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December 30, 2011

DVD Splurge: December

by Piers Marchant

Some of this month's more arresting DVD releases.

Another Earth - BD Edition

The Skinny: One of the undervalued cinematic jewels of this past year, the unabashedly sci-fi premise has a mirror earth suddenly approaching our own, which gives one young woman a possible chance at redemption. It also features the break-out performance of star/co-writer Brit Marling, a brainy beauty you will be hearing a lot more of soon enough.

Studio: Fox

Linkage: Another Earth - BD Edition

Branded to Kill - Criterion BD Edition

The Skinny: A 1967 pop confection of failed Tokyo hitmen and boiled rice, Seijun Suzuki's over-the-top presentation and endlessly inventive storytelling ensures the film loses next to none of its luscious effect more than four decades later.

Studio: Criterion

Linkage: Branded to Kill - Criterion BD Edition

Justified: The Second Season

The Skinny: In all ways better and more gripping than the solid first season, FX's series -- based on a short story by Elmore Leonard -- finds the violent life of U.S. Marshall Raylan Givens and the increasingly intertwined criminal doings of Harlan County inexorably linked. A winning combination of good humor, gunfights and twistedly demented villains.

Studio: FX

Linkage: Justified: The Complete Second Season

Mildred Pierce: BD Edition

The Skinny: A brilliantly acerbic dramatic mini-series from HBO, the versatile Todd Haynes (who also directed *Velvet Goldmine* on this week's list) does yeoman work with the novel by James M. Cain, producing a wrenching portrait of a mother-daughter relationship gone horribly -- incredibly -- bad. Kate Winslet is phenomenal in the title role, and the entire production is first-rate. Just don't watch it on Mother's Day.

Studio: HBO

Linkage: Mildred Pierce: BD Edition

Portlandia: Season One - BD Edition

The Skinny: Believe it or not, Carrie Brownstein, the genius musician from Sleater-Kinney and, more recently, Wild Flag, is also an accomplished sketch writer and comedienne. Along with versatile SNL vet Fred Armisen, the duo skewer the lofty artistic pretensions and hipster aesthetic of their beloved city, while lovingly presenting it in all its diverse, politically progressive glory.

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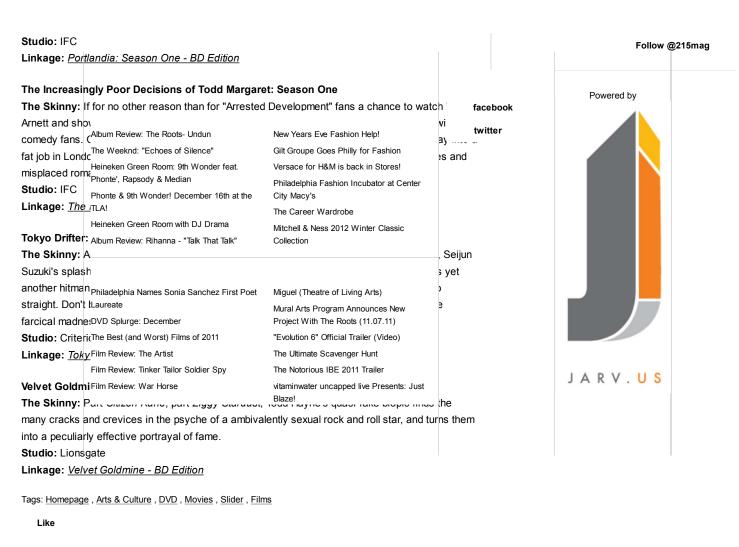
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