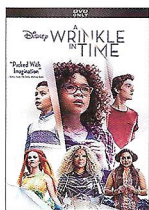


with a well-meaning if naive visiting author-turned-instructor named Olivia (Marina Foï). "South of France" in this case does not mean sun-dappled orchards or glamorous Riviera beaches; rather the setting is La Ciotat, once a thriving shipbuilding city now reduced to servicing yachts in the global economy. Meeting with the racially and culturally diverse kids during afternoons, Olivia takes a gimmicky approach to the writing workshop, prompting students to collaborate on a collectively-written murder mystery that draws upon their personal experiences. She's then surprised at the high degree of anger and conflict over class, race, and opportunities that the assignment evokes, particularly in Antoine (Matthieu Lucci), a disaffected loner given to watching right-wing videos and carrying a handgun. Antoine and Olivia develop a grudging curiosity about one another, each for their own complicated reasons. An often powerful film with an unexpected but appropriate end that is a beauty, this is recommended. (T. Keogh)

A Wrinkle in Time

★★★1/2

Disney, 115 min., PG, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99

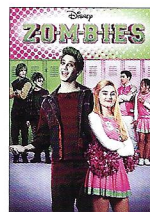


For many years, Madeline L'Engle's beloved 1962 sci-fi fantasy was considered un-filmable due to its complex story steeped in religion and spirituality. Nevertheless, Disney backed director Ava DuVernay on this \$100 million-plus project revolving around rebellious, biracial Meg Murry (Storm Reid), whose adolescent angst is increased by the disappearance of her physicist father, Dr. Alex Murry (Chris Pine). The underlying goal is for Meg to let go of her emotional baggage, grow more confident, and accept herself as she is, faults and all. So Meg embarks on a cosmic journey, ostensibly searching for her father who went missing after he discovered a breakthrough method of traveling great distances through space using a tesseract. Meg is accompanied on this quest by her precocious younger brother (Deric McCabe) and an admiring, supportive classmate (Levi Miller). They are led by three ethereal beings: capricious Mrs. Whatsit (Reese Witherspoon), quotation-spouting Mrs. Who (Mindy Kaling), and colossal, all-powerful Mrs. Which (Oprah Winfrey). When they visit verdant Uriel, populated by talking flowers, Mrs. Whatsit transforms into a green dragon, taking them on a galactic ride on her cabbage-leaf-like wings. Eventually, resilient Meg must match wits with The IT—a giant, disembodied brain (voiced by David Oyelowo). *A Wrinkle in Time* features bold feminism and progressive multiculturalism, but it is ultimately burdened by a diffuse and often confusing storyline, along

with too many garish, overbearing visuals bordering on the psychedelic. A strong optional purchase. (S. Granger)

Zombies ★★★

Disney, 94 min., not rated, DVD: \$26.99

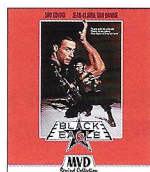


At last, a Disney zombie movie! Filmmaker Paul Hoen's very cute, spirited made-for-TV production is a razzle-dazzle musical that also targets intolerance. Milo Manheim stars as Zed, a ceaseless optimist who is part of a zombie community that has overcome its brain-eating tendencies through technology. Finally allowed to attend a public high school with humans, Zed and his zombie friends bump up against rampant discrimination and fear, forced to take classes in a basement room, and causing panic when seen in hallways. Things change when Zed makes the school's football team and becomes a valuable player, but even more significant is his star-crossed romance with Addison (Meg Donnelly), a human girl whose sole goal has been to make the cheerleading squad captained by her anti-zombie cousin, Bucky (Trevor Tordjman). Manheim and Donnelly have great chemistry, and the film's high-octane music and dance numbers are thrilling. Delivering a strong but never strident message about seeing beyond superficial differences and accepting others, this is recommended. (T. Keogh)

Classic Films

Black Eagle ★★★1/2

MVD Visual, 93 min., R, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99



This 1987 B-movie international action flick stars Jean-Claude Van Damme at an early point in his career when he was sometimes cast as bad guys. Strikingly physical, Van Damme plays Andrei, a Cold War Russian enforcer for a Soviet military cabal, hunting missile-guidance technology off the island of Malta from a downed American F-111 (the plane appears to be sunk in about two fathoms of water). Coerced into thwarting the schemes of the nasty Reds is Hawaiian-born U.S. commando Ken (Japanese action star Shō Kosugi). Very colorful Mediterranean locations appear to good effect under director Eric Karson, and while the storyline tends to skew towards the choppy side, it gets things done. Presented in both the theatrical version and an extended cut, extras include deleted scenes, interviews, and behind-the-scenes featurettes (in one, Karson claims that Van Damme and Kosugi were especially competitive, and that their climactic onscreen

brawl truly threatened to get out of hand). A strong optional purchase. (C. Cassidy)

The Black Scorpion

★★★1/2

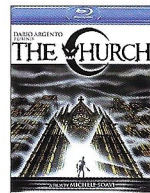
Warner, 88 min., not rated, Blu-ray: \$21.99



Produced on a low budget and set in the aftermath of a volcanic eruption, this 1957 giant insect movie follows the model of earlier (and better) films like 1954's *Them!*, here featuring an invasion of enormous prehistoric scorpions unleashed from an underground cavern. Stiff, stalwart Richard Denning stars as an American geologist who arrives with a Mexican colleague (Carlos Múzquiz) to study volcanic activity and winds up fighting the rampaging monsters. The dialogue is flat, lazy, and full of dry exposition and explanations, while the direction by Edward Ludwig is plodding, and Denning is more one-dimensional than usual as he goes about the obligatory romance with costar Mara Corday. What makes this film memorable is the special-effects work by stop-motion pioneer Willis O'Brien (creator of the original *King Kong*), who helped design and animate the creatures. Even on the film's low budget, the giant scorpion attacks are dynamic and dramatic, including an attack on a telephone lineman, a train wreck with a small army of scorpions swarming over the cars to hunt the survivors for food, and a final showdown between the Mexican army and the scorpion queen. A minor cult film that may appeal to fans of giant monster movies but will likely be a slog for everyone else, *The Black Scorpion* makes its Blu-ray debut with extras including an interview with special-effects-master Ray Harryhausen, a clip of Harryhausen's stop-motion dinosaurs from Irwin Allen's 1956 documentary *The Animal World*, and "Las Vegas Monster and Beetle-men" test footage found after *Black Scorpion* visual effects animator Pete Peterson's death. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmaker)

The Church ★★★1/2

Scorpion, 102 min., in Italian w/English subtitles, R, Blu-ray: \$24.95



Produced and co-written by horror legend Dario Argento and directed by his talented protégé Michele Soavi, this 1989 Italian horror film was originally developed as a second sequel to 1985's Argento-scripted *Demons* before Soavi set it apart with a distinctive backstory. The premise is similar—a group of people trapped in an enclosed building are attacked by demons who possess the bodies of their victims—with the major difference being the setting: a medieval Gothic cathedral built on the site of a massacre carried out by the Knights Templar in the Middle Ages. *The Church* starts slow