

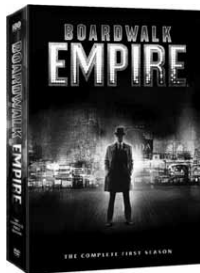
VIDIOTS

UPCOMING DVD RELEASES
AND REVIEWS

BY B. LOVE & JOHN B. MOORE

BOARDWALK EMPIRE: THE COMPLETE FIRST SEASON

All that hand-wringing about filling The Sopranos void is over. Created by Terrence Winter (a former writer/producer on The Sopranos) and starring Steve Buscemi (a Sopranos alum), the show is set in Atlantic City shortly after Prohibition outlaws alcohol throughout the country. Buscemi plays Enoch "Nucky" Thompson, Atlantic City's treasurer/bootlegger/criminal mastermind. In one of his best roles, Buscemi plays Nucky as an extremely likeable kingpin/womanizer who's far more nuanced than Tony Soprano. As if this pedigree weren't enough, Martin Scorsese executive produces and directed the first episode.



THE COMIC STRIP PRESENTS: THE COMPLETE COLLECTION

Unless you're a devout BBC addict, chances are you've never even heard of this expansive anthology of British humor filmed between 1982 and 2000. But fans of Britcoms such as The Young Ones and Absolutely Fabulous will want to take note, as the set features comedy legends such as Jennifer Saunders, Dawn French, Rick Mayall, Nigel Planer and Robbie Coltrane. Though not quite "complete"—their 2005 and 2011 specials are missing—the set includes 9 DVDs spanning 18 years from some of the UK's best. Extras include a retrospective, documentary specials and more.

the U.K. but now lives in a London fog in an apartment she shares with her late husband, Denis (Jim Broadbent). From here there are flashbacks to highlights of Thatcher's personal life and career, following a checklist rather than any sort of dramatic arc. At the time of their marriage in 1951, shortly after losing her first run for Parliament, Margaret is played by Alexandra Roach, a perfect match for Streep, while Harry Lloyd (Denis) looks more likely to age into Gary Oldman than Broadbent. Elected to Parliament in 1959, she goes through a makeover intended to remind Academy voters of The King's Speech, serves as prime minister from 1979 to 1990, and so on. The film tries so hard to be objective about one of the most controversial figures of the 20th century that it has upset people at both ends of the political spectrum.***

—Steve Warren

JOYFUL NOISE (PG-13)

This musical film follows a small-town church choir that wants to win a national gospel competition. When the director dies, the choir is given a choice: continue performing the same old way, or try a more contemporary kind of gospel. Queen Latifah plays Vi Rose, the assistant director who's passed over for the directorship. She's a single mom raising two kids—son Walter, who suffers from Asperger Syndrome, and daughter Olivia, a beautiful, talented teen ready to escape from her protective mom. GG Sparrow (Dolly Parton) is the director's widow, who pushes to update the choir's repertoire. Lastly comes Randy, GG's grandson, an incredible talent and relentless suitor of the rebellious Olivia. The story is simple, but the relationships between the characters make the movie, particularly the one between Vi Rose and Olivia. The soundtrack is rousing, if a bit cheesy, and occasionally touching. Though not a "church film"—there is some choice language—it conveys multiple messages and a moral. Part Glee, part drama, part sitcom, the film does a better job of storytelling than I had expected.

—Justin Patterson

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD 50TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION COLLECTOR'S SERIES

The 1962 film version of Harper Lee's classic novel has withstood the test of time as one of Hollywood's finest literary adaptations. Now Universal is releasing it on Blu-Ray in honor of its 50th anniversary, adding a book and digital copy to sweeten the deal. Gregory Peck's performance as Atticus Finch remains as definitive as ever, Robert Duvall shines as Boo Radley, and Elmer Bernstein's score is unforgettable. If you've never seen them before, the extras are revelatory, including interviews with producer Alan J. Pakula as well as the now grown-up kids who played Scout and Jim.

PORTLANDIA: SEASON ONE

Two things become clear within the first few minutes of this indie hip sketch show: Fred Armisen is far more funny than his gig on Saturday Night Live allows him to be and Carrie Brownstein, his partner on Portlandia (better known as singer/guitarist for Sleater-Kinney), is even funnier. From sketches about nitpicky diners requiring the pedigree of the local raised chicken they are about to eat to a laugh-out-loud skit featuring Aimee Mann reduced to being a maid for fans of hers, there is not a single bad episode in the entire first season. Swamp People: Season Two—The second season of this History Channel reality show follows the lives of several Cajun families who hunt gators in the Louisiana swamps, and pretty much prove just how wussy the rest of us are. One scene in particular, where a son has his mom remove bullet shrapnel from under his eye and arm using nothing more than a sewing needle, is enough to make you shut up about how "stressed out" you are about your own job. The show does a commendable job of showing the lifestyles of these folks on the bayou without any hint of exploitation.

MAN ON A LEDGE (PG-13)

It's one thing to release a blockbuster film in the middle of Oscar season, but it's a complete blow to the genre to deliver a mediocre copycat storyline. Judging this one by its movie poster, you're immediately interested in its star-studded cast of Elizabeth Banks, Sam Worthington, Ed Harris and Ed Burns. But when you pay close attention to the trailer, you'll understand why people are calling it, "Phone Booth on a Ledge." You're beaten over the head with predictable lines, forced humor and such a severe clash of good-cop-bad-cop/guilty-or-innocent morality that you end up not really caring if he jumps or not. And would the people of NYC really cheer for someone to end his life? I'll never say a bad word about Banks or Burns, but I can't help but wonder what they're doing in this script. There is a solid twist to the storyline, and, without offering too much of a spoiler, I can say it wasn't 100% predictable. For the last 30 minutes, I was genuinely interested, with a thudding heartbeat and edge-of-my-seat suspense. Unfortunately, the movie had gone on for an hour at that point, so I can't be sure how much of that anxiety was just anticipation for it to end...

—Jenni Williams

ONE FOR THE MONEY (PG-13)

Why is Katherine Heigl a movie star? An adequate actress who was fine on Grey's Anatomy, she hasn't made a decent movie since her breakthrough in Knocked Up. One for the Money, a gender-reversed virtual remake of last year's The Bounty Hunter, is as generic as its title. It's based on the first of Janet Evanovich's 18-and-counting Stephanie Plum novels. Stephanie is an older (but hardly more mature) Nancy Drew who lives in Trenton among people with exaggerated Jersey Shore accents (Heigl's comes and goes). Divorced and unemployed, Stephanie takes a job as a bounty hunter/skip tracer/recovery agent for her bail bondsman cousin. Her first target is Joe Morelli (Jason O'Mara), a cop who was arrested for killing a drug dealer while off duty and jumped bail to prove his innocence. That's ridiculous on

so many levels, but just an excuse for a lot of killing and sexual tension. Although she once hit him with a car and broke his leg, Stephanie is seeking further revenge because Joe took her virginity in high school and never called again. There's also potential romance with bounty hunter Ranger (Daniel Sunjata), who trains Stephanie for the job, but that goes nowhere. One For The Money was done as a TV movie a decade ago. This version wouldn't even pass muster in that medium.

—Steve Warren

RED TAILS (PG-13)

Box Office Mojo says the budget for this historic tale was just south of \$60 million, making it the costliest film with a mostly black cast since, umm, we can remember. But before we go some diatribe about the lack of African American-starred action pictures, let's focus on this one spotlighting the courageous, largely overlooked efforts of the Tuskegee Airmen during World War II. From the onset, you see what co-producer George Lucas and director Anthony Hemingway's intentions are—show "Easy" (Nate Parker), "Joker" (Elijah Kelley), "Junior" (Tristan Wilds) and the other fighters as heroes fighting Nazis in 1944 Italy, not soldiers warring against racism. Sure, there are obvious injustices from the government, scuffles amongst white American officers and even one powerful N-word instance, but this movie's mission isn't to make social statements. The film's not particularly concerned about a moving dialogue either. Phrasing is cookie cutter. Soldiers come off too cool for the turbulent times. Thankfully, when the pilots take to the air, battles are fluid, sharp scenes Call of Duty wishes it had. We just wish we could say that more about instances on the ground. Overall, we're just not sure Red Tails gives Hollywood enough of a battle plan for making good African American-fueled action movies in the future.

—DeMarco Williams

A SEPARATION (PG-13)

Easily my favorite foreign film of the past year, A Separation is a masterpiece of familial drama from Iranian auteur Asghar Farhadi. At the outset, Simin is filing for divorce from her husband, Nader, because he refuses to leave Iran with her and their teenage daughter, Terme. But the story is really about the turmoil of Nader and Terme's lives in her absence, which centers around taking care of his Alzheimer-afflicted father. When Simin goes back to live with her parents, Nader hires a family acquaintance to help care for the elderly man while he's at work. But from that point on things spiral out of control, as the father's health takes a turn for the worse, the caretaker mistreats him due to a secret she's been hiding, and her husband proves to be an out-of-control ticking time bomb. Farhadi wisely lets the dynamic story unfold naturally and the actors never overplay their roles, lending the film an oddly appealing voyeuristic quality. It's like watching a tragic train wreck unfold in slow motion, where the only question isn't whether or not it will crash, but how much devastating damage will ultimately be done. It's too bad the film is in subtitles Farsi, because it deserves a much broader audience than it will inevitably attract.

—B. Love

TINKER TAILOR SOLDIER SPY (R)

John le Carre wrote some of the best spy novels of the 20th century, but it's time to come in from the Cold War. TTSS became an acclaimed miniseries in 1979, starring Sir Alec Guinness. Gary Oldman channels him in this bigscreen version, and while it may get Oldman his first Oscar nomination, it's no match for his work in Sid and Nancy or a number of other films. Unlike Mission: Impossible, which has kept up with the times and combines crowd-pleasing action with serviceable plots, TTSS is stubbornly cerebral yet tells its story confusingly—four characters who turn out to be important are given no distinguishing characteristics and flashes of flashbacks are more disorienting than enlightening. As le Carre's frequent protagonist George Smiley, Oldman is forced into retirement from MI6 with his boss (John Hurt) when a 1973 mission in Hungary goes awry, but is secretly brought back (Ghost Protocol?) a year later to try to determine the identity of a mole in the upper echelon. Though impeccably filmed and acted,

this story of British Intelligence is a challenge for those of ordinary American intelligence, and Smiley's game of whack-a-mole isn't worth the effort it takes to follow it.

—Steve Warren

THE WOMAN IN BLACK (PG-13)

A lot of people have been eagerly awaiting this film, wanting to see Daniel Radcliffe in his first post-Potter role. He plays Arthur Kipps, an attorney struggling to keep his position and take care of his son in the wake of his wife's death. He's sent to Eel Marsh House, a faded manor on the English coast, to sort through the papers of a woman whose family is deceased and whose will cannot be located. The townspeople look at him with suspicion and fear, but he doesn't know why. When he finds himself stuck at the house overnight, he begins to fear for the town, his son and his life. This film is an old-fashioned "things that go bump in the night" kind of horror film, telling a disturbing story in an unsettling location and using tried-and-true tricks to play the audience like a violin. Radcliffe does quite well with what he's given: The part was not written with a lot of depth, but he does a great job of conveying the desperation and protectiveness that define the character. Though sometimes predictable, this is a very entertaining film for those who want to raise their heart rates.

—Justin Patterson

YOUNG ADULT (R)

Charlize Theron is so much better than Diablo Cody's screenplay deserves, I kept thinking as I watched how terrible Young Adult would have been if they'd cast, say, Jennifer Aniston or Katherine Heigl in it. Theron plays Mavis, a ghost writer of young adult novels who's on an emotional par with her readers. She returns to her Minnesota hometown with the goal of reclaiming her old boyfriend, Buddy (Patrick Wilson), even though he has a wife (Elizabeth Reaser) and new baby. For some reason Matt (Patton Oswalt), who was invisible to Mavis in high school, becomes her best friend and confidant. He remains crippled from an attack 20 years before by some guys who thought he was gay (he wasn't), so Mavis remembers him as "The Hate Crime Guy." Most actresses would try to make you feel some sympathy for Mavis but Theron is happy to let you agree with the person who calls her a "psychotic prom queen bitch." She's clearly delusional for thinking she can walk back into Buddy's life and walk out with him, but you believe her, even if you don't want her to succeed. The character she most resembles is Billy Bob Thornton's Bad Santa, but this movie isn't as good.

—Steve Warren

YOUNG GOETHE IN LOVE (N/R)

Lovers of European period romances should enjoy this mash-up of Austen, Rostand, Wedekind and of course Johann Goethe. It's hard to reconcile the sensitive writer with the buffoonish 23-year-old (Alexander Fehling) we're introduced to as he totally blows his oral exam for a doctorate. His backup plan to sell an original play fares no better and his stern father, telling him the free ride is over, arranges an internship for Johann as a law clerk in a provincial town. There we discover that people "met cute" even in 1772, as Lotte Buff (Miriam Stein) bumps into Johann at a fair. As the oldest child of a large, poor family (her home life resembles Fiona Gallagher's in Shameless, but with more kids), Lotte's expected to marry well to save their house. Her father introduces her to her arranged fiancé (Moritz Bleibtreu) just as she's falling in love with Johann, their "spring awakening" taking place in the summer. Like Cyrano, Johann puts words in the mouth of his rival to woo Lotte. He also befriends co-worker Wilhelm Jerusalem (Volker Bruch), who also falls in love; but what seems like a silly, second-banana romance ends more tragically. Since Goethe is a born writer, he's able to weave all the heartbreak into a novel, "The Sorrows of Young Werther"; and the rest is history. Director Philipp Stölzl fails to maintain a consistent tone but the film is probably as true to the details of Goethe's life as his semi-autobiographical novel was.***

—Steve Warren