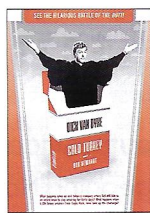


## Cold Turkey ★★★1/2

Olive, 102 min., PG-13, DVD: \$14.99, Blu-ray: \$29.99

Norman Lear's sharp-toothed 1971 comedy broadside swipe at Nixon-era American values (originally released with a PG rating, and upgraded to PG-13) is set in a recession-hit Iowa town called Eagle Rock, whose mayor (Vincent Gardenia) enlists a charismatic local priest (Dick Van Dyke) to spearhead a revitalization that will be made possible if the town wins a self-promoting contest by a cigarette giant to award millions to any community that can quit smoking for a month. The great cast—best known for their TV work—includes Bob Newhart, Tom Poston, Jean Stapleton, Barnard Hughes, Paul Benedict, and Judith Lowery, who all go through the agonies of nicotine withdrawal and gnawing greed (meanwhile, the classic radio-comedy team of Bob Elliott and Ray Goulding play multiple roles as the entire electronic media covering the escalating circus). Certain elements are badly dated—zingers about Walter Cronkite, hippies, and the Maidenform Bra ad campaign—but Randy Newman's musical score is wonderful, and the film succeeds as a fine example of Watergate-era satire, created before Lear's *All in the Family* made him a household name. Highly recommended. (C. Cassidy)



## The Complete Sartana

★★★★

Arrow, 5 discs, 466 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$99.99

There was a lot more to the spaghetti Western than just Sergio Leone and Clint Eastwood, as demonstrated by this fine compilation of the five "official" movies featuring one of the Man With No Name's many imitators: a mysterious black-clothed gunslinger called Sartana (other movies using the name were unauthorized knock-offs). Sartana is played in all but one of the films—released between 1968-70—by Gianni Garko (George Hilton took the role in the third film, 1970's *Sartana's Here...Trade Your Pistol for a Coffin*), and all but the first were directed by Giuliano Carnimeo under the name Anthony Ascott (1968's *If You Meet Sartana...Pray for Your Death* was helmed by Gianfranco Parolini, credited as Frank Kramer). Over the course of the series, Sartana evolves from a slick gunman to an avenging angel of sorts (in 1969's *I Am Sartana, Your Angel of Death*), and his weapons become increasingly exotic: he begins with a trick derringer, but in the final entry, *Light the Fuse...Sartana Is Coming* (1970), he not only plays an organ that turns into a machine gun, but is accompanied by a little robot (looking a bit like a mini-R2-D2) that not only fires bullets but also sets off explosions. Throughout the series, Sartana

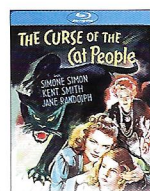


confronts corrupt officials and townspeople (in the first film Klaus Kinski plays a deadly gang leader) and leaves piles of corpses in his wake. But while acting on the side of good he also has mercenary motives, making him an intriguingly enigmatic figure. The *Sartana* movies might not be Leone-quality classics, but this set will certainly be appreciated by fans of spaghetti Westerns. Extras include audio commentaries, cast and crew interviews, a video essay by critic Jonathan Bygraves, and photo galleries. Recommended. (F. Swietek)

## The Curse of the Cat People ★★★

Shout! Factory, 70 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$29.99

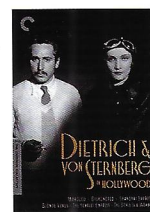
The success of the original 1942 *Cat People*—a shadowy psychological horror film simmering with sexual repression—prompted RKO to request a sequel from producer Val Lewton. His solution was surprising and inventive: a psychological drama with a child's perspective and a ghost story twist, centered on Amy (Ann Carter), the dreamy young daughter of the hero (Kent Smith) of the original film. Schoolgirl Amy is constantly lost in her imagination, so much distracted by butterflies and stories of magic that she is shunned by other children. Left alone, she befriends the aged widow of the "haunted" manor in the neighborhood and conjures up a magical friend: the ghost of Irena (Simone Simon, from the first film), who is presented as a benevolent spirit looking after a dreamy girl. More modern fairy tale than horror film, *The Curse of the Cat People* was a box-office flop, perhaps because audiences expected more psychological horror rather than delicate fantasy, but this is a tender tale of childhood innocence with poetic images created on a B-movie budget by first-time feature filmmakers Gunther von Fritsch and Robert Wise. Extras include separate audio commentaries by film historians Steve Haberman and Greg Mank, the featurette "Lewton's Muse: The Dark Eyes of Simone Simon," an audio interview with actress Carter, and a stills gallery. Recommended. (S. Axmaker)



## Dietrich & Von Sternberg in Hollywood ★★★

Criterion, 6 discs, 542 min., not rated, DVD or Blu-ray: \$124.99

When Josef von Sternberg returned to America after directing *The Blue Angel* (1930) in Germany, he brought with him a new discovery: Marlene Dietrich, who he featured in six lavish, lush productions that brought Hollywood art and craft to stories of sexuality and power with exotic overtones and fetishistic undercurrents. Dietrich made her American debut as a sultry cabaret singer opposite Gary Cooper in *Morocco* (1930), a French For-



eign Legion melodrama that dressed Dietrich in a man's tuxedo and earned Oscar nominations for both Dietrich and director von Sternberg. And she played a Mata Hari-like spy in *Dishonored* (1931), sent to seduce Russian officer Victor McLaglen, and starred as a nightclub entertainer in *Blonde Venus* (1932) who battles her jealous husband (Herbert Marshall) for custody of their child. Dietrich and von Sternberg's greatest collaborations are arguably *Shanghai Express* (1932), starring Dietrich as a high-class prostitute on a train carrying civilian evacuees from war-torn Peking, and *The Scarlet Empress* (1934), with Dietrich as Russia's Catherine the Great. Less an historical epic than a self-aware creation of expressionist decadence, *The Scarlet Empress* was a commercial flop, as was the pair's last collaboration *The Devil Is a Woman* (1935), a beautiful but narratively austere melodrama. Taken together, these films combine ornate set design, delicate lighting, and a battery of hanging nets, smoke, and cross-hatched slats to create a dense visual canvas while addressing issues of sexuality and power through both imagery and melodramatic narratives. Von Sternberg was able to conjure up a unique kind of glamour that has never been replicated by any other director. All six films are newly remastered and are accompanied by a wide array of extras, including new and archival documentaries and featurettes on Dietrich and von Sternberg, new and archival interviews with film historians and experts, a video essay by critics Cristina Álvarez López and Adrian Martin, a Lux Radio Theatre adaptation of *Morocco* featuring Dietrich and Clark Gable, the song "If It Isn't Pain" (removed by censors from *The Devil Is a Woman*), and an 80-page book with essays. Highly recommended. Editor's Choice. (S. Axmaker)

## El Sur ★★★1/2

Criterion, 94 min., in Spanish w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99

Ten years after releasing his lovely and tender 1973 debut *The Spirit of the Beehive*, director Victor Erice made his second feature, based on a novella by Adelaida García Morales that was published in 1985. Set in 1957 Spain, 1983's *El Sur* is narrated by the adult Estrella, who recalls her father Agustín (Omero Antonutti), a doctor with special "powers" that he channels—like a medium or a water diviner—using a pendulum on a chain to find water under the earth. Eight-year-old Estrella (Sonsoles Aranguren) idolizes her father, a loving enigma estranged from his own parents (his father supported the Fascists), who spends much of his time locked away in the attic performing experiments. But Agustín changes after seeing an actress named Irene Ríos (Aurore Clément)—a mystery woman

