

instead were wide fissures between floes and unstable surfaces. We aren't asked to take Copeland's word for it, however, because we're also introduced to Inuit hunters who've been required to expand their range and search harder for fewer polar bears, seals and walrus. In fact, "Into the Cold" would have benefitted from more threats to Copeland and Heger, including those from starving bears. They make it look too easy. When one of them falls into the water, we empathize with his ordeal but aren't allowed to witness how he was able to avoid hyperthermia.

Considering that the promotional material for "Into the Cold" is quick to point out that Copeland used a HD camera to capture the adventure, it's surprising that the documentary isn't being released in Blu-ray. Vast empty icescapes look brilliant in hi-def, with or without bears. This isn't said to dissuade anyone from watching "Into the Cold," only to discourage heightened expectations. It says important things about the risks facing our environment and the grit of two determined young men who demand perfection from themselves and, in this case, achieve it. – *Gary Dretzka*

The Phantom Father

We've seen plenty of movies about first- and second-generation Americans going back to the Old Country – a term not frequently used these days – to uncover familial roots buried by war, poverty, forced relocation, tyranny and ambition. At one time, the Old Country was pretty much limited to Europe, from whose ports most immigrants departed before and immediately after the world wars. That generalization no longer applies, of course. "The Phantom Father" describes one Jewish-American man's quest to learn more about his father and grandfather, who left a much-disputed corner of Romania long before it was taken over first by the Soviet Union, then Germany, the U.S.S.R., again, and finally split between the Ukraine and Romania. After arriving in Chicago's West Side, Professor Robert Traum's relatives became involved in organized crime, which was one way the city's Jewish immigrants got by between the wars. Traum (Marcelle Iures) is nearing retirement age and only carries a few letters, photographs and a single name that might connect his family to anyone left in Bucovina. The name belongs to an elderly traveling projectionist, Sami, who once ran the local cinema but had his business taken away from him by the city's corrupt mayor. In league with Ukrainian gangsters, he wants to turn the property into a multipurpose mall.

Traum is an affable fellow, who doesn't speak Romanian and isn't familiar with the locals' susceptibility to rumors, ancient prejudices, superstitions and gossip, especially in the rural villages. On one of his stops, Sami's name rings a bell with an expert in Jewish history in eastern Romania. She's heard of the roving projectionist and volunteers to join the professor in his quest, if only to get away from her nagging boyfriend, Alex (Mimi Branesco). It takes her a while to connect with Traum on a personal level and, when she does, it's because of a common affection for Supertramp's "Breakfast in America." Even before they reach Bucovina, Traum senses that he's entered an entirely different world than the one he left in Bucharest. Tanya and, later, Sami convince him that it's better to go with the flow, rather than wait for the locals to adjust to him. Viewers, too, are advised to adjust their expectations about recent Romanian cinema and simply take Lucian Georgescu's disparate conceits as they come. "The Phantom Father" evolves from black dramedy to buddy film and, finally, romantic fantasy. Filmed largely in and around Sibiu and Braila, the mountainous terrain offers much to enjoy, besides the story. "Phantom Father" was adapted from a story by Barry Gifford, who makes a short appearance in the film, while Sami is based on an actual travelling projectionist and keeper to the keys of the local synagogue he met while travelling through Bucovina with Georgescu. – *Gary Dretzka*

Gate of Hell: Criterion Collection: Blu-ray

No less an expert than Martin Scorsese has called Teinosuke Kinugasa's 1953 drama "Gate of Hell" one of the 10 most beautiful color films ever made. It won Grand Prize at Cannes; Oscars for Best Foreign Language Film and Best Costume Design; and several top critics' awards. Although it features less action than most other feudal-period movies from Japan, "Gate of Hell" tells a story that could be traced back to the ancient Greek theater. After being released in VHS in 1999, it's only now being given a proper re-launch in completely restored DVD and Blu-ray editions. And, yes, it's an inarguably beautiful movie. "Gate of Hell" tells the story of a 12th Century samurai, who, with the help of a lady-in-waiting, caused a diversion that allowed the royal family time to escape from a rebellion. The coup fails and the lord grants the samurai a single request, which is to marry the woman who joined him in the ruse. Unfortunately, the woman already is married to one of the lord's most-trusted guards, and neither of them is eager to end the marriage. When the samurai insists on her hand, as promised, the seeds of tragedy are sewn. It's simple and well told. The most impressive thing about "Gate of Hell" on Blu-ray, though, is color cinematography, which is so brilliant that it looks as if the images might have just exited the vats of chemicals at Technicolor. The costumes, especially, benefit from the upgrade. They're worth the price of a rental, alone. The Blu-ray adds only a booklet with an essay by film historian Stephen Prince. – *Gary Dretzka*

Hong Kong Confidential

Anyone expecting to find in "Hong Kong Confidential" the slam-bang action of a Jackie Chan or Jet Li martial-arts epic will be sorely disappointed. Neither is the movie populated with corrupt cops and gangsters. Instead, it is the kind of enigmatic, bi-cultural romance one might have expected from Jim Jarmusch, and not because the protagonist's hair is bleached white. Paul is an Englishman with no set roots or apparent lack of money. He's just arrived in Hong Kong to study massage therapy, something he's done in several other Asian cities. He doesn't, however, reveal everything to his instructors, who treat him as if he were just another *gringo* goofball. Neither are they aware that he understands enough Chinese to know what they're saying about him. A curious young woman arrives at the school within days of Paul, but, unlike him, she is pushy and headstrong. Jasmin is from the mainland and has some tangential connection with the middle-age co-owner, Amaya (Kaori Momoi). "Hong Kong Confidential" originally went by the more apt title of "Amaya," because it's her character that affects the most change during the course of the movie and is most influenced by the new arrivals. Their outlooks on life, love and identity inspire her to look beyond her cramped middle-class world and passionless marriage. Three other primary characters cross paths in "Hong Kong Confidential," and their stories also are compelling. Latvian writer/director Maris Martinson might be the busiest filmmaker in the Baltic States, as, since the split from the U.S.S.R., he has kept busy writing, directing and producing movies, television series, music videos and commercials. The DVD includes a video with a song from the movie. – *Gary Dretzka*

The Sorcerer and the White Snake: Blu-ray

Woochi the Demon Slayer

Deadball: Blu-ray

I'd love to see the reactions on the faces of American kids corralled into watching "The Sorcerer and the White Snake" in a cozy screening room. A vast departure from the Japanese anime that children here began to embrace in the 1980s, Tony Ching Siu-tung's CGI-heavy fantasy tickles the imagination by combining an ancient Chinese folk tale, Buddhist teachings, supernatural creatures and over-the-top action. Jet Li stars as a sorcerer monk, Fahai, who, upon entering the gates of a magical new city, warns his enchanted-dog companion, "Don't believe everything you see." Fahai is an expert in seeing through the disguises of demons and engaging them in combat. Here, he has his work cut for him. Early on, we're introduced to a sibling pair of 1,000-year-old snake demons — one white, one green, both quite long — who have quite different feelings about the humans in their midst. After the white snake, Susu (Eva Huang), rescues the gentle herbalist Xu Xian (Raymond Lam) from drowning, she takes human form and they fall in love. She even is able to use her mystical knowledge to help Xu Xian prepare potions. Unable to leave well enough alone, Fahai causes a revolt by identifying the demons and attempting to banish them. It provides the film's primary action sequences, but they are less interesting than the backgrounds and CGI work. "Sorcerer and the White Snake" goes in some other bizarre directions, as well, introducing animal characters from the Disney catalogue and songs in unexpected places. Adults likely would find the wild mix of styles and characters too far-fetched, but kids, I think, will see something wondrous in the fantasy. For once, the English dubbing is pretty good, too. (I think I heard the ubiquitous voice of Patrick Warburton in there somewhere.)

Conversely, "Woochi the Demon Slayer" is a wildly inventive time-travel fantasy from Korea, also based on a folk tale, that should appeal most to those viewers who can't get their fill of *wuxia* action. Woochi is a brash Tao wizard from the Chosun Dynasty whose lack of discipline seriously impinges on his master's ability to protect a magical pipe from evil goblins. Without it, the goblins could take back their kingdom and spread mayhem. Woochi is blamed for the death of his master at the