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Sep 07 2010

## [DVDs for 09/07/10 – A Solitary Man, a Teardrop Diamond and Apache Rifles](#)

**Solitary Man** (Anchor Bay) – Add Michael Douglas to the long list of actors who simply get more interesting as they age farther out of leading man roles. For this role, he loses the self-effacing humor of the charming tongue-in-cheek cockiness he brought to **Romancing the Stone** for the droll comedy of desperation in an once-celebrated businessman and happy husband and father who tossed in the towel of responsibility and commitment for a life of immediate gratification and paid the price: divorce, distrust and financial ruin. His Ben Kalmen is all smooth charm and charismatic confidence and more that a little vain, all of which Douglas captures without professional vanity or theatrical distance on his part. Even in Ben's most pathetic moments and disappointing acts, Douglas never drops the charm or the confidence, his greed or lust or simple arrogance pumping up beyond caring when confronted with his own sleaze.



Michael Douglas shares his philosophy with the next generation


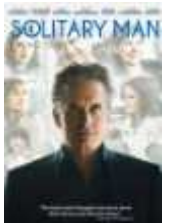


Susan Sarandon co-stars as his ex-wife, with whom he is on astoundingly good terms since repeatedly cheating on her before their divorce, and I wish Danny DeVito had more to do as an old college buddy who remained behind to run the family coffee house and grill. Jesse Eisenberg does his overeager pup thing as Ben's student chaperone on a campus visit and for a while the dynamic recalls his breakthrough role in **Roger Dodger**, with Douglas handing out the dubious advice on dating and

sexual politics, but in this case he's just another slice of youth that Ben uses to convince himself he's still young at heart while simultaneously building his ego as the charmer of an elder statesman holding court. Mary-Louise Parker, Jenna Fischer and Imogen Poots are some of the other friends, family members and lovers he doesn't fail to disappoint. There's nothing particularly deep in the film's insights to male vanity and mortality, but Douglas makes it a riveting character study of a man spending his life seducing everyone he meets so he doesn't have to face himself.

Co-directors Brian Koppleman and David Levien are joined by fellow director/screenwriter Douglas McGrath, who has a small role in the film, for a fine commentary track. More than a guest, McGrath serves as a kind of host and moderator, pointing out details, offering compliments and asking questions to draw out their inspirations and intentions in the various scenes. The accompanying 11-minute "Alone in a Crowd: Solitary Man," however, is a conventional (if well-made) promotional featurette where the cast and crew offer the usual paeans to the greatness of their fellow actors and collaborators.

**The Loss of a Teardrop Diamond** (Screen Media) – Fisher Willow (Bryce Dallas Howard) is a continental socialite turned social pariah in the rarified society of twenties-era Memphis, thanks to a disgraced daddy and a self-destructive rebellious streak in this overly-earnest production of a recently rediscovered Tennessee Williams original screenplay, which feels a few drafts short of satisfaction. Educated in Europe and used to speaking her mind, she bounces with cheery energy that gets suffocated by the oppressive constraints of local norms of social acceptance. Howard works hard to bring life to the intelligence and independence of this worldly young woman in a provincial culture but there simply isn't much dimension to her character, and even less to Jimmy Dobyne (Chris Evans), the dirt-poor grandson of a Governor that she essentially hires as her escort to the season's debutante balls and social events. Evans is stiffly stalwart and blandly idealistic as the straight arrow in this stifling culture of small-mindedness and hypocrisy covered over with surface manners and fashion accessories. In this place, Jimmy is just another prop, though he's also supposed to be the object of desire for these repressed phonies.

The words drip with affectation as do the actors and Jodie Mankell's direction is dipped in southern gothic honey and glazed over with period sprinkles. The themes and settings are classic Williams, almost a pastiche, but the characters lack the full-blooded passion and depth of the great Williams characters and the film compounds the weaknesses with a recreation that feels more affectation than lived life. It is pretty to look at, however, and the Ellen Burstyn is quite fine as a former free spirit laid low by a stroke who sees a kindred soul in Howard and asks for a favor that she doesn't with her own family. Both the DVD and the Blu-ray editions include a slim behind-the-scenes featurette, a 13-minute interview with director Jodie Markell and two deleted scenes.

 <p><a href="#">Solitary Man [Blu-ray]</a> Michael Douglas, S... <b>Best Price \$23.96</b> or Buy New \$23.99 <a href="#">Buy amazon.com from</a></p> <p><a href="#">Privacy Information</a></p>	 <p><a href="#">Solitary Man</a> Michael Douglas, S... <b>Best Price \$16.99</b> or Buy New \$17.99 <a href="#">Buy amazon.com from</a></p> <p><a href="#">Privacy Information</a></p>	 <p><a href="#">The Loss of a Teardrop Diamond [Blu-...</a> Bryce Dallas Howar... <b>Best Price \$16.25</b> or Buy New \$21.49 <a href="#">Buy amazon.com from</a></p> <p><a href="#">Privacy Information</a></p>	 <p><a href="#">Loss Of A Teardrop Diamond</a> Bryce Dallas Howar... <b>Best Price \$17.81</b> or Buy New \$17.99 <a href="#">Buy amazon.com from</a></p> <p><a href="#">Privacy Information</a></p>
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**Apache Rifles** (VCI) – Hollywood journeyman director William Witney never got much respect or critical attention in a career that spanned over a hundred movies and serials and even more TV episodes until he was championed by Quentin Tarantino. This cut-rate 1964 western, starring Audie Murphy as Indian-hating cavalry officer Captain Jeff Stanton, assigned to an outpost near an Apache reservation, shows off Witney's talent for creating dynamic dramas with highly-charged conflicts on a budget. Stanton is itching to take on the Indians but finds himself in an unexpected position when, after arguing with a Christian missionary (Linda Lawson) he mistakenly assumes is a captive of the Apaches, watches white settlers beat and torture Red Hawk (Michael Dante), the proud son of the tribal chief, and then whip up all the racist anger into a full-on war so they can get to the gold they've discovered on the reservation.









The contradictions are inherent in the script but Witney gives them a turbulence and edge missing from many bigger budget productions. Dante does Michael Ansara duty as a fierce (and justifiably furious) chief who stands up to the abuses heaped on his people and L.Q. Jones is the most virulent of the hate-spewing miners who leads an attack on a missionary school filled with unarmed women and children. The VCI disc offers the film at the 16×9 widescreen ratio, which looks just film, and a generally good looking master. Includes the 23-minute "Please, Hold the Spaghetti," an overview of the producer, director, writer and stars of the film featuring Western historian and B-movie screenwriter C. Courtney Joyner, with brief comments by co-star Michael Dante and Chris Langley of the Museum of Lone Pine Film History, both of whom are interviewed separately in separate (and brief) featurettes.

**Night Of The Living Dead: Reanimated** (MVD) – George Romero's 1968 classic is re-envisioned in animated form by over 150 artists and animators in a monster mash-up of styles: a little primitive CGI, a little stop motion with dolls or plasticine figures, puppets, paintings, pixilated photography and a lot of comic-book style panels and splash pages, all of cut together to the original soundtrack of the film. A few effective images and sequences aside, it's more fan stunt rather than artistic tribute, a visual mess made with affection. Features multiple commentary tracks, interviews, panel discussions, deleted and alternate scenes and behind-the-scenes shorts among the supplements.

I skipped **MacGruber** (Universal), even though [MSN's Glenn Kenny was among the few critics](#) who actually liked the film. And I review **Playing For Time** (Olive Films) [on the blog here](#).

Also new this week is **John Rabe** (Strand), directed by Florian Gallenberger and starring Ulrich Tukur as the Nazi businessman in 1937 China who saved over 200,000 Chinese civilians in the Nanking Massacre perpetrated by the invading Japanese army, plus **That Evening Sun** (Image) with Hal Holbrook, the Slovenian thriller **A Call Girl** (Film Movement), and releases of two older British productions: **Four in the Morning** (VCI) with Dame Judy Dench and **Hell is Sold Out** (VCI) with Herbert Lom and Richard Attenborough.

For TV on DVD for the week, [see my wrap-up here](#). For the rest of the highlights, visit my weekly column, which goes live every Tuesday on [MSN Entertainment](#).

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