

THE BATTALION



"Firefly: The Complete Series"
Starring Nathan Fillion, Adam Baldwin
and Morena Baccarin
Fox Home Video

Joss Whedon became a master of crafting witty dialogue and outrageous plot twists with his shows "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" and its spin-off "Angel." So it's a shame that what could quite possibly have been his best show, "Firefly," was cancelled before it had a chance to spread its wings. "Firefly" is a science-fiction western that ran for 14 episodes in the fall of 2001 on Fox. Newly released on DVD as a box set containing every episode, the show has been granted a new life in the aftermarket.

Combining western sensibilities with an intergalactic saga, "Firefly" is a show that's not afraid to bend the rules of what a science-fiction show is supposed to be. Don't expect any bumpy fireheads or pointy ears; "Firefly" lacks extraterrestrial life. Instead, the show focuses on character interaction and the ongoing arcs.

"Firefly" features the continuing saga of the starship Serenity and its crew of nine. Captained by Mal Reynolds (Nathan Fillion), the crew battle to survive in a harsh universe 500 years into the future. Taking work when it comes, the crew isn't afraid to break a few laws, often bringing them trouble from the ever-present Alliance and shadowy government forces with deadly secrets.

The show features clever dialogue and exceptionally good character interaction. Each episode is enjoyable in its own right and features a wide array of subjects from train robberies to bounty hunters. The show takes western themes of loyalty and honor and cleverly inserts them into the far-flung future in a way that's different than most American television today.

Characters such as the hilariously lewd Jayne Cobb (Adam Baldwin) and the space prostitute Inara (Morena Baccarin) add to the colorful cast of characters and bring freshness to every episode. Whedon's attention to detail works wonderfully to bring to life a vast universe and scope that is amazing, considering the number of episodes produced. From the fact that prostitution is actually one of the most respectable jobs of the future to the use of Chinese as a language as fluent as English, the show has a flair to it that most programs lack.

The DVD contains all 14 episodes produced, including the two-hour original pilot episode and three never-aired episodes. Standout episodes include "Our Mrs. Reynolds," the hilarious story of Capt. Reynold's accidental wife; "Out of Gas," the space horror story interwoven with flashbacks of the crew's beginnings; and "Objects in Space," which showcases Whedon at his finest with the story of an insane bounty hunter.

The DVD also comes with seven episode commentaries, an excellent mini-documentary on the bittersweet history of the show, a feature on the spaceship's design, four deleted scenes and a gag reel. The set includes four disks that are each impressively packaged and designed. The episodes are presented in the order they were meant to be aired, although this privilege was denied to the show when it originally aired.

Overall, "Firefly" is an excellent addition to any DVD collection. Few shows today manage to be as consistently thrilling, touching and hilarious. The set is easily worth its moderately hefty price tag. With a "Firefly" motion picture on the way from Universal, expect to hear big things from the crew of "Serenity."

— Robert Saucedo

- If you see it on the video shelf, walk away as fast as you can
- Only watch it to please your date
- Good for Saturday afternoon TV
- Pick up a copy when you have a chance
- You should have bought this yesterday

PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

Film starring Robbins, Morton premiers at Austin's South by Southwest film festival

NEW YORK (AP) — The futuristic "Code 46," starring current Oscar nominees Tim Robbins and Samantha Morton, will have its United States premiere on opening night at the South by Southwest film festival.

The film from director Michael Winterbottom ("24 Hour Party People," "The Claim") is among nearly 200 being shown at the festival, which runs from March 12-20 in Austin, Texas.

"Code 46" is about an insurance investigator (Robbins) and a woman (Morton) who have an affair, but their relationship is complicated by the proliferation of cloning.

Robbins is up for a supporting-actor Oscar for "Mystic River," while Morton is nominated for best actress for "In America."

Also on the South by Southwest schedule, announced Monday, are Kevin Smith's "Jersey Girl," with Ben Affleck and Jennifer Lopez; and "Intermission," with Colin Farrell.

Justin Timberlake heads to Hollywood

NEW YORK (AP) — After adding the title of Grammy winner to his resume, Justin Timberlake is going after another: movie star.

Timberlake will star with Kevin Spacey, Morgan Freeman and LL Cool J in "Edison."

"After many years of looking at many scripts, he's decided on what we think is a terrific project," Timberlake's publicist, Ken Sunshine, told The Associated Press Tuesday. "You can judge by the quality of the people associated with the film the direction he's headed as he begins his film career."

The 'N Sync singer will play a young journalist who discovers an elite team of corrupt police. Freeman plays the veteran reporter who helps him, and Spacey plays the district attorney's top investigator.

When asked whether sharing the screen with such formidable company will intimidate Timberlake, Sunshine said, "Justin's 22. I don't think anybody has handled the kind of success he's had in their 22 years better than he has."



Mona Lisa Smile
Starring Julia Roberts, Kirsten Dunst
and Maggie Gyllenhaal
Columbia Pictures

Stifling the potential of women is a "crime," the penalty of which has been lessened over time, but is something that should not be forgotten.

"Mona Lisa Smile" takes a step back in time to the 1950s when women went to college to find a husband and were taught how to become obedient housewives. It was a time when other options were not encouraged nor even available for women.

Julia Roberts displays her everlasting charm and self-sufficient style. She plays Ms. Katherine Watson, a confident and "before her time" art teacher from California, whose greatest dream is to teach at Wellesley College, the distinguished all-women's institute. Despite the controversy, her teaching style provokes at the College, she helps influence the minds and viewpoints of her students.

Kirsten Dunst, Julia Stiles and Maggie Gyllenhaal portray three of Ms. Watson's most prominent and troublesome students who have three very different outlooks on what life should hold after graduation. Dominic West (Chicago) plays the role of Bill Dunbar, the typical, handsome womanizer who attracts all the women yet is taken aback by Ms. Watson.

In addition to the strong cast and touching performances, the visual and audio aspects of Mona Lisa Smile are fantastic. The soundtrack augments the feeling and emphasis of the storyline.

One noticeable difference between women in the movie and women of today is their attire. Though the clothing of the 1950s is depicted as delicate and feminine, reflecting the era's attitude toward women, it seems that today's outfits are more comfortable and diverse. In regards to the accessories, it was intriguing to see all the different styles of gloves, hats and ankle-strap high heels. One of the most baffling aspects of the film is that all the women were smoking in the classroom, meetings, dorm rooms, everywhere; it was seemingly glamorous to do so at the time.

This multi-generational film is entertaining for all, but especially for female audiences. The younger viewers will likely realize how many more opportunities are available to them now. It also serves a nostalgic value for older generations that lived in that era.

Overall, Mona Lisa Smile may seem slow-moving and unentertaining for male viewers. Yet the audience will leave feeling uplifted and re-energized.

— Christina Teichman

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