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Journey into Blu-ray

The 1943 RKO Radio Pictures thriller that Orson Welles did and did not direct, **Journey into Fear**, has been released by Warner Bros. as a *Warner WB Archive Collection* Blu-ray (UPC#840418310823, \$22) after having never appeared on DVD (we reviewed an LD in Nov 89). The film is stunningly good cinema, and after its long absence from home video, many motion picture fans are going to be outright surprised in a where-have-you-been-all-my-life? manner at how transfixing the squared, full screen black-and-white film is. Running a brief 68 minutes, once you see it you want to keep watching it over and over all day long. Show it in tandem with **The Third Man** (Dec 08) and you can persuade even the most jaded young person that black-and-white films are equal in validity, beauty and bedazzlement to color films, and are perhaps spiritually superior.

Welles's Mercury Theatre produced the film for RKO and Welles has a supporting role, but like Howard Hawks producing **The Thing from Another World** and Steven Spielberg producing **Poltergeist**, there has forever been a wink-wink attitude that Welles was the film's primary creative force. Yes, it is the director who authors a film, but not all of the time and definitely not in the same way all of the time. Norman Foster, who would go on to make another butchered RKO classic, **Rachel and the Stranger** (Oct 20), along with lots of enjoyable 'B' movies, is the film's official director, and for that matter, Joseph Cotten, who stars, is credited solely as the film's screenwriter. Based upon a novel by Eric Ambler, Cotten is a representative for an American arms manufacturer doing business in Turkey before the war, who becomes an assassination target by Nazi agents wanting to delay the deal. Much of the drama is set on a creaky steamer that the Turkish authorities have hustled Cotten's character onto in hopes of ducking the assassins for the first leg of his journey home. The steamer has a number of eccentric passengers, and the assassins pick up his trail soon enough.

Mercury was one of those fantastic creative organizations that was positively bubbling over with talent, and clearly, everyone was giving the film their all. The production designs, credited to Albert S. D'Agostino and Mark-Lee Kirk, are absolutely incredible and are utilized up and down as well as left and right and back and forth and all around. The cinematography, credited to Karl Strauss, is fantastic, capturing the depth and texture of the sets in every shot, and lit to squeeze every last piece of atmosphere and mood out of them. The Blu-ray's image is outstanding. A substantial improvement over the LD, not only is it sharp and finely detailed, but it is free of any hint of wear or damage. The audio design, by James G. Stewart by Richard Van Hessen, may not have the extravagance that Welles attended to his best films, but it is still a solid factor in the entertainment, with the sounds of the boat and the cheap walls of the cabins proffering all sorts of stray noises. Again, the monophonic audio on the LD pales in comparison to the much cleaner and stronger audio on the BD. And then there is the cast, which, in addition to Cotten—the nebbish hero giving the story its momentum—and Welles—great fun, as usual, as a Turkish official—features Dolores Del Rio, Ruth Warwick (playing the wife of Cotten's character, left clueless at a Turkish Hotel), the marvelous Agnes Moorehead, the even more marvelous Everett Sloane, Hans Conried, Jack Moss, Frank Readick, Jack Durant and several others, all delivering exquisitely idiosyncratic performances.

Yes, the film is more superficial than **The Third Man**, but it is still a spellbinding experience and has a sufficiently logical, coherent, witty and effectively paced narrative to provide visceral satisfaction. From there, however, one need only settle back and watch the contrast levels between the completely dark portions of the screen, the gradations of shadows, and the brightly lit portions to realize that secondary to its tale of intrigue and suppressed sexual adventure (we'll go out on a limb here and say that, like *Ulysses in Nighttown* and *Eyes Wide Shut*, the film is actually about slipping away and then coming back to the wife), **Journey into Fear** demonstrates the incredible, magical power that movies have to create vivid, imaginary worlds with an almost tactile presence, and then to draw viewers through those worlds, be it in terror or excitement or aesthetic pleasure (or all three at once), with the aid of movie star avatars. Every artist who worked on the film contributed to its enduring power and beauty, and Welles, as the head of Mercury if nothing else, was the man responsible for its creation.

There are optional English subtitles. The disc also comes with a real delightful treat, the first three, wonderful *Mercury Theatre* anthology radio programs originally broadcast during three sequential weeks in July of 1938 (most with Bernard Herrmann background music) and each running 59 minutes: A lovely, genuinely creepy

rendition of *Dracula* with Welles as the title character and one of the doctors, along with Moorhead, George Coulouris, and Ray Collins; the superbly crafted *Treasure Island*, which is even better than sitting at someone's knee and having the story read aloud (we were in tears just listening to Welles's introduction of how Robert Lewis Stevenson came to write the story—Welles plays the adult narrator and Long John Silver, and the aural staging of the story is outstanding, with Moorehead, Coulouris, Collins and others); and *A Tale of Two Cities*, which is more convoluted after the wonderful clarity of *Treasure Island*. Welles plays both parts, with Collins, Erskine Sanders and others, and you wait patiently the entire hour to hear his reading of the work's most famous quotation—although from that perspective, it's worth the wait.

Project A+

Made at the height of their agility, Jackie Chan and Sammo Hung star in the 1983 Golden Harvest production, **Project A**, part of the Celestial Films 88 Films four-platter 4K Blu-ray release, **The Project A Collection** (UPC#760137143543, \$100). Set in Hong Kong during the late Victorian era, Chan plays a cop assigned to take down pirates who inhabit a nearby island. Hung is a local thief who collaborates because, if the pirates are out of the way, it will mean more business for him. Biao Yuen and Man-Ying Wing are also featured. The film is comprised of almost constant action, much of it intended to be comical, but some of it is a bit more serious to sustain the stakes for the heroes. Some of the gags intentionally call to mind the work of Buster Keaton and Harold Lloyd (Chan is apparently unaware, however, of how similar his work is to that of Douglas Fairbanks). The chases and fights are wildly inventive and death-defying, whether it is simply ducking a sword as it is swung in a fight or dropping sixty feet from a clock tower. And since the action is so intricate and elaborate, the 4K presentation is especially valuable in its ability to delineate every split-second detail.

The film and its sequel, *Project A II*, are presented on two standard Blu-ray platters and two 4K platters. The films look terrific on the standard BDs, but they are even better on the 4K discs. The crazier a scene gets, the sharper the 4K presentation looks in comparison to the standard BD, and the more exhilarating it is to watch the actors risk life and limb for your entertainment. Both films are letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. On both, the colors are fantastic. They look incredibly fresh and solid. Once in a while the cinematography is a touch out of focus (because of the widescreen lenses, there are times when part of a shot is in focus and part is not), but most of the time the image is sharp, and sharper still in 4K. Both monophonic films are in Cantonese with optional English subtitles, and both have other language options. On both features, both the 4K platter and the standard BD platter have commentaries and three trailers each. The standard platters have additional supplements.

Two versions of the original **Project A** are included on the platters, the standard Hong Kong release, which runs 106 minutes, and an alternate release that runs 115 minutes. Since pacing is an intricate part of the film's pleasures, the Hong Kong version is preferable for newcomers, but once you are familiar with the film, then the expansion afforded by the longer version, adding more character beats and other details, is most welcome and enhances the entertainment. On both versions of the film, there is a Dolby Atmos track that expands the music beautifully while keeping the dialog and sound effects strong and direct. That said, even the original mono track has an impressive clarity and smoothness. There is also an English language track in mono. The standard platter features a 31 minutes of interviews with Chan's double, Mars Cheung, about his career and making the film and the sequel; a good 22-minute interview with fighting expert Hoisan Lee about performing martial arts on the screen (he gives a demonstration of Wing Chun that can be followed, if you're up to it) and working with Chan (and how Cheung doesn't mind playing villains although in real life he isn't a bad person); an 18-minute interview with Yuen about his entire career and his collaborations with Hung (primarily) and Chan; a 14-minute interview with co-star Dick Wei about his career playing mostly villains; a 17-minute interview with composer Michael Lai, deconstructing the music in the **Project A** films and other Chan movies; a cute 16-minute visit with a Chan memorabilia collector and a perusal of his **Project A**-related items; a good 15-minute interview with co-screenwriter Edward Tang about conceptualizing several of Chan's films; 36 minutes of behind-the-scenes footage and silent bloopers accompanied by the film's score; and a different set of bloopers in the 2-minute Japanese closing credit sequence than appeared on the Chinese releases. One of the trailers, incidentally, includes shots of Chan speaking to the camera to wish everyone a happy New Year.

Project A (Continued)

Hong Kong film expert Frank Djeng and F.J. DeSanto supply an excellent commentary track on the first film, enthusiastically explaining why, in their opinion, the film is not just one of the greatest Hong Kong films, but one of the greatest movies ever made. Their reasoning is that in addition to the film's basic entertainment, coherent narrative, and meticulously staged action, it was a watershed feature for many reasons. "This was a transitional film for Jackie, from the period martial arts films to the modern action films, where emphasis on the action kind of switched gradually from kung fu to modern fights and stunts." Although barely out of their twenties, Chan and Hung had been working together for at least a couple of decades, and structurally the film gave them a unique opportunity to display their by now instinctual coordination through the collaboration of their characters. While Chan was officially directing, Hung was virtually a co-director, and the action scenes benefited as well from the way they could complete each other's sentences, as it were. While they would still appear in other movies together, the film's success sort of pushed them into going their separate ways. It was also the first time Chan played a fully adult character not spoiled by privilege. He went from being, "A fun kid to leading man in this movie."

Djeng then goes back through the film a second time by himself to add more details about the production, and to explain the cultural references and language idioms, further identify the locations and dig even deeper into the film's historical references. He also itemizes the scenes that were added to the longer version (including a view of Hung's rear that didn't make it into the standard cut).

Chan's character is carried over to the 1987 sequel, *Project A II*, which does not have Hung and is a different movie from the first, although that actually improves their appeal significantly as a double bill. Unlike the first film, it is not wall-to-wall action, but it still has plenty of fights and chases, and compensates with a much stronger and more involving plot. Still set in Victorian Hong Kong, Chan's police officer character is put in charge of an area of town that has been corrupted by gangsters. Revolutionaries who hope to overthrow the government of Mainland China are also soliciting contributions there, and counter agents want to break up their group. Rather innocently, Chan's character lands in the middle of the conflicts between the gangsters, the corrupt cops, and the two sets of foreign agents, while a group of pirates annoyed at what he did to them in the previous film are also looking to take their revenge. The film feels meatier than the first movie, while still providing a plethora of amazing moments, witty moves and exhilarating, brilliantly staged sequences. At one point, during a fight in a marketplace, Chan's character grabs a handful of peppers and stuffs them in his mouth so he can wipe the juice on the eyes of his opponents. This is not Hollywood, and while the juice on the hands is undoubtedly faked, the peppers in the mouth are real. Hung was not involved with the production at all, which co-stars Maggie Cheung, Rosamund Kwan, Carina Lau and David Lam.

Unlike the first film, some of the music remains centered and bland on the Dolby Atmos track, although other sequences do have a dimensionality on par with the earlier show. Again, the original mono track is also very smooth and clear.

There are again two versions of the film, although this time the preferred version is the original *Hong Kong Cut*, which runs 107 minutes, while the shorter *Export Cut* runs just 98 minutes. Since the narrative is a more important component of the film's entertainment, the scenes that appear in the longer version add to an appreciation of both the characters and the stakes at hand. The supplements on the standard BD include a very interesting 25-minute interview with stuntman Anthony Carpio about the entire process of becoming a member of Chan's stuntman team and what being a member entailed (he says that like himself, Chan would never tell his mother about his injuries); a 20-minute interview with co-star Wai-man Chan (the film's villain, no relation to Jackie) talking about training as a fighter in films ("You have to have a good memory and stamina.") and about his memories of Bruce Lee; a really great 13-minute featurette shot in English about the stuntmen working on the set that includes all sorts of fresh outtakes; a 3-minute clip of Jackie Chan recording the film's closing song; a 4-minute alternate ending used in the film's Japanese release (a different set of outtakes over the final credits); and a brief collection of promotional photos in still frame.

Djeng and DeSanto supply another rewarding commentary track. While they also claim that this is the best Chan movie ever, after saying the same thing about the previous movie, it is an acceptable assessment, because the two films complement one another so well that, despite having been made several years apart, they function perfectly as a complete and highly satisfying entertainment. Once again, the pair go over the careers and skills of the players, dissect the narrative, and analyze the stunt sequences, and they also contrast the film with its predecessor, pointing out the deeper narrative (which has pertinent links to *Once upon a Time in China*), larger budget and greater confidence in what could be accomplished. "This is great French farce comedy here. Just the intricacies of how these guys all dance around each other in this is great. Everything is elevated here. Everything is like something he's tried to do in a previous movie—and, by the way, has done well in a previous movie—but he sort of has a realization here, 'I can do it better. I can do it in a way that's bigger and grander,' and that's what this movie represents."

The yellow saw of Texas is the only one for thee

Arriving in a very cute and quite hefty plastic yellow chainsaw, the three-platter 4K Blu-ray release from MPI Media Group and Dark Sky Selects, **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 50th Anniversary** (UPC#03036839592, \$300), is also accompanied by a VHS video tape. The chainsaw, a spot-on replication of the one from the movie, comes in a box, and you have to insert the saw part into a hole in front of the main unit after you take everything out, but it is nice and secure once it is inserted. Then you split the main unit open (again, it fastens securely when you re-close it), and inside is the jacket for the 4K presentation of the film, which also holds a standard Blu-ray presentation and a Blu-ray platter containing bonus features. The jacket for the VHS tape is also lodged inside, but given that we have never owned a video tape player and have no intention of obtaining one now, we are not capable of assessing its presentation quality.

The VHS tape is primarily a keepsake tribute to the roots of the film's true popularity, burgeoning on home video a couple of decades after the 1974 feature first unnerved theatergoers. It serves as a reminder that the film has always been, intentionally, a slapdash affair, much like the barbecue at the gas station where the heroes make their fateful stop. The film is conceptually grungy, and so the impact of its horrors was unharmed by low quality playback. In some ways, the less you could make out, the scarier the film became. That said, the 4K presentation is outstanding, and is definitely the scariest of all. When Gunnar Hansen's character lunges into the bright light with his chainsaw, the sharpness of the image adds significantly to the impact of the fright. You scream louder and jump higher. But even during the murkier moments, the 4K image conveys the sense of a fresh film print—grainy, but smooth and ill colored, but accurately ill colored. It is hard to imagine how the film could look any better than it does, and its perfection helps to sustain a viewer's concentration.

And speaking of screams, the 4K's Dolby Atmos sound is just outstanding, as well as being a substantial improvement over the primitive stereo enhancements that were done on the Pioneer DVD we reviewed in Jun 99. The cast members, particularly the actresses, scream a lot. They scream so much that it stops raising your own adrenaline and becomes irritating instead—irritating, that is, in the same way that the grainy, dour-colored images and over-indulgent set dressings are irritating. You'd think, in fact, that if Marilyn Burns's character would just shut up, the none-too-bright villains would have no idea where she has run off to. With the fresh, crisp and meticulously separated sound mix—it is so detailed that when a character runs around one side of a car, you hear every footstep in a proper progression from back right to front center—the screams are more piercing and more persuasive. And if your neighbors don't think you are murdering somebody, they will definitely believe that you are cutting down trees. The chainsaw noises are epic. It is also worth mentioning that the musical score, composed by Wayne Bell and director Toby Hooper, has been given an impressive dimensionality as well, which enhances not only its impact, but the understanding that there has actually been quite a bit of intelligence and talent channeled into the mayhem.

Hooper's 83-minute feature represented a shift in how horror was presented on film, a shift that first appeared with Alfred Hitchcock in *Psycho* but took another decade to really sink in. Although murder in normal movies had usually been about why the act was committed, from the Greeks to William Shakespeare, and on to the Grand Guignol, there had been a celebration of the act itself. With the true mass audiences that accompanied motion picture entertainment, however, mass tastes suppressed dwelling upon what became known as, 'the gory details.' Films like the 1963 *Blood Feast* and the 1968 *Night of the Living Dead* were relegated to the exploitation market and weren't generally known until home video enabled their dissemination. While it straddled the exploitation market, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* kicked-started an obsession with the act of murder itself—nobody cares about why it is happening—that penetrated the general populace even before home video whipped the film's popularity to an even greater level. He also melded it with the Fifties marketing obsession that he had come of age enjoying—the placement of teenagers in mortal danger from monsters. By then, standards had lowered, permissiveness had flourished, and what Hooper accomplished—pushing the terror so far (without significant splatter) that it comfortably dips into a perverse humor—would expand to the many horror and slasher films we know and love today. Nevertheless, by focusing on what made viewers scream, no one else ever quite duplicated the balance between the film's horror moments and the unnerving idea that the murders were being perpetrated by bizarre but essentially regular people.

The 4K platter has optional English subtitles and four commentary tracks. One track, with Hooper, Hansen and cinematographer Daniel Pearl, appeared on the Pioneer DVD. Another track features Hooper with *Texas Chainsaw* historian David Gregory, who prompts Hooper to talk about various aspects of the production and also provide insights about the impact the film has had over the subsequent decades. On the one hand, there are details that he can't remember (did Burns really allow her finger to be pierced because the blood tube wasn't working and they were running out of time to get the scene?), but on the other hand, he provides many interesting details about the shoot and how things were organized and executed, and he also talks philosophically about the manner in which monsters in movies were often depicted as 'creatures,' while the monsters here are, definitively, men.

On another track, Burns, co-stars Allen Danziger and Paul Partain, and production designer Robert Burns (no relation) have a pleasant talk, sharing their memories about the production from their perspective, and how they have seen the film enter into the general public consciousness. "I think after this movie less hitchhikers were picked up. I never checked into it but I would betcha it put the kibosh on picking up strangers."

A fourth commentary track features Pearl, editor J. Larry Carroll (you gotta love his montage of successively nearer close-ups of Burns's eye) and sound man Ted Nicolaou, prompted again by Gregory and providing loads of interesting anecdotes about the shoot and the specific production challenges. They all came out of film school together, expecting to get no further in their careers than teaching, but the immediate success of the film paved the way for all of them to go to Hollywood. Still, making the film was unnerving at times.

"What's funny is that if you traveled outside of Austin in these days it wasn't so different from the way it was presented in this movie. You could get into some serious tangles with some seriously weird rednecks."

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"We were serious hippies, we were, at the time and we were pretty sure that if the rednecks ever got a hold of us they would have their way with us. Basically, this film is about that fear."

But in all of the commentaries and supplements, no one ever mentions a movie that might be considered the film's chief inspiration—**Deliverance**.

The standard Blu-ray included in the set has the same four commentaries, and additional optional Spanish subtitles along with the English subtitles. It does not have the Dolby Atmos track. It does have a 7.1-channel DTS track, which also appears on the 4K platter, but lacks the exhilarating immediacy and clarity of the Atmos track. The color transfer is also different, closer to the soft image that one is familiar with from past presentations. If there were nothing to compare it with, then the image on the BD platter, which is a little brighter, would seem terrific, but the colors are substantially more realistic on the 4K platter, and the image is substantially sharper, so that the standard BD pales in comparison. The chapter encoding is also slightly different.

The third platter, also a standard Blu-ray, contains three trailers, three TV commercials and two radio commercials. Most of the 25 minutes of deleted scenes and outtakes appeared on the DVD, as did the 2 minutes of bloopers. There are also 8 minutes of production photo montages that include detailed looks at the make-up applications; a very good 10-minute piece about the 4K re-mastering effort and how the film was originally shot; an 8-minute walkthrough of the house where the film's mayhem was shot (which had been moved and restored as a restaurant); a jokey but still informative 20-minute visit to the film's other locations and to the restored house; a thoughtful 14-minute piece about the film's memorabilia and collectibles; an 11-minute interview with Carroll, who explains how he became involved, what some of the challenges were in putting the film together, what Hooper was like (he tended to sleep during the day and work at night), and his own subsequent projects; a 16-minute interview with co-star John Dugan who talks about the stress of shooting in such hot conditions wearing a ton of old age makeup and also becomes emotional over what Burns had to go through; a very nice 17-minute retrospective interview with co-star Teri McMinn (the one who gets put on the meat hook) who talks about the trials and tribulations of the shoot and what she has been up to since then; a 16-minute interview with production manager Ron Bozman (he later won an Oscar producing **Silence of the Lambs**), who shares a few fresh anecdotes about the shoot and then goes into fascinating detail about the film's financing and profit distribution; a passable 54-minute talk between Hooper and William Friedkin in front of a live audience, going into detail about the original gestation of the film and touching on other filmmaking anecdotes; a 72-minute collection of shorter pieces, including another interview with Pearl, a very nice memorial section about the individuals who worked on the film and have since passed away, more about the house that became a restaurant, an interview with co-star Nubbins Sawyer, a terrific interview with Hansen (who is now an author living in Maine), and other topics; and an excellent 83-minute appreciation of the film, intercutting the reflections of different critics, fans and filmmakers to dissect the film's strengths and also to celebrate Hooper and his career.

MPI has also released the film as a regular two-platter 4K Blu-ray (UPC#030306836799, \$45), with the Blu-ray supplement as the second platter, but no awesome yellow chainsaw jacket.

Lewton classics in 4K

Two wonderfully atmospheric 1943 RKO Radio Pictures features made during World War II that were produced by Val Lewton, to whom authorship of their overall cinematic impact is often ascribed, **I Walked with a Zombie** / **The Seventh Victim**, have been released in a two-platter 4K Blu-ray by The Criterion Collection (UPC#715515303415, \$50), the films appearing together on both the 4K platter and the standard Blu-ray platter. Both black-and-white films are presented in a squared full screen format, and both have reasonably clean monophonic audio tracks. The films are supported by optional English subtitles.

To this day, *I Walked with a Zombie*, entirely because of its showmanship title, has a greater popularity than Mark Robson's *The Seventh Victim*, but the latter is our favorite of all the Lewton features from the Forties, a terrific suspense thriller that penetrates beyond its superficial mechanics at every turn. Set in Greenwich Village during the middle phase of its Bohemian era, where a cosmetics entrepreneur, played with a straight-from-flapper-to-Goth hairdo by Jean Brooks, goes missing. Her sister, played by Kim Hunter in an impressive debut, comes looking for her, uncovering not just the sister's unseemly love life, but a cabal of sophisticated devil worshippers. Running a succinct 71 minutes, the film has the compelling momentum of a mystery, with one unexpected discovery after another. It is consistently intriguing and out of the ordinary, merging the ambiguities of romance with the uncertainties of suspense to create a unique and enduring film that indeed defies almost every categorization except for its being a "Val Lewton feature."

Hugh Beaumont and Tom Conway co-star. The picture quality looks terrific, adding greatly to the film's subtleties of atmosphere and emotion, and holding one's attention all the more. It is substantially cleaner than the Warner Home Video DVD, part of **The Val Lewton Horror Collection** we reviewed in Nov 06, with a lovely, sharp and spotless image. The Steve Haberman commentary from the DVD has been carried over. Additionally, excerpts from a terrific a podcast profile of Lewton and his career entitled *The Secret History of Hollywood* with Adam Roche plays on another track as the film unspools beneath it. While such podcasts are wonderful experiences at any time, it is especially rewarding to hear the pertinent passages with the film still so fresh in your mind.

Jacques Tourneur's *I Walked with a Zombie* is more clearly defined but still holds an inviting balance between enigma and exoticism. Famously a "voodoo *Jane Eyre*," its weakest component is the casting of Conway as the male lead, who is ultimately too one-dimensional to convey the conflicted soul that the film really needs to sell its romance (he is much better as the guarded psychiatrist in *Seventh Victim*). Frances Dee plays a nurse who has been called to the Caribbean sugar plantation to care

for the wife of Conway's character, who seems to be suffering from some sort of walking coma, if there is such a thing. Eager to help cure her, Dee's character ends up visiting local religious gatherings for some interesting treatment options. Seeing how the film was created backwards from the chosen title and runs just 68 minutes, it is an admirable and enduring feature, with an abundance of the requisite atmosphere, a viable if not completely satisfying romance, and a few moderate thrills. If it has become dated from a racial perspective, there is good as well as bad in its approach. On the one hand, the movie introduced the calypso legend Sir Lancelot to American audiences, and has several strong black characters, but on the other hand, the tall, lanky Darby Jones, playing an apparent zombie, is shot in a way that is intended to unnervingly audiences entirely because he is tall and black, since his character otherwise presents no threat to anyone or anything. He would not be out of place in a contemporary political advertisement.

The picture looks terrific, adding significantly to the film's appeal. The image is absolutely spotless, an improvement over the Warner Bros. DVD (Nov 06), and contrasts are finely detailed. The grain that does appear enhances the mood of the specific scenes where it is present. The excellent DVD commentary by movie enthusiasts Kim Newman and Stephen Jones has been carried over. More excerpts from *A Secret History of Hollywood* are included as the film unspools beneath it. It is not a casual reading, as it is accompanied throughout by a pleasant musical score as well as other appropriate sounds—audio clips from other movies, Lancelot's singles, and so on. Again, you definitely catch things that would otherwise pass without notice if the music wasn't there. Additionally, the tale of the film's production is inherently entertaining, and Lancelot's story deserves a feature film all of its own.

On both movies, the standard Blu-ray presentation is almost as nice as the 4K presentation. While the 4K image may seem sharper from time to time, the improvements will only be discernible on a very large screen. The quality of the sound is also indistinguishable on the two presentations. The standard Blu-ray, however, also contains a bevy of additional supplementary materials. *Shadows in the Dark: The Val Lewton Legacy*, a 53-minute retrospective look at Lewton's films, is carried over from the DVD, as are trailers for the two films. Also featured is a reasonably thorough 47-minute appreciation ("It's astonishing how much these films pack into 70 minutes of running time, how compact and at the same time expansive they are.") and comparative analysis of the two title features (although they miss how the shadow behind the shower curtain in *Seventh Victim* suggests the Devil's horns); a really good 13-minute piece on the real history of zombies; another 53 minutes of excerpts from *The Secret History of Hollywood* about Brooks and her husband (briefly), Richard Brooks; and 70 minutes from *Secret History of Hollywood* about Conway and tangentially, his brother, George Sanders, and Zsa Zsa Gabor. The special features do not start up where they left off if playback is terminated.

Wild Japanese folktale

An elaborate Japanese folktale with political undertones, kitschy embellishments and a Biblical finale, Masahiro Shinoda's 1979 **Demon Pond** (*Yasha-Ga-Ike*), has been released as a two-platter 4K Blu-ray by The Criterion Collection (UPC#715515303712, \$50). The film begins realistically, in 1913, as a school teacher wrapping up his summer vacation decides to make one last stop on the way home, to visit the oddly titled body of water that he spots on the map. Traveling on foot from the train station, seemingly across rivers and a desert, he becomes very thirsty, only to learn that the area he arrives at has been subject to an extreme drought and there has been no rain for several years. Passing through a town where everyone is rude to him, he walks up a hill and discovers a verdant garden being irrigated by a small stream, and a woman rinsing flowers in the water. He relieves his thirst and begins a conversation with her. And then things start to get weird. Later there is a sequence where a fish and a crab turn into men and discuss their lot in life as they walk down a path in the moonlight, coming upon a humanized catfish who has an urgent message for the princess of the Pond (the princess is also played by the same actor playing the other woman). They are in costumes that would not be out of place in an episode of **Mighty Morphin Power Rangers**. Ultimately, the film cuts back and forth between the princess (whose lair would not be out of place in **Barbarella**), the teacher and his hosts (the woman rinsing the flowers is married), and the townspeople who want to sacrifice the woman to end the drought, shifting from serious and thoughtful conversations to wild, epic special effects as everything converges for the climax. There are other surprises, such as with the film's casting, that are best left to be discovered. The film runs 124 minutes to take everything in, and while some viewers will be alienated by the understated and earnest opening, followed by a sudden shift in tone and presumption, others will take full delight in the understanding that they are watching something that is very different from anything they have ever seen before. Subsequent visitations to the film, when you have a better idea of what to expect, are even more transfixing.

The one way you can tell that the film was made in the Seventies is the musical score, which is reminiscent of Keith Emerson, with synthesizer renditions of early Twentieth Century classical music pieces from *Prelude to an Afternoon of a Faun* to *Night on Bald Mountain* and others. The monophonic sound is solid and clean, and the film is in Japanese with optional English subtitles. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. Although soft at times, and deliberately hazy at other times (there are flashbacks, too), the picture is mostly solid and clean, and colors are accurate. The 4K presentation is definitely nicer than the standard Blu-ray that is also included in the set, which has blander, less distinctive hues, although the differences are more pronounced in some sequences than in others. At its best moments, even the standard BD is gorgeous. The standard BD platter also contains an incisive 18-minute analysis of the film and Shinoda's career, and a 13-minute profile of special effects master Nobuo Yajima (with an appreciation of the film's **Godzilla**-style miniatures), which deconstructs the final sequence almost shot by shot. The special features do not begin where they left off if playback is terminated—it goes back to the film instead.

China Blu

Twelve days before the partial meltdown at the Three Mile Island nuclear power facility, James Bridges's 1979 Columbia Pictures thriller about problems at a nuclear power facility, **The China Syndrome**, was released in theaters. The film is also a wicked satire about the vacuity of local news programs, and it endures as an exciting suspense drama with marvelous performances, but the center of its narrative is the fallout, as it were, from a construction flaw at a nuclear plant, and the film's fortunes rose and subsided upon its being identified as a movie about the problems of nuclear power. Within the film, but more pragmatically all around, the problems really aren't about nuclear power but about contractors cheating on specs to make their budgets. Nevertheless, the film came to be associated with a panic that has, in the years following the incident (and the even greater, muckier Chernobyl disaster in the USSR) subsided, thanks in part to a concentrated public relations effort by the nuclear power industry but in part to improvements in construction safety, as well. Heck, there are even talks about reopening Three Mile Island, because the next scary technological advancement, A.I., needs a dedicated power source to grow.

Hoping that enough time has passed, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment has released **The China Syndrome** on Blu-ray (UPC#043396637139, \$27) with a beautiful transfer that captures the texture and detail of the original images with near perfection. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1, hues are fresh and fleshtones are finely detailed. The filmmakers had no intention of creating beauty. The cinematography is deliberately utilitarian, underscored by the working environment within the plant, and yet the image on the BD looks so nice that every shot is transfixing. The 5.1-channel DTS sound has an occasional dimensionality that is fairly pleasing, and when the sub-woofer kicks in at its appropriate moment, it contributes directly to the drama. There are optional English subtitles.

Before the nuclear power aspect of the film was blown up by actual events, the movie's satirical component was intended to be its primary social quarry (the main target is TV news, but there is also a wonderful spoof, probably taken from real occurrences, on the stunts that nuclear activists pull for anyone who will listen), which Bridges deftly balances against the seriousness of the film's suspense sequences. Jane Fonda plays a reporter for a Los Angeles television station stuck doing soft news, and Michael Douglas plays her cameraman. They are at a nuclear plant doing a puff piece when an incident occurs, and while their recording of the incident is suppressed, the operations manager at the plant, played by Jack Lemmon, believes that the root cause of the problem has not been resolved. One of the movie's primary thrills is to see Fonda and Lemmon in the same shot—enhanced by the beauty of the BD's image playback—as the incredible power and focus of their performances brings a realism to their characters that enhances the film's validity significantly. Douglas is kind of left in the dust, back there with James Hampton, James Karen and others, delivering perfectly fine, functional performances. Only Wilford Brimley, as the co-worker of Lemmon's character, comes close to achieving the magic blend of star power and emotional veracity that Lemmon and Fonda achieve.

Lemmon has it easy, because his part is understandable and relatable. Fonda's accomplishment is a great deal more challenging, depicting a woman who is paid to act like an airhead, and not only wants to break out of that role, but is capable of doing so when the opportunity arises, to a point. And here is where the truly wicked part comes in. At the end of the film, her character is praised for the brilliant 'reporting' she has done, but from an objective view, her report is confusing, nonsensical and accomplishes almost nothing, which, so far as TV news goes, is still a substantial achievement.

Also featured on the disc is a trailer, 4 minutes of sensibly deleted scenes that give the viewer a wonderful chance to further savor Lemmon, Brimley and Fonda, and 57 minutes of excellent retrospective documentaries that include substantial interviews with Douglas (who also produced the film—coming off of his Oscar win as a producer and a long stint on TV, he wanted to get back into feature films) and Fonda (her red hair in the film, which drove the cinematographers crazy in the video feeds, is an homage to Brenda Starr—red works much better in the comics), detailing many insightful aspects of the film's creation. As for Three Mile Island, "I don't think there has ever been an incident of such congruity between real life tragedy and a film story."

Desperate hours

A taut widescreen black-and-white Japanese crime thriller from 1966, **The Threat**, has been released on Blu-ray by Arrow Films (UPC#760137160762, \$40). Directed by Kinji Fukasaku, the film begins with a middle class couple returning from a wedding to their somewhat remote and relatively small suburban home with their young son, only to have two escaped criminals that have kidnapped a baby barge in on them. The villains need the father, played by Rentarō Mikuni, to pick up the ransom money, and hold his family hostage so that he will do what he is told. Set to a wonderful, jazzy score by Isao Tomita, which is accentuated since a lot of the film is watching the characters from afar cross streets and move through crowds, the film establishes the conflict and pushes forward with it so there is no time to second guess any character's actions, while the intimacy of the household sequences magnify the personalities and psychologies of every character, good and bad, child and adult. Running 84 minutes, the efficiency, intensity and momentum of the film put lame, embarrassing efforts such as John Badham's **Nick of Time** (Jun 96) to shame. This is how such a film—about parents without significant street skills coping when their children are placed at risk—should be done.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The transfer looks terrific. It is pristine, but sustains the feel that the film has been shot on the fly. The monophonic sound is solid and the score is worth amplifying. The film is in Japanese with optional English subtitles. Along with a trailer, there is a decent 19-minute appreciation of the film and an excellent commentary track by Asian film expert Tom Mes. His talk falls off a bit in the film's second half, but he dives thoroughly into the

biographies of the cast and the crew, the financial struggles of the Japanese film studios and how the film fits into the development and spread of the crime genre. He also goes into great detail about Fukasaku's working methods. "He would direct all these bit actors who would normally be ignored for the most part by the directors and left to the assistant directors to deal with. Fukasaku, on the other hand, even knew the names of all these bit players and these were bit players who lived in dorms on the studio lot in Toei, the so-called 'large room actors,' because they all shared large rooms where they lodged, and so that made Fukasaku very popular with these actors and these actors really gave him, his films, their all. That's part of where the energy of Fukasaku's films comes from."

Samurai paths

A cross between **Camille** and **Yojimbo**, the 1966 samurai feature directed by Tai Kato, **Tokijiro: Lone Yakuza**, released on Blu-ray by Radiance Films (UPC#760137159780, \$40), has drama, action and heart. It has it all. Set in a pre-technological era, the characters refer to themselves as yakuza, but the differences from a standard samurai adventure are negligible. Kinnosuke Nakamura plays a lone swordsman who is obligated, after a duel, to take care of an ailing woman and her child, while a gang seeks them out for revenge. The more subtly emotions are expressed between the characters, the more touching the film becomes. Running 90 minutes, it is as compelling for its clearly told, wonderfully performed story as it is for its blood-soaked sword clashes (you never see the cut, but you do see the blood spilling and gushing every which way), and it is as captivating and engrossing as anyone seeking out a samurai film for more than superficial pleasures could hope to discover.

Junko Ikeuchi co-stars. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The image is often soft, and at times irritatingly so, but otherwise colors are fresh and the picture is free of wear. The cinematography has many lovely moments that are not impeded by the shortcomings of the presentation. The monophonic sound is so clear that you can hear the whirring of the camera during quieter scenes. The film is in Japanese with optional English subtitles and comes with a trailer, a good 17-minute analysis and history of the story, and a nice 18-minute appreciation of Nakamura's career with lots of stills and photos.

Creepy forest

Who knew Ireland had a forest so dense that people who enter it never come out? A creepy and exciting horror film with a touch of science-fiction in its fantasies, **The Watchers**, stars Dakota Fanning as a pet store employee who is taking a rare parrot from Galway to Belfast when her directions app leads her onto a dirt road in the forest and then shuts off entirely, her car following suit shortly thereafter. On foot with the bird and hoping to find help, when the sun begins to set she meets a woman in the woods who rushes her to a cabin where two other younger people have also been staying, locking the cabin up tight as noises increase behind them. One wall of the cabin, however, is a one-way mirror, so that whatever is outside can see in, while those inside cannot see out.

The 2024 New Line Cinema production, released on Blu-ray by WB and SDS Studio Distribution Services (UPC#883929818501, \$35), was directed by Ishana Night Shyamalan from a novel by A.M. Shine. Not only is it suspenseful and at times frightening, but despite running 102 minutes, it is quite effectively paced. The story presents one idea, lets the viewer stew on it for a bit, and then resolves the point and moves on to the next dilemma. The film is reminiscent of those movies about strangers trapped together in an odd yet internally logical enclosure, while the forest setting taps into a wellspring of primal fears that are readily utilized for some potent screams. The film's resolution is also wholly satisfying, even though it leaves an opening for more to come.

Olwen Fouéré, Georgina Campbell and Oliver Finnegan co-star. A couple of decades ago, we thought that Fanning would have an Oscar by now, but her career got sidetracked by big paycheck secondary roles in blockbusters, and while it still could happen, our money now is on her sister to get there first. Nevertheless, this is the sort of role she needs to embellish her skills and carry a drama. As she presses her nose against the mirror—duplication is a motif in the film—it is clear that there is an abundance of innate talent beneath the surface, just waiting to erupt.

The movie does not pick up where it left off if playback is terminated. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. Darker sequences are clearly detailed and the cinematography has an effective immediacy that continually adds to the entertainment, placing you with the characters and allowing you to escape your own environment. The Dolby Atmos sound has an adequate dimensionality and a workable amount of power when called upon. There is an audio track that describes the action ("Below, Mina stands in the center of the shaft of light, and looks up. Behind her, a shadowy figure passes before the view. Mina's eyes shift, then she slowly turns around. She regards the darkness beyond the shaft of light."), alternate French and Spanish audio tracks, optional English, French and Spanish subtitles, 25 minutes of good promotional featurettes and a great 9-minute collection of scenes from the faux reality show that is the only entertainment the characters have access to in the cabin.

Snakes, rats and Klaus Kinski

How much Klaus Kinski do you dare to spend time with? Kinski plays identical twins in the giddy 1967 tale of murder and other frights, **Creature with the Blue Hand**, a two-platter Film Masters Blu-ray (UPC#760137158776, \$30). Directed by Alfred Vohrer and based upon an Edgar Wallace story, Kinski's character is both a wealthy heir and his brother, the latter confined to an asylum as criminally insane for having murdered the estate gardener. When he is allowed to escape from his confinement, other murders begin occurring, and there are several attempts on his sweet younger sister, played by Diana Körner. A police inspector played by Harald Leipnitz quickly determines that there is more going on than one escaped lunatic could accomplish. (Another character, played by Vohrer, is not just named 'Carl Denham,' it is in fact the same Denham character created by Wallace that elsewhere took a flyer on seeking to capture a rumored humongous ape.)

Running a refreshing 74 minutes, the estate is packed full of secret passages decorated with skeletons like a Halloween house, the story is packed full of twists and quadruple twists, and the film is packed full of frights. At one point, Körner's character is locked in one of the cells in the asylum, where oodles of snakes and rats are released to crawl around her feet and otherwise look icky and scary. Keyed by an aggressive Sixties musical score from Martin Böttcher that also tries to knock you on the head with its anticipatory and reactive surges, the movie is just too calculated in its dire intentions to be anything but utterly delightful.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. Keeping in mind that the film's budget was as confined as Kinski strapped in an easy chair, the color transfer is fantastic. The image may be soft at times, but hues are always deep, flesh-tones when not scarred are fresh and the image is always as sharp as it is permitted to be in an asylum. Taking its cue from the music, the monophonic sound has plenty of punch and is reasonably clear. Also featured are two trailers, a good 14-minute profile of Wallace and a rewarding 18-minute overview of the Wallace film series in Germany and its intersection with Kinski's career.

One of our favorite commentary teams, Stephen Jones and Kim Newman, provide a thorough talk (supported by optional English subtitles) about that series of German films adapting Wallace stories, of which **Blue Hand** was a late entry. They also talk about the players, the music, the differences between the various versions of **Blue Hand** that are available and the film's convoluted story. They say the original German version is longer, but more nonsensical. When they arrive at the final denouement, which itself has more twists than an entire normal crime film, they kind of throw up their hands. "Frankly, at this point, just go with it."

A 1987 reissue of the film by Sam Sherman that adds a few gore sequences to extend the running time to 80 minutes, *The Bloody Dead*, has also been included on the platter. The regular film is all there. A few of the inserts enhance the murders that appeared in the film, but most of the footage, ineptly staged, depicts two bloodthirsty inmates in an asylum cell, who first gorge on a nurse, and then pull apart a guard. The footage also looks substantially less pristine than the footage from **Blue Hand**, so it is pretty easy to spot. The entire 9 minutes of the additional footage and outtakes shot for the film are also included as a special feature. Sherman supplies a rewarding commentary over 46 minutes of *Bloody Dead*, sharing all sorts of great stories about the schlock distribution business in the Eighties, how he came to have control of several of the German Wallace adaptations, and what became of them, including deals with Roger Corman. He tells one great story of going to meet Corman while Corman was on a working honeymoon, only to find his wife in the lobby of the hotel, so worried that Corman is late that she is in tears. "This is Roger Corman's bride. He's just married her. I'm trying to sell the man a picture and his wife is upset, crying on my shoulder." Fortunately, Corman appears soon enough and also fortunately, does not see the two embracing. Again, both the presentation and the commentary have optional English subtitling.

The gem of the set, however, is the feature on the second platter, Antonio Margheriti's 1974 *The Web of the Spider* (the credits use Margheriti's pseudonym, 'Anthony Dawson'), a color remake of his black-and-white *Castle of Blood*. Kinski has a small but wonderful part in the beginning and end as a strung out Edgar Allan Poe. The film stars Anthony Franciosa as a reporter interviewing Poe, who then accepts a wager from Poe's companion to stay in an abandoned mansion overnight, with the bulk of the 93-minute feature depicting the events in the mansion, where ghosts materialize and give Franciosa's character a very hard time.

The film is a masterpiece. For one thing, the production design for the castle/mansion is absolutely delicious, particularly since the image, letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, has such a pristine color transfer. Every chamber, every hallway, every shot in the mansion is filled with scrumptious bric-a-brac, and the details of the transfer are such that every niche is crisp and properly hued. If you know anyone who collects antiques, they will go gaga watching the film. Next, yes, we admit it, we have a soft spot for Franciosa. He's not the greatest thespian that ever lived, but he is a wonderful movie star, even when he is overacting or otherwise over-expressing an emotion. He has a compelling screen presence that supersedes emotional nuance. Some of the dubbing sounds like his voice, and some of it does not (Kinski is entirely dubbed), but again, his visual presence is so enjoyable that any drawbacks are irrelevant. Next, the film has a haunting narrative, one that is, to evoke Poe, 'like a dream within a dream.' The experience of watching the film reminded us most of all of the first time we watched Mario Bava's *Lisa and the Devil*, its intricate, untethered story ambiguities overriding its narrative logic. The ghosts, in early Nineteenth Century garb, have affairs with one another and react jealously, to the point of murder. One ghost, played by Michèle Mercier, becomes involved with Franciosa's character as he wafts in and out of corporeal presence while observing the other castle narratives. If you take the plot literally, it is pretty silly, regardless of the interesting Nineteenth Century undergarments and sprinkles of nudity, but as a woozy manifestation of Poe's fantasies, flitting from one partially formed idea to the next, the décor and the evocations of romantic temper are enough to keep a viewer spellbound.

The monophonic sound has its limitations, particularly where the music is involved, but is adequately presented. A trailer is included, as is a trailer for *Castle of Blood*, demonstrating how closely the two films align.

Jones and Newman, in another commentary, go over all of the similarities and differences between the two films, as well as identifying the scenes that have been removed from the longer Italian version of the film, which they say is duller and less mysterious as a result. Both the film and the commentary are accompanied by optional English subtitles.

In addition to talking about the film's history and its secondary position in Margheriti's career, they also go over the backgrounds and Italian horror credentials of each supporting player, and have many enjoyable insights about the movie (they take a dim view that an especially macho character has been named, 'Herbert') and its underappreciated strengths.

"Now, you may think here that Anthony Franciosa is overacting, and there is a sense that, you know, he is, yet this scene was set up very early on in the pub scene at the very beginning, where he accuses Poe of having characters in his stories who are always driven mad by the supernatural, and yet he himself now is becoming a character in a Poe story. But Franciosa is a better actor than this if it wasn't intentional. I think it's just totally intentional that he's playing this role as somebody who is actually a Poe character."

"It's always more frightening if your leading man who's terrorized starts out as a confident guy. You think, with Anthony Franciosa, you're safe, right? He's a guy who can put up with everything. He's played all these cops and crooks and cowboys, yeah. But you put them in a situation where they're terrified, and that's actually much more frightening than if it's like a 19-year-old ingénue who's fresh from a convent."

Van Damme gets bumped around a bit

Jean-Claude Van Damme's character gets hit in the head right away, and slashed on the arm, thus excusing the actor's limited martial arts skills in the 2017 action thriller **Kill 'Em All**, a Sony Pictures Home Entertainment release (UPC#043396-496286). That doesn't mean that his fight scenes aren't any good. He still has some great moves, and thanks to the direction by Peter Malota and some deft editing, he appears to have even more. Autumn Reeser plays a nurse in a Biloxi hospital that is shut down, but is still maintaining an emergency care unit—hence, most of the building is EMPTY—when the survivors of an assassination attempt on a Serbia official are brought in for care, only to be followed by more assassins. Running 96 minutes, the film is told in flashback by Reeser's character, who is being interviewed in an FBI office (there is a single, small, unadorned picture of Abraham Lincoln on a wall, but people appear to be milling about the cubicles, so it still seems valid), explaining how she initially ran into Van Damme's character—she helped him with his wounds—and then kind of tags along with him as the villains attempt to work their way up to a floor where the official has been stashed. With interruptions to remind us of the interview and to fill in some of the backstory on Van Damme's character, the film advances from floor to floor like a video game, with different bad guys (and different skill sets), on each floor. Reeser gets her share of the action, as well. It is an enjoyable film, working up a decent amount of suspense and fights, and the ending has several nice twists that justify having accepted the more farfetched moments for the sake of the entertainment.

Peter Stormare and Maria Conchita Alonso play the FBI agents, and Kris Van Damme is one of the villains. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The image is a little soft, but workable, and colors are accurate. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has a generalized dimensionality, but not as much punch as one might hope for. There are alternate French and Japanese audio tracks and optional English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, Chinese, Korean and Thai subtitles.

Sony's 2024 sequel, **Kill 'Em All 2** (UPC#043396638396, \$21), expands the premise nicely to make the two features into a decent double bill. Van Damme's character is quickly hobbled by injuries again, and gets banged up more and more as the film proceeds, but that doesn't stop him from wasting bad guys at every turn. The fights are energetic and brutal. The setting moves from Mississippi to Serbia, which is a very nice embellishment. Reeser is not back, but Stormare and Alonso show up again, while the brother of the main villain in the first film wants to take revenge on Van Damme's character and tracks him down to where he is attempting to lead a tranquil life with his well-trained daughter, played by Jacqueline Fernandez. Running 88 minutes and directed by Valeri Milev, the film is an effective mix of capers, chases and bloody face-offs. The twists aren't as inspired as they are in the first feature, but there are some decent plot turns nevertheless, and the demise of the villain is glorious.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The image is a little more solid than the earlier film, and looks reasonably sharp. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has a limited dimensionality, but at the height of the action scenes, so long as there are noises, you really don't care how well they are finessed. There are optional English, French and Spanish subtitles.

Cheech & Chong cultivate the past

Cheech Marin and Tommy Chong's 1984 vaudeville romp through Eighteenth Century France, **Cheech & Chong's The Corsican Brothers**, an Orion Pictures production, has been released on Blu-ray by MGM (UPC#840418306918, \$20). The two play the titular brothers and one of the gags is that if one is hurt in any sort of way, it is the other one that feels the pain. Chong's character wants to lead a revolution against the king, and Cheech's character tags along. Alexandre Dumas, this is not. There are gags about the prissy aristocrats and gags about slovenly commoners. There are double entendres galore, amusing bilingual gags (an exploding potato is called a 'bomb de terre'), jokes that are now out of date but may still elicit a giggle or two about gay characters, lampoons of costume swashbucklers, and genuine laughs often enough to keep you attentive through the dumber stuff. Even Marin's mustache is off center, a gift of humor that keeps on giving. There are loads of gags involving sex, but surprisingly almost none at all about weed, which had previously been the pair's raison d'être, as the French say. Nevertheless, by taking on such a classic motion picture setting, the comedy duo (Chong also directed, and they worked together on the script) proved that they were more than just a one-trick pony, belonging instead to a long tradition of movie comedy teams, well after that tradition had been thought to have gone, as the title of another one of their films suggested, up in smoke.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. An occasional softness in the image is because of the laissez-faire cinematography, and otherwise the picture is sharp and hues are vivid. The film was shot in France, with a substantially French crew. The DTS stereo sound brings just enough separations to the musical score to enliven the proceedings. There are optional English subtitles that are worth activating, in order to underscore some of the punchlines—Roy Dotrice plays the film's villain, whose character name cannot be shared here but is manipulated with great amusement a dozen different ways in the dialog, and you really don't catch them all unless you are reading them.

A better Bronson

Charles Bronson made lots of movies in the post-*Death Wish* phase of his career and to be sure, they were a mixed bag. He was cashing in, and for everything he had contributed to the pleasures of moviegoers up to that point, he deserved every penny that he got. Some of the movies he made in the late Seventies and Eighties were really good entertainments, but others were bland or incoherent bombs. It didn't seem to matter to him. He never dialed in his performance. He did what he was told, and moved on to the next.

Although as imperfect as most of them, J. Lee Thompson's 1989 *Kinjite Forbidden Subjects*, a Cannon Entertainment production released on Blu-ray by MGM (UPC#840418306949, \$15), is one of the best Bronson films from this period. Not only does the 97-minute film get wrapped up with a terrific action sequence, but Bronson delivers an excellent, even gutsy performance as a racist, trigger-happy cop who works in the Los Angeles vice squad, busting pimps when he'd rather just be blasting them away. He has a caring wife played by the way too little seen and greatly appreciated Peggy Lipton, and a tantalizing teen daughter played by Amy Hathaway, whom he watches over like a hawk with territory issues. But here is where the film avoids the ordinary—James Pax plays a Japanese businessman who has recently been transferred with his family—he has an even younger daughter—to Los Angeles. Accustomed to his life in Japan, he often goes out drinking at night and carousing, and one evening on a bus going home, feeling tipsy and horny, he puts his hand up Hathaway's skirt. He gets away from the bus before being caught when she screams at him, but the incident causes Bronson's character to feel especially resentful and angry over Asians in general and Japanese in particular. And then the daughter of Pax's character is kidnapped by the nastiest pimp of all, played with the utmost slime by Juan Fernandez, who has already run afoul of Bronson's character once before. One thing you pick up from this movie is that Los Angeles is a real small town.

In any case, the film has lots of nudity, great fights, a willingness by every cast member to let the darker and uglier sides of their characters' personalities show, and a clever back-and-forth narrative that obligates the viewer to accept or at least understand how some of that darkness comes about. In comparison to most of the formula films Bronson took part in, it is thoughtful and satisfying.

And the Blu-ray looks and sounds terrific. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. Colors are smooth and sharp, and the image is free of even the slightest distortions. The Ultra-Stereo DTS sound is pretty much reserved for Greg DeBelles's score—most everything else is centered—but the music has many enjoyable separations that add to the film's faux classy atmosphere. There are optional English subtitles.

Reacher further

The first season of *Reacher* (Feb 23) was heaven sent. It was the perfect 'Dad' program, an ideally constructed, hard-hitting, witty but no-nonsense action show with an awesome hero and story hooks galore that you could watch not just for an afternoon, but for a whole day or weekend. Needless to say, we were more than salivating when Amazon Studios and Paramount followed up with *Reacher Season Two*, a two-platter 4K UltraHD Blu-ray release (UPC#840418307014, \$40).

And... *Season Two* is almost as good as *Season One*, good enough that nothing is spoiled by its few shortcomings. There is a marvelous gag in the first episode involving a steering wheel airbag, the pleasures of which linger for quite a while afterwards, and the ending is definitely worth getting to, since it has not just one heartwarming moment, but a good half-dozen. In between, there are many additional thrills and excitements, nicely developed and appealing characters, adventure and a coherent plot that is ideal for taking the characters on their journeys and enabling them to grow emotionally as they kick butt every which way. There are also, however, a couple of shrill shortcuts (the heroes successfully guess a critical password that has no numerical characters) and the fights are not always staged with the clarity that can give the viewer the maximum momentary satisfactions. That one of the 'good' characters had mouths the musicianship of Jimi Hendrix is also unforgivable. *Season Two* is not as smart, not as slick and not as tight as *Season One*.

Additionally, and this cannot really be helped, the season lacks the compelling sense of discovery that gripped onto you at the very beginning of *Season One* and pulled you through every twisting step of its revelations. Yes, the character created by the novelist who calls himself Lee Child was initially embodied by Tom Cruise in a couple of films, but the impact of Cruise's presence in the franchise was completely negated by the hulking actor chosen for the series, Alan Ritchson. It was the combination of his character's Sherlock Holmes-like deductive skills with his Arnold-Schwarzenegger-looks-tiny-in-comparison presence, to which the narrative carefully added genuine emotional exposure and development, that not only endeared one to the character, but validated the series as being more than just a mindless string of adrenaline-filled action sequences. Ritchson also brought it heart.

All of that is established, however, so *Season Two* just carries it along with a new story, additional (and effectively developed) characters, and more nuances to the hero's psyche, with the plentiful, hard charging, but still not quite as skillfully edited action scenes. Nevertheless, the season remains utterly transporting. A member of the hero's former elite army investigation unit is murdered, and so he gathers several other members from that unit to investigate the death, leading to a diabolical plot by an industrialist (nicely played by Robert Patrick) to sell a new weapon component to terrorists. When the industrialist gets a whiff that the team is investigating, he starts sending out hordes of killers to eliminate them. It just makes the heroes omerier.

Originally broadcast on Amazon in 2023 and 2024, the eight episodes run a total of 351 minutes, and each platter has a 'Play All' option. Each episode, including the first one, opens with a recap of what has transpired previously. A statement buried in small print on the dark portion of the back of the jacket states, "Some episodes may be edited from their original network versions." You'd think Paramount would know for sure, right? The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2:1. The picture does not have the stunning precision that the best 4K

presentations sometimes offer, but there is nothing particularly wrong with it, either. The opening location shots of the various American cities that the show jumps around to—most of it is set in New York, but not all of it—feel crisp and vivid, and thereafter, the image is solid and clear, even in the shadows. The 5.1-channel DTS sound is rarely invigorating. There is a basic dimensionality when there needs to be, but nothing showy. There are optional English subtitles.

Northern exposure

In 1959, Alaska was trending. Statehood had given it buzz. Not only had production started on *North to Alaska*, which would also spin off a hit single title song, but even *The Hardy Boys* got into the act with an installment in the juvenile mystery book series, *The Mystery at Devil's Paw*, set in the newest state. Like Hawaii, the land was exotic but accessible, and Hollywood saw it as a magnet for viewers seeking fresh entertainment topics. So as part of its having gone viral, Warner Bros. and ABC, who had, just a few years earlier, invented the hour-long dramatic television series with continuing characters (*Cheyenne*), came up with a series they hoped would strike gold, *The Alaskans*. That did not, ahem, pan out, but there were enough episodes shot and broadcast in 1959 and 1960 to fill a nine-platter *Warner WB Archive Collection* Blu-ray set, *The Alaskans The Complete Series* (UPC#840418306147, \$70).

The full screen black-and-white picture is consistently vivid throughout the thirty-six episodes, except when the filmmakers have borrowed footage from other sources. The picture so crisp, in fact, you can see micro wire being used to control the reindeer in a saloon. In one episode, characters are supposedly out in the wilderness, but if you look carefully in the background, you can see someone skirting from one bush to the next, trying to stay out of the camera's view. The monophonic sound is solid, and there are optional English subtitles. Each platter has a 'Play All' option, and don't use the effective chapter encoding to jump past the end credits, or you will miss all of the cute 'sponsor' promos tacked on at the end, from a phallic pack of Chesterfield cigarettes to Johnson & Johnson First Aid Cream for 'dishpan hands.' Fortunately, the show has a very catchy theme song at the end, and it concludes over a terrific gag, repeating the word, 'Gold, gold, gold!' as executive producer William T. Orr's name shines on the screen (in the later episodes, the credit is shortened to 'Wm. T. Orr,' underscoring the implied pun even more). Most of the teasers that precede the opening credits are repeated during the course of the show, but once in a while they actually kick off the story, instead.

Dreamboat Roger Moore stars with mustachioed Jeff York and blonde Dorothy Provine in the show, which takes place in the Alaskan Gold Rush Era in the late Nineteenth Century (yes, sometimes that means the characters are in Canada and subject to Canadian law enforcement, although most of the time they are on the American side, where law enforcement is generally non-existent). Provine's character is an entertainer, while Moore and York's characters are hustlers, working claims now and then, but more often becoming involved in other get rich quick schemes, or running legitimate businesses, such as a freight service, and getting caught up in the lives and dramas of other characters. The three appear together in plenty of episodes, but they also appear individually, or as just two of the three, although in the case of Provine going it alone, one or both of the others will be seen briefly at the beginning or end of the piece. In the later episodes, Michael Forest portrays a French-Canadian woodsman who works for Moore's character, functioning as the workhorse sidekick in several episodes, appearing with just Provine in another (the only one where neither Moore nor York make a token appearance), and then even having the starring role in one, where Moore only appears for a moment at the beginning.

In 1959, an 'hour-long' episode was virtually a 'B movie,' running 52 minutes. As an unexpected treat, to pad things out when necessary and to add a bit of color, almost every single episode has at least one musical passage of some sort, from Provine singing the hits of the Gay Nineties (that said, one can get a bit tired of *Ta-ra-ra Boom-de-ay* rather quickly), to Moore strumming on a guitar (lest we forget, Andrew Lloyd Webber conned him into appearing on stage a few decades later in a musical). The show tries very hard not to be a western, although some of its best stories are stories that could be just as easily set in the Old West. The writers do make a conscious effort to slip in Alaska-ism, from the Aurora Borealis to Inuit phrases. They really did their homework well in the twenty-sixth episode, *A Barrel of Gold*, which genuinely tries to capture the atmosphere of a gold rush town, depicting a family in such a hurry to reach the claim sites that they buy bad meat that the army was supposed to have destroyed. Not only is the drama quite entertaining, but its attention to detail is much greater than normal. At the time, incidentally, gold was selling for \$16 an ounce. Although the depiction of indigenous peoples is, initially, atrocious, used as the butt of gags and often shown as alcoholics, there is an effort in later episodes to stage accurate depictions of various Yukon tribes and make the Native American/Native Canadian characters genuinely appealing. In the entire series, there is just one African-American cast member, in one episode.

The vicissitudes of stardom are fascinating. York, perhaps best known for playing 'Mike Fink' in Disney's *Davy Crockett*, is sort of like a portly Bert Reynolds. In one episode, George Kennedy has a small supporting part and like his supporting part in one of the episodes of *Colt .45* (Jul 24), he grossly overplays his role as a doofus. In both instances, it is a broad, amateurish performance. In another episode, he is a gang enforcer and more of a straight tough guy, but he still comes across as artificial and self-conscious. Yet, when you look at things closely, as Kennedy eventually landed more prominent feature film parts in movies like *Charade* and *Airport*, and then won his Oscar for *Cool Hand Luke*, there is not a single one of his feature film roles that York couldn't have filled just as effectively. Why one and not the other? Other guest stars showing up here and there include Lee Van Cleef, the magnificent Emile Meyer, Troy Donahue, Alan Hale, Warren Stevens, Frank Ferguson, Jesse White & John Dehner (they appear in a couple of comedic episodes together), Simon Oakland, Julie Adams, Claude Akins, Neil Hamilton, Denver Pyle, Robert Colbert, Rex Reason, Valerie French, and Leo Gordon.

Like **Colt .45**, the show is very rough going at first. The pilot episode, *Gold Fever*, required as an introduction to the characters, is a real mess. The story is about a fortune in gold that has been lost in an overturned sled deep in the snow. The motivations for the secondary characters (George Mitchell is one of the guest stars) is explained at the end, but up to that point, it just seems sloppy and even incoherent. The second episode, *Cheating Cheaters*, which introduces a slick hustler played by Ray Danton with an inept 'Indian' sidekick played by Frank de Kova—the two would go on to appear in several more episodes as the same characters—emphasizes comedy. While it is an improvement in clarity over the first effort, the humor can get tiresome pretty fast, with Danton's character pretending that gold was on a boat that sank before it arrived at the dock. The third episode, *The Devil Made Five*, is an outlier. Directed by Jacques Tourneur and adapted from a story by Bret Harte, it is a terrific piece about transporting dynamite on a sled with three unsavory people. While later episodes would become just as entertaining, Tourneur's tone and approach are exceptional.

The next four episodes are generally dismissible. One of them, *Starvation Stampede*, builds up to a decent drama about a town rebelling against a hoarder, but the other three are overly comical and get by primarily on the appeal of the stars. But then, the eighth episode, *Winter Song*, is truly where the show finds its voice, as it were. It is an episode without Moore, and focuses primarily on the guest characters rather than the recurring cast. Marie Windsor is an opera star who is losing her singing ability and comes to Alaska to try to make a few more bucks before it deteriorates entirely. Her manager is sleazy, as is the owner of the saloon where she is to sing. A miner who has struck it rich falls in love with her, but then his money gets stolen. The romantic component is truly wonderful and the rest is fully rousing and crowd pleasing. It was only at that point that we were hooked.

Thereafter, a few so-so episodes still pop up (including a busy but still tiresome comedy episode directed by Everett Sloane of all people), but there are plenty of other good ones, including ones that may follow a predictable template, but still manage to squeeze a decent amount of suspense or romance from the premise. Additionally, there are a few episodes that stand out even more.

A decade before the Sasquatch craze, the Abominable Snowman craze was kickstarted by Edmund Hillary in the early Fifties, and proved to be ideal fodder for a neat Moore-only effort in the eleventh episode, *The Abominable Snowman*. A monster is lurking in the woods, killing miners, and a Hindu miner thinks the monster is after him. The episode has a lot of action and suspense, and a suitable amount of ambiguity to top things off. Efreem Zimbalist, Jr. guest stars in the fourteenth episode, *The Trial of Reno McKee*, playing alcoholic lawyer who has to defend York's character when he is framed for murder. The drama a little heavy handed, but no matter, the creators hit all of the right notes. In the fifteenth episode, *Gold Fever*, the brother of York's character runs into problems when his new bride is blackmailed by someone who knows about her shady past. Not only is the story well staged, but Werner Klemperer and Tor Johnson both have marvelous supporting roles.

In one of several really good episodes just featuring Moore's character, he has to plant dynamite on a ridge to prevent an avalanche from burying a town in the sixteenth episode, *The Challenge*. Not only does the episode have a sense of adventure to it, but it also contains a lot of cringing, edge-of-your-seat suspense. It is episodes such as this that showcase Moore's birth as an action hero. We wouldn't want to spoil anything concerning the seventeenth episode, *The Long Pursuit*, which just features York's character, but it is an excellent blend of action and drama, carrying the viewer along from one emotional stance to the next. Moore's character is trapped in a gold mine with a jealous husband in the twenty-fourth episode, *Disaster at Gold Hill*, which works up a good blend of drama and suspense. The marvelous twenty-fifth episode, *The Last Bullet*, is a cute variation on **Petrified Forest** in a blizzard, with Dick Miller in a juicy part as the main outlaw. One of the better comedies, because it isn't entirely a comedy, Moore and Provine are featured in the twenty-seventh episode, *The Bride Wore Black*. A wealthy miner sent a mail order bride a photo of Moore's character because he didn't want to discourage her with his less-Adonis-like appearance, but when she shows up, there are serious complications. Most of it set on a riverboat (also used in **Colt .45**).

Sadly, the best episode of all—and it genuinely brought us to tears—was the final episode, which features Moore without York or Provine (or Forest), *The Ballad of Whitehorse*. If only that had been the first episode or one of the first, perhaps the series would have gone on for more than a single season. While it would spoil the wonderful surprise of his initial appearance to identify who he is, a subsequently famous movie star has the guest spot. Not only does he give a powerhouse performance, as a dying poet (it should be recalled that in the Gold Rush era, published poetry was the TikTok of its day) who marries a goodtime girl and then starts to recover, but you savor every moment he shares on the screen with Moore, not just for the drama, but for the iconography. The story is beautifully composed, Moore is at the top of his game, too (he had to be), and there is even a little bit of action to wrap things up. The entire collection is worth it for that episode alone.

DVD News

CRITERION CORNER: The Criterion Collection is releasing Anthony Mann's **Winchester '73** in 4K format with the groundbreaking commentary James Stewart originally recorded for LD; an interview with film programmer Adam Piron on the portrayal of Native Americans in the western genre; and a *Lux Radio Theatre* adaptation of the film from 1951. Richard Pryor's **Jo Jo Dancer, Your Life Is Calling** will be in 4K format and will feature an interview on the film with Robert Townsend and an interview with Pryor from a 1985 episode of *The Dick Cavett Show*. A 4K double bill,

Yojimbo / Sanjuro: Two Samurai Films by Akira Kurosawa will have two commentaries from Kurosawa scholar Stephen Prince; documentaries on the making of **Yojimbo** and **Sanjuro**, created as part of the *Toho Masterworks* series, *Akira Kurosawa: It Is Wonderful to Create*; teasers and trailers; and stills galleries of behind-the-scenes photos. Jean Eustache's **The Mother and the Whore** will be in 4K format and will include an interview with actor Françoise Lebrun; a conversation with filmmaker Jean-Pierre Gorin and writer Rachel Kushner; a program on the film's restoration; and a segment from the French television series *Pour le cinéma* featuring Lebrun, Eustache, Bernadette Lafont and Jean-Pierre Léaud. Stephen Frears's **The Grifters** is coming in 4K with a commentary featuring Frears, John Cusack, Anjelica Huston, and Donald E. Westlake; an interview with Annette Bening; a short making-of documentary featuring Cusack, Frears, Huston, Westlake, and production designer Dennis Gassner; *Seduction, Betrayal, Murder: The Making of The Grifters*, featuring interviews with Frears, Stapleton, editor Mick Audsley, executive producer Barbara De Fina, and co-producer Peggy Rajski; and *The Jim Thompson Story*, featuring Westlake and Thompson biographer Robert Polito.

NEW IN BLU: The following titles were recently issued on Blu-ray—Glitch Ditch 7, Glitch Ditch 8, Glitch Ditch 9 (Acid Bath); Mary Jane's Not a Virgin Any More (AGFA); Anne Rice's Interview with a Vampire Season 2, Oddity (AMD); Spirit Riser (Art); Disco Boy (Big World); Crackcoon (Brad Twigg); Deadpool & Wolverine, Kinds of Kindness (Buena Vista); And God Made Man, Cancel Me Not, Done Waiting, El Perdon, Hope, Miss Fashion Global, Stealing Church, Until the Last Promise (Burning Bulb); When Tomorrow Dies (Canadian); Green Sea, Lion vs The Little People, Mission H2O (Capital); Bloodline (CAV); Arcane League of Legions Season 1, As Above So Below, Death Becomes Her, Devil, Formosa Betrayed, Model House, Perrier's Bounty, The Wolfman (Cinedigm); Touch (Cinematographe); About Dry Grasses, Demon Pond, Gummo, I Walked with a Zombie/The Seventh Victim (Criterion); Billy Bevan Silent Comedian (D&D); Cuckoo, National Anthem, Robot Dreams, Slingshot, Subservience (Decal); That Guy Dick Miller (Dekalog); Blonde on a Bum Trip (Distribpix); Brimstone, Diabolo, Forsaken, Goon Last of the Enforcers, Hell on Wheels Complete Series, Mom and Dad, A Night in Old Mexico (eOne); Devi Danger (ETR); See You Next Tuesday (Factory 25); The Battle of Chile, Ferocious Fukasaku: Two Films By Kinji Fukasaku, Hotel, Lourdes (Film Movement); Foud Footage Festival V.10 (Found Footage); Heavenly Bodies, Paradise (Fun City); Along Came the Devil, Another Happy Day, Between the Beats, Down Below, Hauntology, Hi-De-Ho/Boarding House Blues, In Tenebras Into the Darkness, In the Fire, Little Brother, Martinez Margaritas and Murder!, Mother Father Sister Brother Frank, My Home Unknown, Slide Ride, Studio One Forever, To Fall in Love, The Vampire and the Vigilante (Gravitas); Pariah, Victim of Love (Indican); Shadows of Bigfoot, The Town Without Halloween (Indie Rights); My Heart Is That Eternal Rose (Kani); Body and Soul, The Boy in the Woods, Brick, The Classic Ghosts, Cross Creek, Deadly Circuit, Enough Rope, The Falling Star, Film Noir The Dark Side of Cinema XXII, First Love, Fluke, Garbo Talks, Hussy, Monsieur Vincent, Plenty, Riot in a Women's Prison, Sebastian, The Throwback, Up the Creek, Youngblood (Kino); Cora, Dark Web, Inbred, Inheritance, The Syndrome, Treasures of Terror V.2 (Leomark); Borderlands, Fear the Walking Dead Complete Collection, MaXXXine (Lionsgate); The Arctic Convoy, The Convert, Thelma (Magnolia); Dog Leg (Memory); Art Dealers, The Becomers, Texas Detour (MPI); Alison's Birthday, Broken Oath, The Convent, Creature with the Blue Hand, Cruel Britannia, Daiei Gothic, Dogra Magra, Don't Change Hands, II Demonio, J-Horror Rising, Kid from Kwang Tung, Killers, The Kung Fu Instructor, The Mad Bomber, 1982 Greatest Geek Year Ever!, The Project A Collection, The Red Light Bandit, Sam & Me, Suicide Room, Village of Doom (MVD); Eldritch USA (One Tree); The Prince & Me, A Quiet Place Day One (Paramount); El Vampiro Two Bloodsucking Tales from Mexico (Powerhouse); The Darkness, Dead Name, The Fearway, Final Summer, Future Soldier, How to Be Lucky, I Scream on the Beach, I Tripped on Acid from Outer Space, Krays Code of Silence, Sweetie You Won't Believe It, Terrorize, Tortured 4, Untitled Horror Movie, Witch (Rising Sun); Spiral (Ronin); The Name of the Rose (Samuel Goldwyn); Flesh Freaks (Saturn's Core); Boiling Point, Boudica Queen of War, Bull, ChristMess, Control, Hunted, The Island, Jamaica and the Mystery of the Maroons, Night Train, Shadow Master, Shrapnel (Shoreline); The Crown Complete Series, Harold and the Purple Crayon, Nine Queens, Secret Ballot (Sony); The 25th Anniversary Rock & Roll Hall of Fame Concerts (Starvista); Axegrinder 2, Axegrinder 3, Camp Blood 3 First Slaughter, Camp Blood 4 (Sterling); Dawning, Family Dinner, In the Woods, Psycho Sisters (Terror); Beyond the Unknown (Trialside); Little Boxes (Tribeca); Roland West's The Bat (Undercrank); Didi, Twisters (Universal); I Used to Be Funny (Utopia); Asylum of Terror (VHShitlist); Bathing Beauty, The Beast with Five Fingers, Conflict, For Your Consideration, The Hitcher, I Remember Mama, Jonny's Golden Quest/Jonny Quest vs. The Cyber-Insects, The Intern, Journey into Fear, A Prairie Home Companion, The Return of Doctor X, Veep Complete Series, The Walking Dead, The West Wing Complete Series (Warner); The Beast Within, End of the Rope, Exhuma (Well Go); Despiser, Kung Fu Rascals (Wild Eye); The Other Laurens (Yellow Sky)

NEW IN 4K: The following titles have recently been released in 4K format—Deadpool & Wolverine, Signs, The Sixth Sense (Buena Vista); Delirium Photo of Gioia, Howling II Your Sister Is a Werewolf (CAV); Arcane League of Legions Season 1, Devil, Drag Me to Hell, Land of the Dead, Shocker, The Wolfman (Cinedigm); Demon Pond, Gummo, I Walked with a Zombie/The Seventh Victim, Pandora's Box (Criterion); Baby Blood, Brick, The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, Cowboys & Aliens (Kino); Borderlands, MaXXXine (Lionsgate); Cheeky, The Convent, Hellraiser Quartet of Torment, The Project A Collection, Trick 'R Treat (MVD); Addams Family Values, Ghost, A Quiet Place Day One, To Catch a Thief, Zodiac (Paramount); American Movie, Thanksgiving (Sony); American Pie, Friday Night Lights, The Ring, Twisters (Universal); Dr. Seuss' How The Grinch Stole Christmas, The Hitcher, A Nightmare on Elm Street, Tag, Vacation (Warner); Exhuma (Well Go)

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Current Attractions

The following titles recently appeared for the first time:
Forsaken (eOne)*
Haven Complete Series (Lionsgate)*
Hell on Wheels Complete Series (eOne)*
Diablo (eOne)*
Wild Horses (eOne)*
The Night Agent Season 1 (Sony)*
ChristMoss (Shoreline)*
Out of Spite (Rainbow)*
The Summer with Carmen (Kino)*
The First Step (Deskpops)*
So Long Marianne (Leomark)*
The House Next Door (Little Fish)*
The Island of Lost Girls (Vision)*
The Bouncer (Vision)*
Inheritance (Leomark)*
Bridge of San Luis Rey (Leomark)*
Deadpool & Wolverine (Buena Vista)*
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Jaguar People (Green Planet)*
Shadows of Bigfoot (Indie Rights)*
Shadow of Vengeance (Deskpops)*
Sing Me a Song (Gravitas)*
The Town without Halloween (Indie Rights)*
Beyond the Unknown (Trialside)*
A Good American (Gravitas)*
Getting to Know You (Gravitas)*
Wounded Healer (Freestyle)*
Those People (Green Planet)*
Ruta 60 La Carretera Biblica (TBN)*
The Santa Summit (Cinedigm)*
That Guy Dick Miller (DekanoLog)*
Holiday Hotline (Cinedigm)*
Small Town Santa (BMG)*
New Tokyo Decadence The Slave (Rising Sun)*
Hope (Burning Bulb)*
The 25th Anniversary Rock & Roll Hall of Fame Concerts (Starvista)*
The Charisma Killers (Deskpops)*
Daria in Space (Freestyle)*
Hollywood Kills (Shoreline)*
Done Waiting (Burning Bulb)*
The Thicket (Samuel Goldwyn)*
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The Darkness (Rising Sun)*
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Mission H2O (Capital)*
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Cancol Me Not (Burning Bulb)*
Stealing Church (Burning Bulb)*
Until the Last Promise (Burning Bulb)*
El Perdon (Burning Bulb)*
And God Made Man (Burning Bulb)*
Witch (Rising Sun)*
Glitch Ditch 7 (Acid Bath)
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Baghead (AMD)
Anne Rice's Interview with the Vampire Season 2 (AMD)
Harry Wild Season 3 (AMD)
Oddity (AMD)
Sanctuary A Witch's Tale Season 1 (AMD)
My Life Is Murder Season 4 (AMD)
Disco Boy (Big World)
Grace Wins (BMG)
Grace by Night (BMG)
Finding Christmas (BMG)
Chicken Coop (BMG)
Joy of Horses (BMG)
My Private Line to God (BMG)
The Day You Found Me (BMG)
Summer Rain (BMG)
School of Magical Animals 2 (Breaking Glass)
Last County (Breaking Glass)
Kinds of Kindness (Buena Vista)
Handshake (Buffalo 8)
Never Been Chris'd (Cinedigm)
The Perfect Christmas Present (Cinedigm)
A World Record Christmas (Cinedigm)
Round and Round (Cinedigm)
The Summer with Carmen (Cinephobia)
I Walked with a Zombie/The Seventh Victim (Criterion)
Demon Pond (Criterion)
About Dry Grasses (Criterion)
Subservience (Decal)
National Anthem (Decal)
Singshot (Decal)
2 Lives in Pittsburgh (Deskpops)
The Window (Deskpops)
Robot Dreams (Deskpops)
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Amazonia Undercover (Dreamscape)
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The Dig (Electric)
Baby Boomer Yearbook (Electric)
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(Freestyle)
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Paradise (Fun City)
Heavenly Bodies (Fun City)
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Family (Indiepix)
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Coup (Kino)
Close to You (Kino)
The Falling Star (Kino)
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Happy Clothes A Film about Patricia Field (Kino)
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Path to Pain (Leomark)
Intred (Leomark)
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Cottontail (Level 33)
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Borderlands (Lionsgate)
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Thelma (Magnolia)
The Arctic Convoy (Magnolia)
Mark A Call to Action (Mark)
Murder Company (Maverick)
American Pop Flashback Great Hits of the 60s and 70s (MPI)
Art Dealers (MPI)
Hitchcock's Pro-Nazi Film? (MPI)
Creature with the Blue Hand (MVD)
Behind the Bucket A Garrison Story (MVD)
1982 Greatest Geek Year Ever! (MVD)
Eldritch USA (One Tree)
A Quiet Place Day One (Paramount)
NCIS Hawaii Final Season (Paramount)
NCIS Hawaii Complete Series (Paramount)
Ridley Season 2 (Paramount)
Odysseus Returns

(Paramount)
Mary Berny's Highland Christmas (Paramount)
PAW Patrol Ultimate Film & TV Collection (Paramount)
SpongeBob The Best 300 Episodes Ever (Paramount)
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Classic Series Complete Collection (Paramount)
Are You Afraid of the Dark Three Season Collection (Paramount)
Van Der Valk Season 4 (Paramount)
Walker Complete Series (Paramount)
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I Tripped on Acid from Outer Space (Rising Sun)
The Fearway (Rising Sun)
Future Soldier (Rising Sun)
#AMFAD All My Friends Are Dead (Roundtable)
From Power to Prison The Trump Story Part 2 (Rutless)
The Pumpkin Man (Scream Team)
Happy Times (Sony)
Kill 'Em All 2 (Sony)
Kneecap (Sony)
Harold and the Purple Crayon (Sony)
The Great Yokai War Guardians (SRS)
Buck Rogers in the 25th Century Complete Series (Universal)
Las Vegas Complete Series (Universal)
Summer Snow (Universal)
Chestnut (Utopia)
Trilogy New Wave (Utopia)
The Good Half (Utopia)
Chief of Station (Vertical)
The Lady of the Lake (Vision)
Babylon 5 Complete Series (Wamer)
Captain Planet: The Complete Franchise (Wamer)
Curb Your Enthusiasm Season 12 (Wamer)
Curb Your Enthusiasm Complete Series (Wamer)
The Gilded Age Season 2 (Wamer)
Exhuma (Well Go)
End of the Rope (Well Go)
Mummy Shark (Wild Eye)
Catnado (Wild Eye)
History Kids What Is a U.S. Representative to Congress? (Wonderscape)
History Kids What Is a U.S. Senator? (Wonderscape)
*Did not appear on last month's Coming Attractions listing

Coming Attractions

The following select DVD titles are promised for the near future. How many of them will show up is never a certainty. Logical subdivisions appear unmarked within each division. Titles which did not appear on last month's list are marked with an arrow (→) and are added to the bottom of the subdivisions so that the longest awaited titles appear at the top within each grouping:
From Acid Bath:
→ Mind Melters 64
→ Mind Melters 65
→ Glitch Ditch 10
→ Glitch Ditch 11
→ Glitch Ditch 12
From AMD:
Murdoch Mysteries Season 17
Orphan Black Echoes Season 1
Parish
→ The Walking Dead Daryl Dixon Season 2
From Apple:
→ Severance Season 1
From Ariztical:
→ Malanovna
From BMG:
→ Merry Birthday Happy Christmas
→ Christmas at Xander Point
→ Life and Me
→ The Christmas Letter
From Buena Vista:
→ Alien Romulus
From Burning Bulb:
→ Hotel Limbo
→ Country Rain
→ Best Supporting Actors
From Cinedigm:
Christmas on Cherry Lane
Haul Out the Holy Lit Up Christmas Island
Mystery on Mistletoe Lane/ Catch Me If You Claus/To All a Good Night
A Sudden Case of Christmas
→ Friends & Family Christmas
→ My Christmas Guide
→ A Sudden Case of Christmas
→ In Water
From Classicflix:
The Little Rascals Complete Collection
→ Angel Complete Series V.1
From Criterion:
Ryuichi Sakamoto | Opus
The Beast
Evil Does Not Exist
→ The Mother and the Whore
From Dark Arts:
→ Snuff Queen
From Decal:
Hounds of War
From Deskpops:
→ The Conversation (WWII)
From Dreamscape:
A Bluegrass Christmas
Cat and Keet Season 1
Cat and Keet Season 2
Discovering Who Is This Jesus?
Food Energy Water
Fruit Ninja Frenzy Force

Good Grief
Infinity
Luna, Chip & Inkie Season 1
Luna, Chip & Inkie Season 2
Luther vs. Rome
Martin Compton's Scottish Fling
My Father's War
Riding Tomado
Secrets of Sacred Architecture
Siesta Z Season 1
Siesta Z Season 2
Ukrainian Women
Why Do We Even Work
From Film Movement:
On the Wandering Paths
→ 20000 Species of Bees
→ A Real Job
From First Run:
→ Much Ado about Dying
From Freestyle:
All Happy Families
→ I Like Movies
→ Dreama Team
→ Stealing Jokes
From Full Moon:
Parish
→ The Walking Dead Daryl Dixon Season 2
From Apple:
→ Severance Season 1
From Ariztical:
→ Malanovna
From BMG:
→ Merry Birthday Happy Christmas
→ Christmas at Xander Point
→ Life and Me
→ The Christmas Letter
From Buena Vista:
→ Alien Romulus
From Burning Bulb:
→ Hotel Limbo
→ Country Rain
→ Best Supporting Actors
From Cinedigm:
Christmas on Cherry Lane
Haul Out the Holy Lit Up Christmas Island
Mystery on Mistletoe Lane/ Catch Me If You Claus/To All a Good Night
A Sudden Case of Christmas
→ Friends & Family Christmas
→ My Christmas Guide
→ A Sudden Case of Christmas
→ In Water
From Classicflix:
The Little Rascals Complete Collection
→ Angel Complete Series V.1
From Criterion:
Ryuichi Sakamoto | Opus
The Beast
Evil Does Not Exist
→ The Mother and the Whore
From Dark Arts:
→ Snuff Queen
From Decal:
Hounds of War
From Deskpops:
→ The Conversation (WWII)
From Dreamscape:
A Bluegrass Christmas
Cat and Keet Season 1
Cat and Keet Season 2
Discovering Who Is This Jesus?
Food Energy Water
Fruit Ninja Frenzy Force

→ Sleep
→ Omni Loop
From MPI:
Skincare
→ Turtles
→ A Christmas Carol (Jefferson Mays)
→ Teddy's Christmas
→ Rippy
→ The Roundup Punishment
→ The Soul Eater
→ Out Come the Wolves
From MVD:
Zyzzx Road
Village of Doom
Charley Chase at Hal Roadch
The Late Silents
Le Beau Mec
Silent Bite
Santa Claus
Guerrillero Del Norte
Snuff Queen
→ Night of the Blood Beast
→ The Block Island Sound
→ Copkillers
→ Cheerleaders Wild Weekend
→ Slice of America Episode 1
→ Men of War
→ Knock Off
→ Missing from Fire Trail Road
→ The Love Light!
From My Way:
The Forest Hills
→ Hanukkah
From Nathan Hill:
→ Alien Love
From Nitestar:
→ Solstice
From Oscilloscope:
→ Once within a Time (Godfrey Reggio)
From Paramount:
South Park Not Suitable for Children
Apartment 7A
Moonflower Murders
Star Trek Prodigy Season 2
PBS Kids Barnyard Buddies
Sea Change The Gulf of Maine
Leonardo Da Vinci A Film by Ken Burns
SpongeBob SquarePants Season 14
The Marlow Murder Club
The American Vice President
→ Mayor of Kingstown Season 3
→ Criminal Minds Evolution Season 17
→ Paw Patrol Rescue Wheels
→ South Park End of Obesity
→ War Machine World War II
→ Transformers One
→ Blue Bloods Final Season
→ Blue Bloods Complete Series (71 platters)
→ Seal Team Final Season
→ Seal Team Complete Series (30 platters)
From Pinnacle:
The Critic
→ Fancy Like Walter Hayes
→ Starring Jerry As Himself
→ Only the River Flows
→ Never Look Away
From Leomark:
Ash and Dust
→ The Red Book Ritual
→ Still Life
→ Turning Point
From Lionsgate:
The Crow
→ The Killer's Game
→ Never Let Go
→ Ancient Aliens Season 20
→ White Bird
→ Crust
→ Cursed in Baja
→ Abruption
From Magnolia:
Dance First
Yoshiki Under the Sky