



QUEUED UP BY BRYAN REESMAN

THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE (2017)

The set-up: Despite being the cowl with the scowl who triumphs over Gotham City's criminal element, narcissistic Batman (voiced by Will Arnett) is a lonely individual without love or family in his life. Now his world is turning upside down: new police commissioner Barbara Gordon (Rosario Dawson) wants to hamper his vigilante behavior, The Joker and other criminals have turned themselves in, and he has unwittingly adopted a young orphan Dick Grayson who idolizes him and his alter ego Bruce Wayne. But it's not all puppydogs and rainbows—the Joker is up to something

big that Batman will not be able to handle alone. Can the Dark Knight overcome his isolationist stance to work with others and save Gotham?

The breakdown: *The Lego Batman Movie* is a blast. A sharply satirical take on Christopher Nolan's Dark Knight trilogy and the superhero's long-running cinematic history, Chris McKay's animated adventure is crammed with one-witty liners, DC Comics in-jokes, and guest appearances by non-DC villains like Sauron, Voldemort, and the Daleks. It's also the most over-the-top, ridiculous, and family friendly Batman

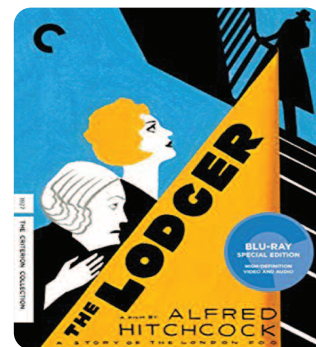


rendition ever, and one that could never be done convincingly in live action. That's why it soars in this format. The Blu-ray/DVD combo pack includes five additional LEGO short films, a look into the making of the movie, deleted scenes, and more.

THE LODGER (1927)

The set-up: At a time when a mysterious murderer is offing fair-haired women in London, a weird lodger shows up at a family's house. His furtive, late night outings, strange quirks, and gradual romancing of their daughter, who is the intended bride of a local cop, not only ruffles their feathers but hints that he may indeed be the killer on the loose.

The breakdown: While this silent black and white film was Alfred Hitchcock's third film, the Master Of Suspense reportedly considered it his first real movie. Some of his trademarks began to emerge here—dramatic camera angles, shadowy set-ups, an urgent sense of paranoia—although much of it plays like a film of its time. Hitchcock aficionados will enjoy this



early work featuring a compelling new score by Neil Brand. Criterion really stocks up on the bonus goods, including his next full-length film with the same star, Ivor Novello, entitled *Downhill* which also features a new score from Brand.

XX (2017)

The set-up: The first ever horror anthology of entirely female writer/directors (hard to believe it's taken this long) presents four eerie tales from Jovanka Vukovic ("The Box"), rocker St. Vincent (aka Annie Clark, "The Birthday Party"), Roxanne Benjamin ("Don't Fall"), and Karyn Kasuma ("Her Only Living Son"). It also features animated interstitial sequences from Sofia Carrillo featuring a living doll house.

The breakdown: Despite their varied themes, most of the *XX* stories tap into a strong emotional core. In "The Box,"

a young boy mysteriously stops eating when he peers inside a gift box held by a mysterious stranger on the subway. "The Birthday Party" for a young girl becomes complicated when her mother finds her father dead in his study then tries to hide the body. The visceral "Don't Fall" dishes out demonic vengeance on young campers who unwittingly invade a dominion of evil, while a mother grapples with the reality of her teenage progeny embracing his devilish roots in "Her Only Living Son". While these are all good stories, Vukovic's "The Box" is the most enigmatic and compelling particularly because it stirs your imagination and



avoids spelling things out. You will likely ponder and re-watch it, a feat that great horror achieves. The bonus materials take us behind the scenes of each entry in this creepy quadrilogy.

L'ASSASSINO (1961)

The set-up: After his mistress is murdered, an unscrupulous antiques dealer (*La Dolce Vita*'s Marcello Mastroianni) falls under the glare of the police spotlight. The investigating detective seems convinced of his guilt, despite the protestations of the potential culprit. But is he really innocent or has he convinced himself that he is?

The breakdown: Directed by Elio Petri, who helmed the off the wall caper film *Property Is No Longer A Theft*, *L'Assassino* (*The Assassin*) is a crime thriller that plays out more like a melodrama, with flashbacks to moments in the lovers' life that may or may not illuminate the murder mystery. The point of the film is not necessarily to ratchet up the tension but rather show the stern process by which the cops try to break down their prime suspect. The film is as



much about indicting the Italian criminal system as the dubious behavior of the beleaguered suspect, and it scrutinizes the moral fabric of many of its chief characters. Petri's work is further analyzed in the bonus features, which offer great insight into a career not as well known to American audiences.

LOGAN (2017)

The set-up: In the year 2029, mutants are essentially extinct. Now an aging, deteriorating alcoholic who drives a limo, Logan/Wolverine (Hugh Jackman) is squirreling away cash so he and the sickly Professor X (Patrick Stewart), who is hidden away south of the border, can escape to a safe place. But his already depressive life gets disrupted further when he gets caught up in a pursuit of a young girl with abilities by a devious military agency bent on using her for nefarious purposes. Now Logan

must make a choice between survivalism and rescuing a young mutant who needs his help.

The breakdown: Hugh Jackman's final turn as Wolverine is one of his most compelling. Co-writer/director James Mangold, who helmed *Wolverine's* previous installment, boosted the franchise and has delivered a gritty, unglamorous, existential superhero film that is highly intimate and personal amid the intense battle action. It is the most vicious we've seen Logan onscreen (and the closest to his comic book alter ego). The black and white



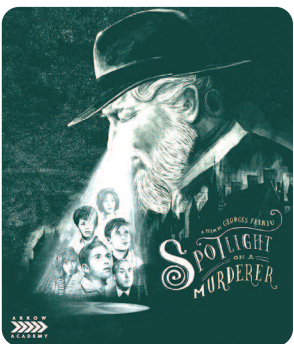
Noir version is also included, but the film works quite well in color. It is the best of the three-film series.

SPOTLIGHT ON A MURDERER (1960)

The set-up: A dying man plays a trick on his greedy heirs by locking himself in a hidden room in his expansive chateau to die. At the reading of the will they learn that without the body of their patriarch they must wait five years to claim their inheritance as well as maintain the grounds during that time. While they transform the chateau into a tourist attraction, bodies start to pile up as desperate family rivals seek to claim the future fortune for

themselves.

The breakdown: This lesser seen film from director George Franjus (*Eyes Without A Face*, *Judex*) serves up an unusual murder mystery that underplays some genre conventions while cozying up to others. Instead of exploiting a noir-like atmosphere, Franjus executes this like an intense family drama with a generous helping of homicide. It is quirky fun, and the bonus interviews from the actual filming

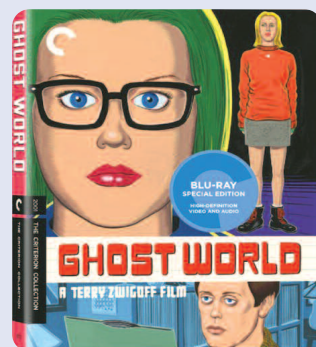


show how much fun the cast had while they made it.

GHOST WORLD (2001)

The set-up: After high school ends, a listless punk teen named Enid (Thora Birch) struggles to find a clear path in her life. Stuck taking a summer art class to graduate, she becomes alienated from her ineffectual father (Bob Balaban) and his girlfriend, starts to drift apart from her best friend (Scarlett Johansson), and befriends an older lonely man (Steve Buscemi) whom she initially plays a mean prank on. But as the lives of those around begin to progress and she becomes stagnant, Enid battles growing despair over her uncertain future.

The breakdown: Based on the indie comic *Eightball* by Daniel Clowes, Terry Zwigoff's Oscar-nominated film is both enlightening and irritating. On the one hand, the rich characters and their very real if modest quandaries are easy to relate to and go deeper than stock movie caricatures. On the flip side, Enid's self-jeopardizing attitude and purposeful detachment from her environment



becomes overbearing at times. The rebellious teen in you can relate, while the mature adult in you screams, "Snap out of it!" (*Ghost World* explores that gray area well.) The 41-minute bonus feature with Birch and co-stars Johansson and Ileana Douglas delves into the film's core, while the accompanying, art-heavy booklet and small-scale reproduction of an *Eightball* story pull us deeper into Clowes' source material.