

AMP

Moviecore!

BY JIM KAZ

This past year was damn good in terms of hi-def goodies, goopy rock melodramas, vintage TV bits, and drool-inducing box set releases. I'd like to go through a few standouts for you now, just so you're up to speed, or have a wish list that needs a little love.

Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory

40th Anniversary Blu-ray Edition



While it would be easy to write this one off as purely a kid's flick, *Willy Wonka* has an undeniable eerie streak. Decadent, surreal and rich with vivid hues, this 1971 film was a relative box-office failure upon its original release, but has become a cult favorite due to its offbeat content. Gene Wilder is fitting as the eccentric curator of chocolate, candy-coated cool, replete with a barely concealed, nasty disposition that surfaces when his young guests break the rules. It's often quite strange and creepy. As a kid, I was always left feeling slightly awed and puzzled after seeing it. On that note, I still am. (Warner Bros.)

Velvet Goldmine



This rock 'n' roll daydream is not so loosely based on the quasi-romance between David Bowie and Iggy Pop during the early glam rock heyday of the '70s UK. This Blu-ray edition presents it in all its decadent, stack-heeled glory, and features a killer soundtrack to boot. (Lionsgate)

The Walking Dead

Season One



Zombies have been all the rage for the past several years and that's not necessarily a good thing. Any trend gets tired once its been done to death (or in this case, "un-death"). All kidding aside, the zombie fad has seen its share of turkeys, which is why *The Walking Dead* has been so well received. It actually feels fresh. The show's economical use of flash and special effects has served it well. This recent release is the 3-disc edition, which features a black and white version of the pilot for extra chills. (Anchor Bay)

Colin Quinn

Long Story Short



SNL alum Quinn takes center stage in a one-man show, presented as a feature film directed by Jerry Seinfeld. And, it's damn funny, not to mention smart as all hell. What makes this one special is that it goes well beyond standup, taking a satirical look at the history of the world. (MVD)

Farscape

The Complete Series

This cult favorite created by The Jim Henson Company made quite an impression upon its release with its kooky Muppet aliens and super-charged special effects. But the stories also had legs, making for a fun, albeit twisted viewing experience. This slick Blu-ray set has the entire series across 20 discs. (A&E)



Smallville

The Complete Series



If you're into superheroes, chances are you were prone to weekly geek-out sessions when *Smallville* was on. While it may not have been the edgiest of super-powered fare, it had solid writing and more than a few savvy, special effects. This massive set comes complete in a hardback book format, with loads of extras including an *Aquaman* pilot, plus a Comic-Con featurette. Even if you're not a major Superman fan—I always preferred the more irritable and ominous Batman, myself—this release is an instant spirit-lifter, which is what has always made Superman appealing. Consider it a must-have for any fans of the DC Comics universe. (Warner Bros.)

Doctor Who

The David Tennant Years



Doctor Who has been an English institution for decades. Just like with the Ramones or Menudo, when it's time for one Doc to go, he's seamlessly replaced,

usually by a younger, more agile Doctor in waiting. The BBC had been fishing for a younger audience when it brought the series back to life a few years ago, and struck gold with actor David Tennant. This time-travelling Doc had an infectious, comedic side, and enjoyed a solid 4-year run, before being replaced himself by actor Matt Smith. This plush set collects all of his episodes—complete with dazzling special effects, clever storylines—with loads of bonuses. (BBC)

Secret Diary of a Call Girl

The Final Season



Anglo actress Billie Piper once played the frumpy sidekick Rose Tyler on the revamped *Doctor Who*. Upon leaving, she became the delectable Hannah in this sizzling UK romp. Witty nymph by day, high-priced escort by night, the series follows Hannah and her alter ego "Belle," as she ponders life, love and her mixed up relationships. This final set takes the series out with a bang—in the form of a steamy love triangle. (Showtime)

The L Word

The Complete Series



Hollywood lesbians. Steamy storylines. Absurd situations. And, hardly a dude to be found. What's not to love? *The L Word* is chock full of gratuitous

nudity, indecent behavior and far-fetched plotlines. And for the most part, it works a charm, except for the final season where it all begins to lose its flow. Either way, it's visually arresting stuff. (Showtime)

Torchwood

The Complete Series

To the uninitiated, *Torchwood* is a spinoff of *Doctor Who*, featuring guest character Captain Jack Harkness. Harkness and his secret operation track down and investigate aliens, monsters and other crazy phenomena. The thing that really separates this show from its contemporaries is its irreverence. Case in point: one episode features an alien sex addict who lays claim to various hosts, using their bodies to achieve deadly orgasms. Now, you can catch it all in sharp Blu-ray. (BBC)



The Office

The Complete UK Series

I've always preferred the original UK version of *The Office* to its US counterpart. While that series certainly has its charm, the original is far more off-the-wall, almost uncomfortably so, like when David Brent does his awkward, charity chicken dance. This new release contains both seasons, the holiday special, and missing footage that belongs in your library. (BBC)



Looney Tunes

Platinum Collection



When you've exhausted your tolerance for heavy dramas or your appetite for blood and guts, nothing beats classic cartoons to soothe weathered nerves, especially Looney Tunes. This numbered Blu-ray set has over 50 classic shorts featuring all of

your favorite smart-asses—Bugs, Daffy, Porky, Road Runner and others. (Warner Bros.)

The Big Lebowski

Blu-ray Book

With the success of *Pulp Fiction* during the '90s, the floodgates opened with indie-flavored films featuring "edgy" camera work, skewed storylines and all-too-clever dialog. *The Big Lebowski* was by far, one of the better ones. It had the Coen brothers, John Goodman, and... "The Dude." Now you can see it all in hi-def, with a glossy book, no less. (Universal)



Trigger



What happens when two riot grrrls reunite after years of bad blood and estrangement? We get two hours of loud, grunge-fueled rock and tedious, melodramatic reconciliation. But, *Trigger* has lots of soul, along with tight acting, a solid soundtrack, and a seamy, DIY feel. (Wolfe)

Big Love

The Complete Series



Lots of love. This racy cable series stars Bill Henrickson and his three wives, a community while keeping his extended family, it's wildly entertaining, sexy and that will keep you perched on the edge. Hmm, maybe I should consider

Scarface

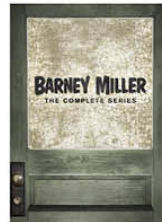


Scarface is the most influential gangster flick of the modern age and has become a pop culture powerhouse, touching future films, music and fashion. This debut Blu-ray edition presents Al Pacino's overkill performance and the whole bloody mess in superb hi-def, making for an ultra-violent viewing experience. (Universal)

Barney Miller

The Complete Series

The sleazy '70s produced tons and tons of cop shows to varying degrees of success. *Barney Miller* was one of the best of them. And, it was a comedy, no less. The show dealt with real-life, topical issues, rarely referenced violence, and relied heavily upon clever dialog to carry it through several seasons... in other words, it was certainly not your average TV show. (Shout! Factory)



It Takes A Thief

The Complete Series



This hip, '60s show followed the exploits of expert cat burglar Alexander Mundy. Once caught by the fuzz, rather than go to jail, he goes to work for the Feds, solving crimes of international espionage. While utterly campy and implausible, the show has a kitschy, *Austin Powers* quality to it, making it a really fun view. This groovy set comes complete with 18 discs. (E1)

Robotech

The Complete Series



Trekkies and fans of vintage Japanese anime should be swooning over this colorful little set. The space odyssey *Robotech* came to the US via syndication during the mid-'80s and would ignite a firestorm of interest in the genre. (A&E)

For questions, comments or something you'd like to see, drop me a line at Retrohead77@yahoo.com. See you next month, JK.