines that disappear for episodes at a time.

The acting is still strong and the chemistry is as good as ever. Holly Hunter does a wonderful job playing Grace as a very complex character. One with many vices and a strong sense of right and wrong. The only complaint I have with the cast is the character of Neely. I personally find the character almost unbearable and cringe each time she appears on screen. She is, fortunately, a minor character.

I won't say that fans should pass over season four, just that it does not live up to the high standard set by previous seasons. I wish Grace and co had left on a higher note.

Jeremy Lynch

TALES OF THE GOLD MONKEY: The Complete Series

Shout! Factory

Tales of the Gold Monkey is often mislabeled a *Raiders of the Lost Ark* ripoff. Don Bellisario (*Magnum, P.I.*, *Quantum Leap*, *JAG*, *NCIS*) originally shopped the series around to the networks in 1979, but none of them wanted to take a chance on a period drama (set in 1938). After *Raiders'* huge success in 1981, ABC bought the series and aired it for one season in 1982.

Stephen Collins played Jake Cutter, former Flying Tiger stranded by luck as a charter pilot in the South Pacific. Jake and his loyal mechanic Corky (MacKay) frequented the Monkey Bar, owned by shady Frenchman Bon Chance Louie (McDowall). In the pilot episode, Jake becomes smitten with songstress and American spy Sarah Stickney White (O'Heaney).

Though I was only eight years old when the series first aired, it seeped into my consciousness and stayed, influencing my own writing in ways I'm so glad to be able to revisit now. The picture and sound while not spectacular, probably surpass any surviving tapes you may have. The characters and atmosphere hold up, thanks to Bellisario's meticulous eye for detail and human interest.

Monkey's only flaw is that ABC kept wanting it to be a *Raiders* ripoff, leading to an uneven season. In the end, *Monkey* was canceled because Bellisario refused to turn it into what ABC wanted.

Fortunately, a handful of late-season episodes live up to the writers' vision.

The six-disc set includes all 22 episodes (five with audio commentary), a 36-minute making-of featurette, character and actor bios, a fact file, stills galleries, and a 24-page episode guide. Well worth the price for *Monkey* fans and fans of old-fashioned adventure in general.

Gerald So

WHITE COLLAR

Universal

Neal Caffrey (Matthew Bomer) is one of the best at what he does. Normally this would be a good thing, but what he does is con and swindle people. Our society frowns on this, which is why when WHITE COLLAR begins, he is in prison. Mere minutes after we meet him, he strolls on out of prison. The officials turn to the one man that was able to catch him: FBI special agent Peter Burke (Tim DeKay). He knows how Neal thinks and quickly tracks him down and returns him to prison.

But they soon speak again and an agreement is made: Cal will have a limited release in exchange for working for the Bureau in an advisory role, going after those in the same field as he. He quickly finds a nice place to live and the two form an uneasy alliance.

But there is more to WC than just an odd couple fight crimes, Neal's girlfriend has disappeared and he wants to know why. No sooner does he start poking around when finds himself peering into a murky world of conspiracy where nothing is as it seems. Can he figure it out while keeping Burke at arms length?

While the show is obviously fiction, they stretch things more than a little. At times, I did find myself snorting in disbelief at Neal's almost MacGyver-like skills. He seemingly knows everything and is able to accomplish anything with only the most basic of equipment and preparation time (not unlike LEVERAGE). But that stuff was not enough to make me walk away, it is just too damn fun.

Bottom line is that White Collar is a fun, breezy show with enough charm for five shows. Slick capers and just enough conspiracy to spice things up, White Collar is the ideal way to leave the troubles of the real world behind.

Jeremy