

Show), a blooper reel, production notes, and more. Recommended. (D. Liebenson)

Mad Men: Season Five

★★★★1/2

Lionsgate, 585 min., not rated, DVD: 4 discs, \$49.98, Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$49.99

Four-time Emmy winner for Outstanding Drama Series, AMC's *Mad Men* examines gender roles and cultural identity through the prism of advertising executives and creative types in 1960s New York. Season five takes the story up to 1966, as the stress of keeping a prestigious but struggling new Madison Avenue ad firm afloat takes its toll on founding partner Don Draper (Jon Hamm) and his colleagues. Although this is the only season the show was shut out of the Emmy awards, it's arguably the best yet, and features the most talked-about episode of the entire series: "The Other Woman," in which the partners ask Joan (Emmy nominee Christina Hendricks) to sleep with a prospective client. The segment became the water-cooler TV moment of the year, and not just because of the salacious dramatic edge. This plot element becomes a turning point for Peggy (Emmy nominee Elisabeth Moss), Don's protégé; and his amazing farewell to her (evoking complicated feelings of anger, betrayal, regret, affection, and pride) is a powerful moment. Compiling all 13 episodes from 2012, extras include audio commentaries, behind-the-scenes featurettes, a pictorial timeline, and a *Newsweek* digital gallery of magazine covers. Still one of the smartest and most challenging shows on the air, this is highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)



Magic City: The Complete First Season

★★★

Anchor Bay, 3 discs, 419 min., not rated, DVD: \$44.99, Blu-ray: \$54.99

This Starz original drama series centering on nightclubs and gangsters in 1959 Miami plays like *Mad Men* meets *Boardwalk Empire*. Jeffrey Dean Morgan stars as Ike Evans, an independent hotelier with big dreams, and Olga Kurylenko (a former Bond girl) is his loving wife, Vera (they are a rare devoted couple in this kind of cable fare). Danny Huston goes way over the top as Ike's not-so-silent partner, Ben Diamond, a crude thug whose nickname is "The Butcher." Huston is the most entertaining element in this handsomely made but shamelessly exploitative series, where naked showgirls and torrid affairs are sprinkled amidst the big deals and gangland hits as if trying to meet a quota. The show is pure crime melodrama, with Ike trying to stay honest and independent in a corrupt world, and his sons routinely getting into trouble as a



result of unwise decisions (his oldest is having a dangerous liaison with The Butcher's beautiful mistress). Compiling all eight episodes from the 2012 debut season, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes. Optional, at best. (S. Axmaker)

Maidstone and Other Films by Norman Mailer

★1/2

Eclipse, 2 discs, 284 min., not rated, DVD: \$39.95

During the late 1960s, pugnacious novelist Norman Mailer decided that he wanted to become a filmmaker, so he banged out a trio of no-budget, mostly improvised productions that blurred the lines between home movies and experimental cinema. His first effort, *Wild 90* (1967), finds three foul-mouthed gangsters (Mailer, Buzz Farbar, and Mickey Knox) hiding in an apartment from unspecified enemies. *Beyond the Law* (1968) puts Mailer in the role of an Irish cop who runs a precinct where police brutality is part of the daily routine. And in *Maidstone* (1970), Mailer plays a controversial filmmaker who decides to become a presidential candidate. All three films are disasters—albeit in unique ways. *Wild 90* features some of the worst sound recording ever in a theatrically released feature—perhaps just as well, considering the absurd abundance of scatological words and pointless name-calling. *Beyond the Law* offers a funny surprise with writer George Plimpton's acting turn in a devastating parody of then-New York mayor John Lindsay, but Mailer's direction is hopelessly muddled and his own acting is worse. *Maidstone* is infamous for the bizarre moment when Rip Torn, playing Mailer's brother, inexplicably freaked out while in character and attacked the director/star with a hammer (Mailer replied by biting Torn's ear). Aside from that strange flare-up, however, the movie is enervated and offers no meaningful insight into the political process. Missing from this anthology, sadly, is Mailer's final attempt at filmmaking: 1987's *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, which—despite its deficiencies in screenwriting and acting—at least boasted professional-level standards that were painfully absent from these ramshackle efforts. Extras on this barebones Eclipse set are limited to liner notes. Except for Mailer addicts and devotees of outrageous underground cinema, this is not a necessary purchase. (P. Hall)



Portlandia: Season Two

★★★★

VSC, 2 discs, 220 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.95, Blu-ray: \$24.95

This offbeat Independent Film Channel sketch-comedy from singer-songwriter Carrie Brownstein (Sleater-Kinney) and Sat-



urday Night Live cast member Fred Armisen became IFC's biggest original hit, thanks largely to YouTube snippets and viral clips. The satire takes comedic shots at the Pacific Northwest culture of Portland, OR, where the population seems to consist largely of aging hippies, slackers, and New-Agers (all of whom are played by Brownstein and Armisen). The sophomore season boasts a great lineup of guest stars: Jeff Goldblum, Kristen Wiig, Tim Robbins, an animated tattoo of Eddie Vedder, and Edward James Olmos and James Callis (the latter pair at a table-read of a fake *Battlestar Galactica* script), among others. While most episodes feature unrelated short skits built around one longer piece running through the show, the finale draws the regular characters (including a return visit from Kyle MacLachlan as the mayor) into a single story, a humorous little epic called "Brunch Village." Compiling all 10 second season episodes from 2012, extras include episode commentaries, a director's cut of the finale, a behind-the-scenes featurette, a deleted scene, and a book excerpt from *Portlandia: A Guide for Visitors*. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Ramrod ★★★★★

Olive, 95 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.95, Blu-ray: \$29.95

This tough, lean, mercenary 1947 Western stars Joel McCrea as Dave Nash, a principled cowhand in the middle of a brutal range war, and Veronica Lake as Connie Dickason, the daughter of a small ranch owner who goes to war with the area's tyrannical cattle baron, Frank Ivey (Preston Foster), a man quick to resort to arson and bloodshed when intimidation no longer works. Based on a story by Luke Short, director Andre De Toth's *Ramrod* takes an unexpected approach to a familiar situation as the opening scenes play out in an atmosphere of anticipation and tension; no gunshots are fired but the threat of violence hangs over the town, giving it the feeling of an occupation. Nash is all principle and sense of justice, trying to follow the law while his opponents resort to violence and murder, as the conflict escalates into surprising brutality (in an era in which screen gunfights tended to be bloodless and clean, De Toth makes it a point to draw blood when there's fighting or shooting). Donald Crisp costars as a fatherly sheriff and Don DeFore is memorable as a likable scoundrel willing to fight dirty. One of the most underrated Westerns of its time, this is highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)



Three Wicked Melodramas from Gainsborough Pictures ★★

Eclipse, 3 discs, 330 min., not rated, DVD: \$44.95

While the rest of the film industry was cranking out patriotic paean to sacrifice and endurance during World War II, Gainsborough Pictures in Britain had a blockbuster