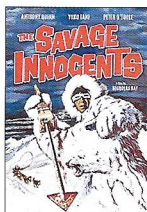


of robbers, led by its chief, Matt (Börje Ahlstedt), are thrilled to welcome the arrival of Matt's first child: a baby girl named Ronja, who is destined to lead the clan one day. Shortly after her birth, winged harpies cause the castle and mountain to split into two, creating a dangerous crevice between the halves. Ronja grows into a strong-willed girl much beloved by her father, but when she discovers that a same-age boy, Birk (Dan Håfström)—the son of Matt's sworn enemy—lives in the other half-castle, her allegiances begin to shift. When Matt captures Birk and threatens to toss him into a dungeon, Ronja forces a rescue that angers Matt and leads him to disown her. Birk and Ronja run off to the woods, where they deal with wildlife, forest trolls, harpies, and other dangers. Much of *Ronja* has an absurdist flair, especially the goofy antics of the robbers. The visual effects are spare but effective, and director Tage Danielsson keeps the action hyperkinetic, whether it's food being thrown across a room or trolls descending on a helpless child. Recommended. (T. Keogh)

The Savage Innocents

★★★1/2

Olive, 110 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99

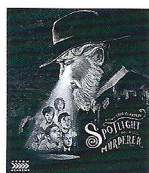


Anthony Quinn stars as Inuk, a lonely Inuit hunter in the icy deserts and snowy expanses of the Arctic North in a tale that spans years in Inuk's life as he takes a wife (Japanese actress Yoko Tani) and starts a family in the hostile world. *The Savage Innocents* ostensibly depicts the cultural rituals of the Inuit or Eskimo people (including the tradition of wives sleeping with single men as a show of hospitality) and the traditional ways of hunting and fishing and nomadic living on the white plains—complete with a narrator. It also dramatizes the collision of Inuit culture with the commerce and bigotry of white settlers as Inuk becomes obsessed with acquiring a modern rifle. When Inuk accidentally kills a missionary who condemns Inuit practices as sinful, he's hunted by lawmen sent to bring him to trial. Peter O'Toole has a small role as a trooper, but an American actor overdubs his voice. Filming on location in Northern Canada and Greenland with dramatic scenes recreated on soundstages, director Nicholas Ray effectively uses the vast empty backdrop to communicate the isolation of this life, but the presentation of native culture slips into cliché and Quinn's halting English is cartoonish. Although made with good intentions, *The Savage Innocents* presents a simplistic, patronizing, and often inaccurate portrait of Inuit life and culture. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)

Spotlight on a Murderer

★★★

Arrow, 92 min., in French w/ English subtitles, not rated, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.95



This 1961 film from French director Georges Franju is an Agatha Christie-like mystery set in an ancient castle where the surviving relatives of a dying uncle have gathered for the reading of his will. The would-be heirs find themselves stuck when the old man disappears (he steps into a secret room hidden by a one-way mirror and expires in an easy chair during the opening scene) and they must wait five years before he can be declared dead and they can inherit his wealth. As they turn the old castle into a tourist attraction with a mix of old-fashioned special effects and modern electronics to raise money for its upkeep, the heirs start dying off in "accidents" arranged by a mysterious killer seen only as a set of black-gloved hands. Jean-Louis Trintignant stars as the young hero who sends his giddy girlfriend (Dany Saval) away as the killings begin, becoming both amateur detective and suspect. Written by Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac, the story borrows from classics such as *And Then There Were None* and *The Cat and the Canary*, and is presented in an elegant style while also adding wit to the tale's Gothic conventions. Extras include an archival behind-the-scenes featurette, and a booklet. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Stormy Monday

★★★

Arrow, 93 min., R, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$29.95

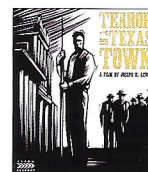


Director Mike Figgis's stylish 1988 British gangster drama stars Melanie Griffith as Kate, an American waitress working in a British pub who takes the occasional escort job for Cosmo (Tommy Lee Jones), an American developer with a shady past who uses thugs to intimidate a jazz club owner (played by Sting) into selling out. Sean Bean appears in his first leading role as Brendan, an Irish newcomer to the city who takes a job at the club, starts dating Kate, and throws a wrench into Cosmo's plans, which in turn marks Brendan as a target. Figgis sets the film in the Northeast England industrial city of Newcastle (his hometown), where cinematographer Roger Deakins achieves a romantic look, while the jazz score composed by Figgis adds to the dreamy quality. The plot is secondary to the atmosphere, characters, and style, all of which created a different kind of British gangster drama. Bowing on high-def in a Blu-ray/DVD Combo set, extras include a director audio commentary, a behind-the-scenes featurette, and a booklet. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)

Terror in a Texas Town

★★★1/2

Arrow, 80 min., not rated, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.95

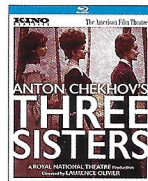


Terror in a Texas Town (1958) ranks among the oddest Westerns made during the classic Hollywood era. Sterling Hayden stars as George Hansen, a Swedish whaler who comes to the American West (still carrying his trusty harpoon) to join his homesteader father, only to discover that the latter was murdered by a psychotic young gunman (Nedrick Young) who is employed by an oil baron (Sebastian Cabot). Hansen bonds with his Mexican-American neighbors—fellow outsiders who have been intimidated into silence about the murder—and the climactic showdown puts a unique twist on the classic gunfight on a dusty frontier street, pitting a one-handed gunslinger against Hansen's harpoon (a scene teased in the film's prologue). Although not an overtly political film, it does set outsiders against the corrupt and powerful in a sly way that challenges the '50s Communist blacklist: screenwriter Ben L. Perry was actually a front for blacklisted screenwriter Dalton Trumbo and actor/screenwriter Young had also been blacklisted (both, incidentally, won Oscars while writing under fronts). This was the final feature film for cult director Joseph H. Lewis, who—working on a budget just barely above B-movie—gives it a noir-ish flavor and dynamic style, with long takes and ominous shots of objects looming in the extreme foreground. A minor but interesting cult Western, this newly restored film is accompanied by extras including an introduction and select scene commentary by Western movie historian Peter Stanfield. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)

Three Sisters

★★★

Kino Lorber, 162 min., PG, Blu-ray: \$29.95



An entry from the revered American Film Theatre collection, Laurence Olivier's 1970 production of Anton Chekhov's classic play features sparkling characterization and quiet insights into the timeless qualities of the human spirit. The eponymous trio of siblings—Olga (Jeanne Watts), Masha (Joan Plowright), and Irina (Louise Purnell)—are the grown children of a deceased army post commander. Living in a provincial setting, they dream of returning to their idyllic home in Moscow. The sisters drift aimlessly through the days, each yearning to begin life afresh: Olga, an old schoolmistress, longs for a family of her own; Masha, dissatisfied in her marriage to a meek schoolteacher (Kenneth MacKintosh), finds a passionate partner in the form of a married colonel (Alan Bates); and Irina, who wants to be seen as a mature adult with desires of her own, finds herself caught in the middle