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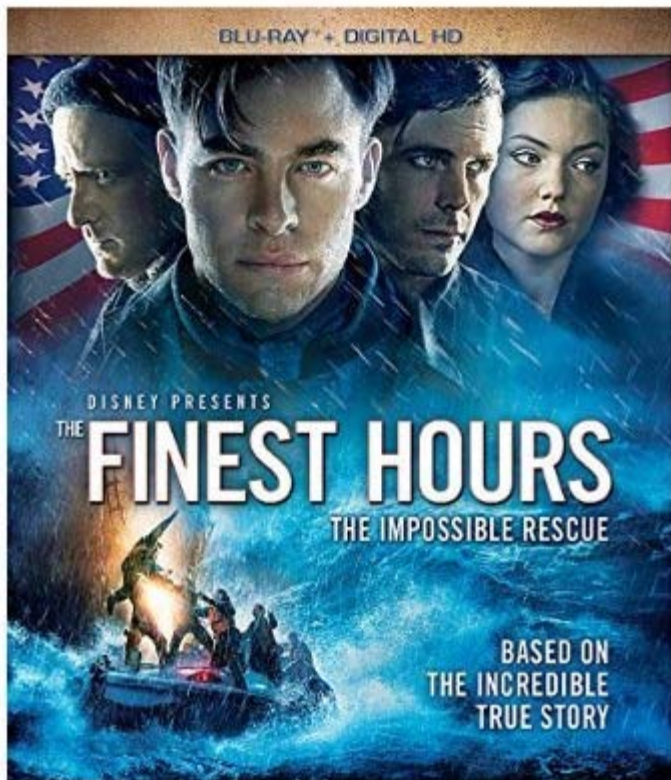


Michael Giltz, Contributor BookFilter creator

DVDs: Chris Pine's "Finest Hours" (So Far), Savvy Horror Flick "The Witch" And The Overlooked "Cop Rock"

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The summer has been a little slow in terms of DVD/BluRay releases. But this time we can watch Chris Pine become a star, Zac Efron continue to become an actor and the infamous/cult favorite TV show *Cop Rock* finally get its due.





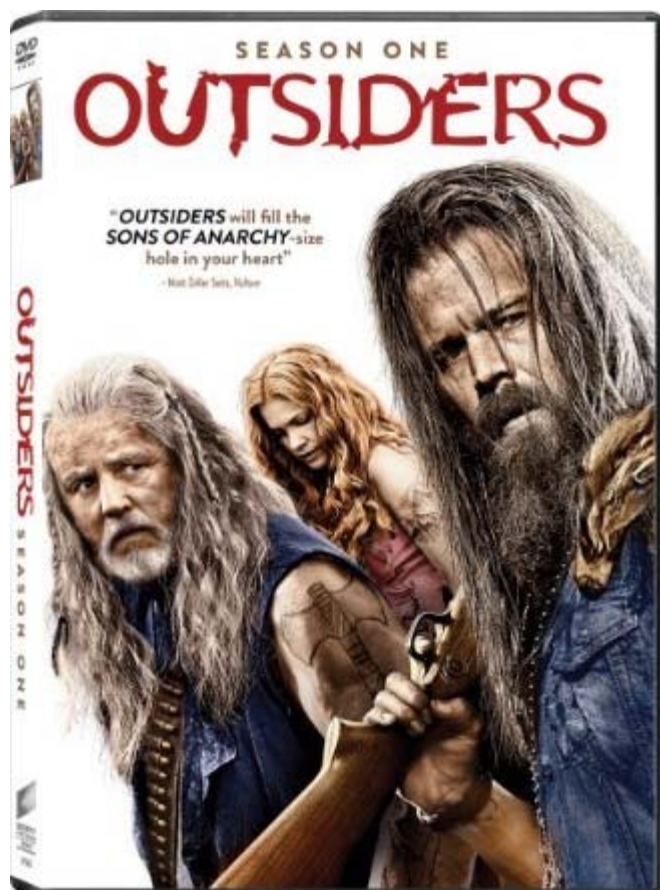
THE FINEST HOURS (\$39.99 BluRay combo; Walt Disney Studios)

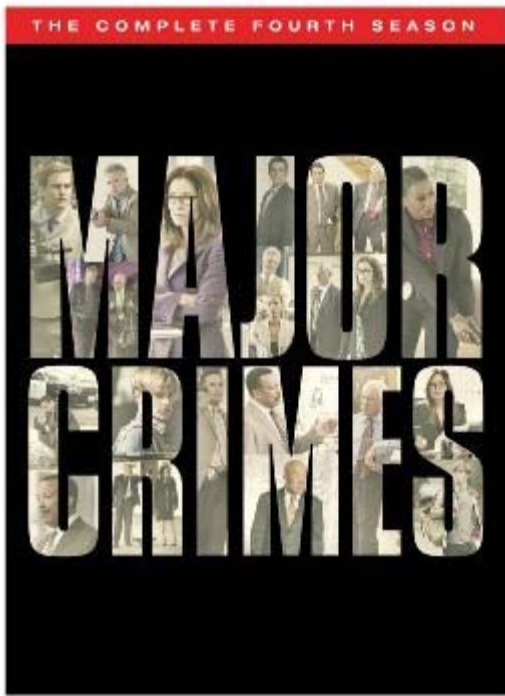
THE WITCH (\$24.99 BluRay combo; Lionsgate)

Actor Chris Pine became a movie star this summer. He did it at the Cannes Film Festival where the crime noir flick *Hell Or High Water* demonstrated Pine could carry a movie and have that certain magnetism movie stars offer in something other than *Star Trek*. Sure, he's made other films, even some hit films. He's even tried to launch a second or third franchise. But nothing quite captured the magic and charisma he's capable of until *Hell Or High Water*. Not that a down and dirty movie like that is going to become a blockbuster. But it's the sort of film stars like Harrison Ford made in between tent poles like *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones*. If you're wondering what I'm talking about, check out *The Finest Hours*. This square-jawed, old-fashioned Disney movie about a daring rescue at sea displays Pine in fine form. Oh, what the classic studio system could have done with this guy, tossing him into a new movie every month -- comedies, dramas, action, adventure, crime and so on -- until they figured out where he worked best. If you're in the right mood, you can appreciate the wholesome conviction Pine displays here. This might have been the film to set his career on fire in a new way. A few years from now, you might watch *The Finest Hours* and wonder why it didn't.

Similarly, *The Witch* looks like a spring-pad for all sorts of talent. It's a low budget horror film about colonial America, where a family living on the edge of a haunted wood is bedeviled by trouble. Writer-director Robert Eggers really delivers the chills here in a story that's more spooky than gory. The look of the film is fantastic, especially the cinematography of Jarin Blaschke. (When you want to check out a film because of the cinematographer, you know he's special. Blaschke is.) The actors are top-notch too, obviously led by Anya Taylor-Joy as the daughter who may or may not be in league with Satan. The tension here is wonderful, so it's a pity the film is a let-down at the finale. Our heroine is beset on all sides. Whatever happened -- whether she defeated the forces of evil, joined them or was in league with them all along -- I wanted her to be an active player. Instead, after an entire movie in which Taylor-Joy seemed smart and capable, she became

merely a pawn with no real choice in the climax. That doesn't keep this from being a very impressive effort from all concerned.





THE LAST PANTHERS (\$39.99 BluRay; Acorn Media)

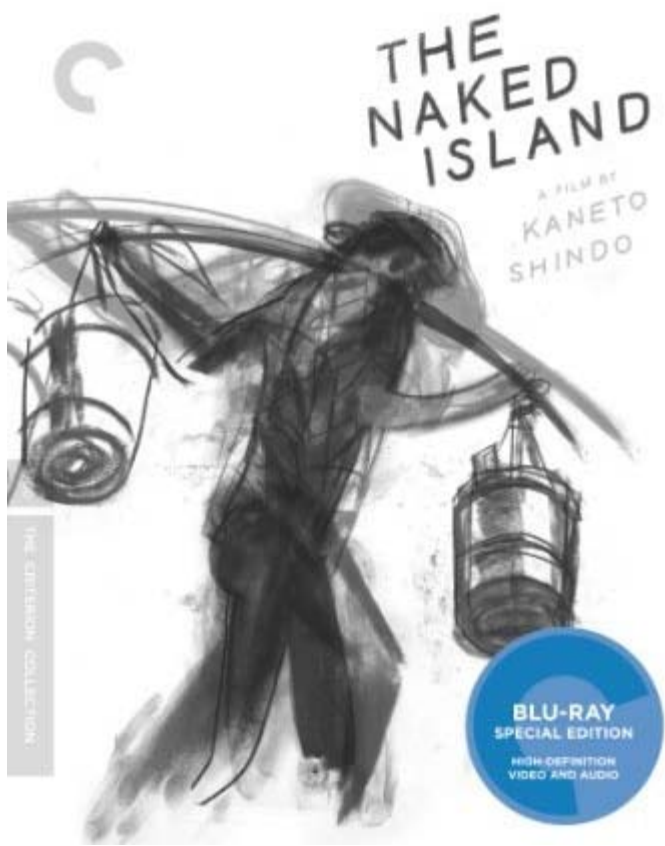
OUTSIDERS SEASON 1 (\$24.96 DVD; Sony Pictures Home Entertainment)

MAJOR CRIMES SEASON FOUR (\$44.98 DVD; Warner Home Video)

Three tight, smart TV shows for crime fans. *The Last Panthers* is a British miniseries with an embarrassment of talent on display. A continent-sprawling story of jewel thieves of a certain age, it stars John Hurt, Samantha Morton, Goran Bogdan and the brilliant Tahar Rahim. They are perhaps better than the material but it's fun if serious stuff and they have a ball.

For those jonesing for motorcycle-based crime shows (is there such a sub-genre) now that *Sons Of Anarchy* is gone, here comes *Outsiders*. It's not a biker gang, just Kentucky mountain folk who live extremely far off the grid and like it that way. Leave them alone. Seriously. But people won't and the black sheep who tried to break away is back and may be their best hope at preserving a brutal life apart. And there are bikes. And guns. And tattoos.

A little less convoluted is the procedural pleasures of *Major Crimes*. Sure there's a season-long arc but this spin-off/extension from *The Closer* has Mary McDonnell as the calm yang to the yin of Kyra Sedgwick's now long-departed head of the Major Crimes unit. McDonnell is wonderfully self-possessed throughout. While the show isn't a patch on *Battlestar Galactica* or, frankly, as enjoyably eccentric as *The Closer*, it's good to have McDonnell's intelligence on display.





THE NAKED ISLAND (\$39.95 BluRay; Criterion)

MANHUNTER COLLECTOR'S EDITION (\$34.93 BluRay; Shout! Factory)

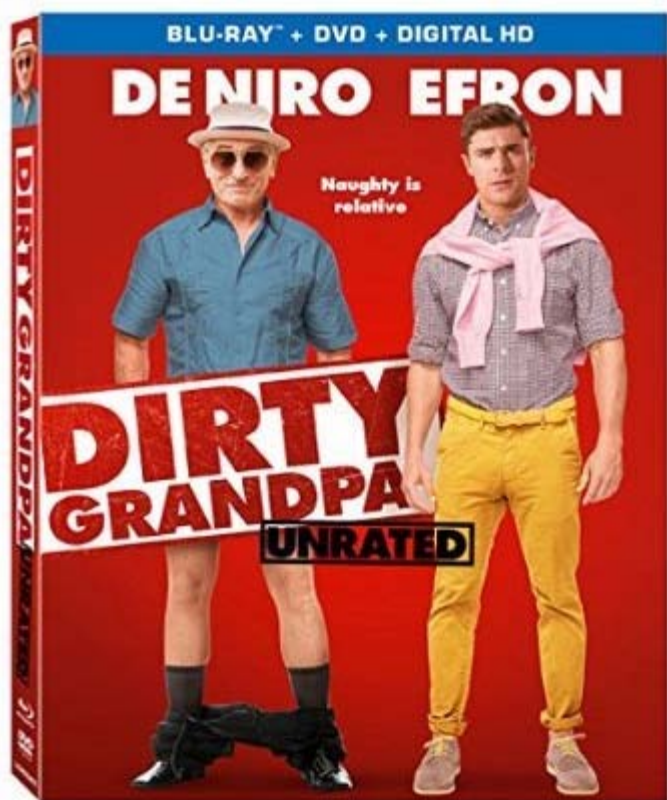
THE FILMS OF MAURICE PIALAT (\$49.98 BluRay; Cohen Media Group)

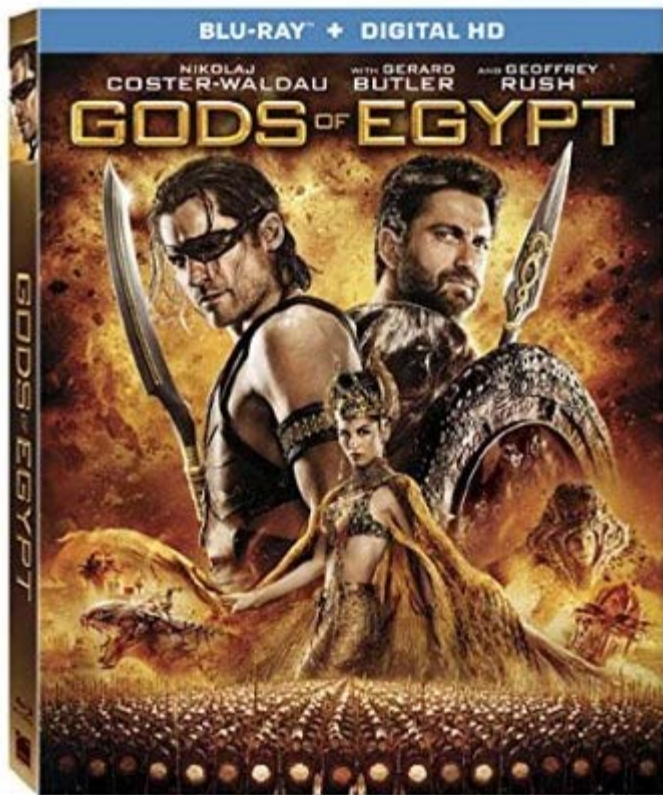
If Criterion releases it, I wanna see it. Usually it's a classic work I get to revisit. Sometimes it's a movie I've read about for years but never actually seen. When it's a movie I've never even heard of, I know I need to wake up and check it out pronto. That's the case with Japanese director Kaneto Shindô's 1960 film *The Naked Island*. It doesn't strike me as an out and out masterpiece, like so many films Criterion has introduced me to in the past. But it's a distinctive, memorable work I'm delighted to get under my belt. Nearly a silent movie, it tells the wordless story of a family surviving on a tiny island off of Japan. A husband, a wife and their two small boys labor day in and day out just to get by. The husband and wife row in darkness to a nearby island just to get buckets of water. They return, labor up a steep, crumbly path to their home, store some water in cisterns for drinking, cooking and cleaning. Then they return to the other island and do it all over again so they can water the modest crop the family grows in tenuous rows clinging to the side of the hills on their small patch of land. And then they do it again. And again. All of this is told in simple, almost documentary style (though the actors are trained, not locals). Criterion's supplements (from a director interview to an appreciation by actor Benecio Del Toro) illuminate the post-war context of the movie, how Shindô revolutionized the independent film industry and so on are great. But you can appreciate this elemental tale as pure cinema, a universal story related with disarming ease.

Manhunter might seem leagues away from *The Naked Island*. But both films thrive in the quiet moments. *Manhunter* is Michael Mann's adaptation of a Thomas Harris novel that preceded *The Silence Of The Lambs*. It's a terrific film and easily William Petersen's career highlight, here playing the FBI profiler who becomes disturbingly immersed in the minds of criminals. Petersen, Kim Greist, Joan Allen and Brian Cox (as the first Hannibal Lecktor) are all impressive. But the most memorable turn is Tom Noonan, an excellent stage talent

and film director in his own right. He plays a serial killer desperately trying to make a human connection. When the movie pivots to his point of view and makes us empathize and feel for this ultimately vicious character, it's a truly remarkable accomplishment. It's a very worthy companion piece to Jonathan Demme's Oscar winner and this new edition is bursting with extras and a director's cut.

And to switch gears one more time, director Muriel Nazzari does not fall trippingly off the tongue of even many film buffs who certainly know their Truffaut and Godard. Nazzari only made ten films, four of them starred Gerard Depardieu and three of his movies are contained here. You get a mother dying of cancer in *The Mouth Agape*, high school students facing a future of unemployment (or worse, miserable jobs) in *Graduate First* and Depardieu as the Nazzari-like *Loulou*, a wastrel who wins the girl but can't be bothered to change his petty criminal ways. The movies savor long takes, quietly observant scenes and an unsentimental worldview. A bonus feature delves into the cinematic sensibility of Nazzari.





DIRTY GRANDPA UNRATED (\$39.99 BluRay combo; Lionsgate)

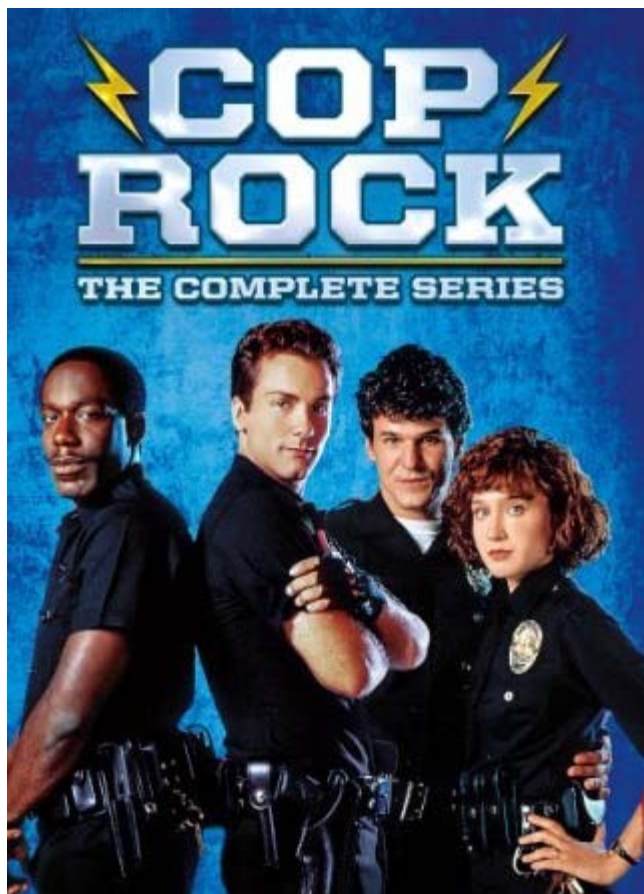
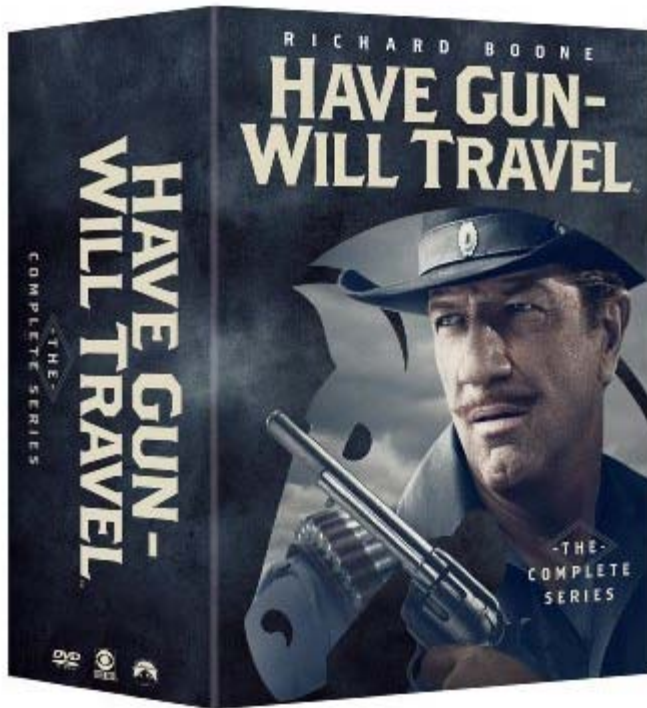
GODS OF EGYPT (\$35.99 BluRay combo; Lionsgate)

Two bad movies, one that's fitfully funny and should have been better and one that's just bad and should have been worse. I may be the only person who had high hopes for *Dirty Grandpa*. I was down for a stupid, dumb comedy that critics overlooked because they wanted "plot" or "character" or something high brow like a litany of dick jokes that were actually funny. Screw that! I just wanted to laugh! I was eager to laugh. *Dirty Grandpa* rarely allowed me to laugh, except in bewilderment and how dumb it was in not being able to achieve enjoyable dumbness. Zac Efron is an uptight lawyer about to be married to sexless, hatefully controlling fiancée. His dad is the equally bland and uptight Dermot Mulroney. Grandpa Robert De Niro used to be a big part of his life but has been out of the picture for years. When grandma dies, De Niro guilts Efron into a road trip from Atlanta to Daytona Beach, Florida. Ostensibly it's to play golf or something. But really *Dirty Grandpa* wants to loosen Efron up and keep him from marrying this awful girl and having a miserable life. Oh and Grandpa sure would like to sleep with a college girl. In about two minutes they bump into the girl Efron SHOULD be with (a college friend who shares his passion for photography) and her best friend (Aubrey Plaza) who is really really into old guys. That makes the film sound far more sensible than it is. De Niro and Plaza have a fun time going at each other. BUT since they meet five minutes in and she practically spreads her legs at hello, why the heck does De Niro talk as if getting her will be some difficult challenge. She is definitely open for business, grandpa! Efron is game, despite idiotic clothes that beat us over the head with how lame he is. The two leads have some good banter. But this flick could have been dumb in a much smarter way and a lot more fun.

On the other hand, I'd rather watch it again than *Gods Of Egypt* which may be campy fun for someone somewhere, but life's too short for that sort of thing. The special effects are weirdly ineffective, the casting absurd and the story witless without even the awareness of *Dirty Grandpa* which at least knows it's witless.

Sad.





LOU GRANT SEASON ONE (\$39.97 DVD; Shout! Factory)

THE UNTOUCHABLES COMPLETE SERIES (\$89.98 DVD; CBS Home Video/Paramount)

HAVE GUN WILL TRAVEL COMPLETE SERIES (\$84.98 DVD; CBS Home Video/Paramount)

COP ROCK: THE COMPLETE SERIES (\$29.93 DVD; Shout! Factory)

Should I say it again? Where is the complete *I'll Fly Away* and *The Paper Chase* and about a million other TV shows that deserve to be available in boxed sets with their entire run ready for perusal? Other than convoluted music rights and the such (the bane of shows like *WKRP* and *The Wonder Years* et al for many years), it remains a mystery why some shows are available and others have disappeared. Take *Lou Grant*. One of the more acclaimed dramas of the 1970s, it's an Emmy winner featuring one of the most beloved characters in history. It also co-stars Nancy Marchand who had a late career peak with *The Sopranos*. But it's taken ages for us to get even Season One out on DVD. The show wore its (bleeding) heart on its sleeve even to my 11 year old sensibility back in the day and hasn't aged particularly well. Yet I'm thrilled to actually know that rather than wondering if my memory is right. And anyone who cares enough to buy season one would surely want to whole show, so it's a shame we're not getting all five years at once.

It's no surprise to see *The Untouchables* repackaged in a nice neat boxed set. Like *Lou Grant*, it wanted to right wrongs. Unlike Lou, it thought the pen might be mightier than the sword but neither was a match for the tommy gun. One of the most violent shows of its era, *The Untouchables* was ground-breaking in its way and a career peak for Robert Stack.

I'll take *Have Gun, Will Travel* any day, however. It has the noble instincts of Lou Grant, the cynical awareness of how the world really works of *The Untouchables* and the good taste to let our gun for hire be a cultured man of leisure. There's no reason why do-gooders have to always toil at low-paying jobs like reporters or cops, is there? Only fanatics will watch all 225 episodes from its six year run. But dip in anywhere and you'll be pleasantly entertained.

As for *Cop Rock*, I would love to report it's an unappreciated gem. The truth is that it seemed a bewildering mess to me when it debuted in 1990 and it remains a (less) bewildering mess today. It's deeply ambitious, almost crazily so and can now be appreciated for the bold step forward it was from creator Steven Bochco. Even at the time, you knew it was a memorable experience for all involved. How could it not be? It's cheering to hear the cast celebrate their work today and rightly so. Essentially, this was *Hill Street Blues* with musical numbers. Crazily, they recorded the performances live on set in most cases, which explains why vocals (surely sweetened at some points) felt a little unpolished even to my untrained ears back then. They delivered five original tunes an episode, which is truly daunting when you think of a terrific show like *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* struggling to come up with two good numbers per episode today. What works? The drama, to a degree. This is clearly the bridge between *Hill Street Blues* (the most influential and important drama of all time) and Bochco's darker *NYPD Blue*. (It's also the bridge between *The Singing Detective* and *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*.) It was also a bold step forward in bringing musical theater into TV, a gambit paying dividends everywhere today from *Glee* to those live TV musicals. *Cop Rock* wouldn't seem nearly so disconcerting today. Of course, if it lasted more than eleven episodes they would have figured out how to incorporate the songs better so they would push the story forward rather than often repeat what we already knew. They'd also learn how to make the songs move. So often, the musical numbers were visually static since they were probably exhausted just getting the songs on their feet. And the hardest part would be maintaining the quality of the five songs delivered by Randy Newman for the pilot. If we got numbers like the terrific "Guilty" (a jury's verdict sung by former members of The Temptations) and Kathleen Wilhoite's "Sandman" included in that first episode, we'd still be talking about this show. To be clear, even the pilot isn't truly satisfying. But *TV Guide* calling it one of the worst tv shows of all time is patently absurd. It's smart, it's ambitious, moments of it are thrilling and when it falls flat on its face that's only because *Cop Rock* is trying something so very, very hard. Getting to see it again all these years later when its trail-blazing has borne fruit is a pleasure. Watching the nutty finale (where the cast and crew break down the fourth wall and join in a sing-along that dispenses with plot and character

altogether) is a joyous, what the hell moment.

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