

# THE DVD LASER DISC NEWSLETTER

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## Two very angry lizards, in 4K

A blood-curdling ‘Thump! Thump! Thump!’ followed by an otherworldly roar, opens the wonderful Criterion Collection two-platter 4K Blu-ray release of Ishiro Honda 1954 Toho production, **Godzilla** (UPC#715515305112, \$50). With the minimal presence of narrative, the 96-minute film—not the American version, which is included in the supplementary features on the standard Blu-ray accompanying the 4K platter, but the original Japanese version, released previously by Criterion on Blu-ray (Feb 12)—is constructed as a poem, a requiem evoking the horrors that mankind creates for itself with both war and technological development. Indeed, it is also an examination of how myths and folktales are created, taking a truly devastating event and shifting its blame to monsters and the supernatural to grieve, forgive and accept its occurrence. Whipped up by Akira Ifukube stormy musical score, the film bombards the viewer like sheets of rain with ever-increasing horrors of destruction, interspersed with periods of calm reflection as the survivors gather and a scientist and his family attempt to interpret what has happened. Another scientist—an iconically dashing but morose young man with a patch over one eye from a likely wartime injury—must undergo an entire continuum of regret and guilt to develop and unleash the only weapon powerful enough to destroy the rampaging creature, which was originally loosened from the bowels of the earth by atomic testing. Even the antiquity of the squared, full screen black-and-white image, which comes across as old but unblemished, enhances the dark, fairy tale feeling the film wants to convey (counterintuitively, some shots of the monster are downright adorable) with the precision of its rendering, while the monophonic sound, emboldened by the crispness that the 4K deliver enables, arrests the viewer in its grip of terror, excitement and the sometimes quaint and sometimes soaring beauty of nostalgia. Ostensibly entertaining with the shots of the dinosaur-like monster rising from the sea, stomping through buildings and melting antenna towers with its atomic breath as jet planes shoot rockets around it (they don’t seem to be able to actually hit it with one), the film is actually a beautifully crafted elegy, with steadily flowing surges and pauses of emotion, and it is the 4K presentation, with a much greater reach into the mysteries of a viewer’s interior, that allows the metaphorical beauty of the poem to engage the soul.

Fortunately, Criterion has retained from the previous Blu-ray release the wonderful pop-up Godzilla head when you open the jacket. The image on the 4K presentation is smoother, cleaner and sharper than the image on the standard Blu-ray, the latter a direct replication of Criterion’s previous release. The monophonic sound is also sheerer and more solid. There are optional English subtitles. The 4K presentation also retains the David Kalat commentary, in which he explained at the time that the presentation of the film was as good as it was ever going to get although, ironically, it is even (just slightly, but still palpably) better now.

The supplement on the standard BD includes the clever 81-minute American version from 1956 memorably starring an inserted Raymond Burr, **Godzilla, King of the Monsters**, as well as Kalat’s additional commentary for that version, along with a 51-minute interview with Ifukube; 23 minutes of interviews with stars Akira Takarada and Haruo Nakajima; a 30-minute interview with effects technicians Yoshio Irie and Eizo Kaimai; a 14-minute appreciation of the film by critic Tadao Sato; a 9-minute deconstruction of some of the film’s visual effects; a fascinating 10-minute piece about a fishing vessel exposed to atomic testing that directly inspired the film; and a trailer.

The ‘Thump! Thump! Thump!’ followed by the roar, is reprised at the very end of the credit scroll in Takashi Yamazaki’s 2023 Toho remake, **Godzilla Minus One**, and it is in glorious Dolby Atmos on the two-platter 4K Blu-ray, Toho being so proud of the film’s worldwide boxoffice success and Oscar win for Best Visual Effects that the company brought the disc to America itself as a Toho Visual Entertainment release (UPC#191329268810, \$50). The title, **Godzilla Minus One**, is very catchy and marketable, and was a smart move, underscoring that the film begins earlier than the first movie does, i.e., before ‘year zero.’ Spoken, the title in Japanese sounds exactly the same as how it is written in English, but the actual title card, also appearing at the end of the film and on the original posters, is G-1.0, which could alternately be interpreted as, ‘[Godzilla] hyphen [version]1.0.’ The remake begins at the end of World War II, even before post-War atomic testing, although the bulk of it is set immediately after those tests, as the monstrous and very nasty-looking lizard (nothing adorable about this one, but he is

cool as all get out) is roused from contentment and goes on a rampage. The film, however, is also a legitimate drama, about PTSD and Japan’s efforts to begin rebuilding after the war, something Godzilla is most unhelpful with. At one point the lead character, a failed kamikaze pilot played by Ryunosuke Kamiki, even admits that everything happening could well be just his own death dream, although that does not stop him from ultimately overcoming his psychosis and defeating the threat, at least for the time being. Running a full 125 minutes, the film is not a mindless series of destruction sequences. Those sequences are there, certainly, and they are fantastic, especially with the Atmos sound and the incredibly well staged effects, which are heart-racing with the precision of the 4K image delivery. But there is also a very lovely and drawn out romance, as Kamiki’s character, returning from the war, forms a family with an orphaned child and a streetwise woman in the rubble of firebombed Tokyo. The film does not so much require patience as it requires a maturity to appreciate the breaths it takes and what Toho has accomplished in bringing the realism of its fantasies to the screen. Unlike all of the other remakes and sequels in Japan and in Hollywood, **Minus One** is truly an equal in spiritual resonance to the original film. When the battleships are steaming toward their final confrontation with the monster and Ifukube’s music kicks in with a full Atmos delivery, you pinch yourself to make sure you aren’t the one dreaming and that, thanks to 4K Blu-rays and modern special effects, motion pictures are finally able to bring the excitement of the imagined thrills of childhood to the reality of your home viewing experience, with class every thundering step of the way.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The film defaults to Japanese with optional English, French and Spanish subtitles, but there is an alternate English language track in Dolby TrueHD, and the dubbing isn’t bad at all.

The second platter in the set is a standard Blu-ray containing an almost exhausting number of special features, including a trailer promoting the film’s Oscar win and its many boxoffice achievements; a great 65-minute collection of behind-the-scenes footage from throughout the production showing what happened pretty much every day during the primary shoot; 68 minutes of enjoyable promotional appearances by Yamazaki and the cast (among other things, a truck with Godzilla’s head on it was driven to different spots in Japan); another wonderful 65 minutes of Yamazaki appearing before live audiences in rewarding conversations with other Japanese monster movie directors; an interesting 19 minutes without dialog that show how the special effects were blended into the final composite in a number of scenes; and a fairly good 22-minute promotional featurette that celebrates the series tradition and also looks at the production effort.

## Folie à joyeux

Boxoffice bombs are not all alike. Some are genuinely bad, mistake-ridden productions that were only let out the door because too much had been invested to terminate them by the point it was recognized that they were not going to succeed. Others, however, are really great movies that just did not appeal to an audience large enough to justify their expense. Todd Phillips’s absolutely wonderful **Joker Folie à Deux**—which has an idiomatic French meaning that references the romance between the film’s two primary characters, but could just as easily refer to the foolishness of doing a sequel—is not for everybody. It’s just for really cool people, the ones who rebel even against the rebels.

Joaquin Phoenix reprises his Oscar-winning role from Phillips’s first **Joker** movie (Feb 20), incarcerated and awaiting trail for murder. Lady Gaga is a prison groupie and the drama plays out with inserted musical numbers that include a bit of dancing and a lot of singing—mostly older songs, like the ones Gaga sang with Tony Bennett—that express the feelings of the characters. The performances are outstanding, and if you like the songs, then the whole movie is spellbinding. Two previous films attempted the same thing—Herbert Ross’s **Pennies from Heaven** (Nov 04) and Keith Gordon’s **The Singing Detective** had inspired moments, but the arc their protagonists underwent was downhill all the way, which was a bummer. Woody Allen’s **Everybody Says I Love You** (Dec 97) is more joyful, but lacks the nihilism that makes **Folie à Deux** so uniquely delightful (like Allen’s film, the songs were recorded live within the scenes). Since Phoenix’s character begins at the bottom, there is nowhere to go but up, and every song pulls you momentarily out of the swamp before dropping you back into it again.

### Folie (Continued)

Released as a 4K *UltraHD* Blu-ray by WB Warner Bros. DC and SDS Studio Distribution Services (UPC#883929818303, \$50), there may never have been a narrative that matches so closely the reception a film containing that narrative has received. Not wishing to spoil anything, we won't go into too much detail, but the manner in which other characters become disillusioned with Phoenix's character, because his actions do not live up to their fantasies, is almost identical to the disillusion felt by audiences who initially flocked to see the movie. The film essentially has two locations, the prison and the courtroom. While there are interior adventures, there is no exterior adventure. The anarchy that the first film celebrated, and that seems to have been replicated in the social tone of 2024, is turned upon itself, which could very well be a glimpse of the future and all the more reason to embrace the movie and its music, and to leave the real world to its own devices.

The picture has a variety of aspect ratios and always looks crisp and accurately detailed. This is especially rewarding for the two stars, who are dressed down just about as far as they can be, and thereby rely upon the precision of the image transfer to endear them to you. You expect Phoenix to be amazing, even when he tackles the songs, but Gaga is with him every step of the way, and for her, the songs are second nature. The Dolby Atmos sound immerses the viewer in the film's world and sells every environment. There is an audio track that describes the action in American ("As Arthur mouths the lyrics to himself, Lea puts the flame to the matchbox and tosses it onto the piano. She adds some pages of sheet music and her cigarette to the verging fire, then returns to her seat, her shadow appearing briefly on the screen as she crosses in front of the projector."), a track that describes the action in British ("Arthur is transfixed by the movie. Lea sets fire to the whole book of matches and tosses it into the open grand piano along with some sheet music. She leaves it to burn and walks back to her seat beside Arthur."), a track that describes the action in German, alternate French, Spanish, Italian and German audio tracks and nine subtitling options, including English. Also featured are 71 minutes of excellent promotional and production featurettes that convey a very complete impression of how the film came together.

### 8½ in 4K

Most recently, we reviewed Federico Fellini's 1963 masterwork, **8½**, as part of the wonderful Criterion Collection Blu-ray compendium, **Essential Fellini** (Feb 24). With one glaring flaw, the standard Blu-ray included with 4K Blu-ray on Criterion's latest presentation of the film (UPC#715515306119, \$50), has the same supplements and the exact same picture and sound transfers, which were a decent improvement over Criterion's earlier releases of the film. The only difference on the standard Blu-ray is that, unlike the **Essential Fellini** version, the film does not start up where it left off if playback is terminated (the **Essential** BD wanted to bring us back to where we left off almost a year ago...). Fortunately, the 4K presentation does provide that essential feature and also, fortunately, the presentation is even sharper and more satisfying than what the standard BD could manage. Since the standard BD already looks and sounds so good, there is not much room for obvious improvement on the black-and-white program, which is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1, but what the 4K adds is what sets the entire film apart from most normal movies. Every moment within every scene is emotionally and textually complex, and the 4K presentation is all the more exciting because it is making you aware of touches, from the improvements in the shades and shadows of white and dark in the backgrounds to the singular creases or quivers on the faces of the actors. There is less improvement to the monophonic soundtrack, but that is because the soundtrack was substantially improved for the previous release. It is solid and free of distortion, preserving nuances in the dialog and delivering Nino Rota's musical score in all of its glory. The 139-minute film—Marcello Mastroianni is a movie director apprehensively preparing to shoot his next feature while taking a partial respite at a spa as he thinks about all of the women in his life and tries to juggle the ones that are present—has so much going on that it is highly repeatable entertainment, and the 4K presentation is so clear and resolute that the temptation to just watch the film over and over all day long is highly tempting.

The film is in Italian with optional English subtitles. Both platters have Criterion's commentary track, featuring intercut reflections by authorities on Fellini and the film. The standard BD platter carries over all of the special features from Criterion's previous releases, including a 7-minute introduction by Terry Gilliam; *Fellini A Director's Notebook*, a 1969 profile running 51 minutes and broadcast on NBC that includes explorations of projects he abandoned (including, in still-frame, a letter sent to the show's producer by Fellini explaining what he wanted to accomplish with the documentary); a 50-minute retrospective piece that includes material about an abandoned final scene; a wonderful 1993 47-minute German profile of Rota; an amazing 27-minute interview with Sandra Milo (who was essentially playing herself in the film); a 17-minute interview with production assistant Lina Wertmüller; a 17-minute piece on the film's cinematography; a trailer, and an extensive collection of captioned production photos in still frame.

### Legends in 4K

Jim Harrison's story that served as the basis for Edward Zwick's 1994 Columbia TriStar production, **Legends of the Fall**, is identified as a novella, but it originally appeared, as is stated in the closing credits, in a magazine. The story is structured, however, as a full fledged novel would be, a generational adventure and melodrama anchored in Montana but stretching to several corners of the globe, and that is how Harrison's invention plays in the hands of Zwick, as if it were a novel. The film only lasts 132 minutes, but you want to reserve a day to watch it, especially on the new Sony Pictures Home Entertainment 4K *UltraHD 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary* Blu-ray (UPC#043396-637672, \$31), because it is a complete motion picture experience, one that would befit the phrase, "they don't make them like they used to," except that even when Zwick made it, they weren't making them like that any more. It is as much an experience as it is a movie, presenting a half-dozen characters and then growing with them as the seasons pass by and world events occur that touch their lives, despite the remoteness of the ranch. Beginning in the late Nineteenth Century but taking place mostly in the early Twentieth Century, the

film is about three brothers played as adults by Brad Pitt, Aidan Quinn and Henry Thomas, and their father, played by Anthony Hopkins. All four are deeply changed by the arrival of the fiancée of Thomas's character, played by Julia Ormond, and what happens after that, being the heart of the drama, we will leave to be discovered. The important thing is that the narrative is perfectly balanced, never lingering on a situation, but never rushing through an important moment of time. Many films have been based upon many novels, but it is rare that the incremental measures of story and feeling are parceled out as carefully as they are in **Legends of the Fall**, and it is that skillful execution that supersedes whatever lack of intellectual depth might be attributed to the emotional conflicts and melodramatic events being depicted. What you see is lives lived, in happiness and heartbreak, in serenity and in war. In just a bit over 2 hours, you experience the lifetimes of the characters. With the transcendent smoothness that the 4K processing brings to the film's image, which is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1, the 4K BD eliminates any distraction one might have to becoming totally absorbed in the film's world. It is not just an experience worth having, but worth savoring.

The Dolby Atmos audio track is never forceful, but it has a satisfying dimensionality that readily supports the motion picture experience that the disc is conveying. We reviewed a lovely *Special Edition* DVD in Nov 00, which was transfixing in its day, although the improvements brought by the 4K BD to the John Toll's Oscar-winning cinematography bring out greater color detail and stronger textures. The audio is also richer and deeper. There is an alternate French audio track and optional English, French and Spanish subtitles. Carried over from the DVD are two terrific commentaries, one featuring Zwick and Pitt and another with Toll and production designer Lilly Kilvert. Between them, an excellent sense of what went into the production is readily conveyed. Also featured from the DVD is a trailer, 11 minutes of production featurettes, and 5 minutes of wonderful, sadly abandoned deleted scenes, although Zwick's reasons for removing them, explained on an alternate commentary, are totally valid.

### The power of the press

American films tend to beatify the press, more so now, perhaps, than in the days of Billy Wilder. These days, reporters are the heroes whose investigations right wrongs, or who travel through a civil war unswayed by the passion of choosing sides in order to get an objective story. Other countries, however, are less naive. A clean-shaven Gian Maria Volonté plays the editor of a right wing newspaper in Marco Bellocchio's outstanding 1972 crime thriller, **Slap the Monster on Page One** (*Sbatti il mostro in prima pagina*), a Radiance Films Blu-ray (UPC#761037167457, \$40). As an election approaches, left wing students riot in the streets of Milan and toss a Molotov cocktail through the paper's windows. Volonté's character publicizes the attack, as a way of gaining sympathy from readers. When a teenage girl is discovered raped and murdered in a wooded area, he and his reporters uncover clues to the murderer that link directly to one of the students in the protest. And so he plays that up too, and when his one reporter with a conscience keeps digging and finds that there is perhaps another suspect, he squashes the story. Running 87 minutes, the film is taut and brisk. The story plays out like a giallo murder mystery, but in an atmosphere steeped in political immediacy (a character in a position of power explains at one point, "The police repress, the judiciary punishes and the press makes people think the way we want them to."). Laura Betti, who played the lover of Donald Sutherland's character in **1900**, has a terrific supporting part as the suspect's betrayer, and her scenes with Volonté are mesmerizing. There is one scene where Volonté's character berates his own wife for her gullibility that seems overplayed, but otherwise the film is tone perfect in capturing the realities of the press (Volonté's character sends a reporter to cover a left wing meeting, and is disappointed to learn that the reporter was not accosted and beaten for being there) and how those realities are so intrinsic to political power, while at the same time entertaining the viewer with gialli-style suspense. The last shot may also seem overplayed, but it is so perfect anyway (sewage begins running over the murder site) that it is well worth applauding.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The film opens with battered documentary footage of an actual protest, but then transitions almost seamlessly to Bellocchio's footage, which still maintains the somber and sometimes frantic tone of the film's atmosphere, but is consistently spotless and sharp in its presentation. It's a great transfer that plops you right into the era while reminding you that in many ways, nothing has changed. There is a fantastic musical score by Nicola Piovani crisply pulsing on the solid monophonic audio track. The film is in Italian with optional English subtitles and comes with a great 20-minute retrospective interview with Bellocchio explaining how he inherited the project (Volonté didn't get along with the initial director) and infused it with a stronger political flavor, and how politics has informed most of his films; an excellent 25-minute interview with Italian historian Mario Sesti, who delivers a concise summary of Italian politics in the Seventies, noting how perfectly the film captures to tone of its era, and also provides a succinct analysis of the film's unique strengths (including the exceptional nature of Volonté's performance); and a 10-minute appreciation by Alex Cox, who comes right out and states his comparisons between the film and Rupert Murdoch's journalism. All three speakers, incidentally, cite **Investigation of a Citizen above Suspicion** (Jan 14) by way of comparison. The two films would make a terrific double bill.

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### Exquisite train thriller

Ever since we first saw the Warner Bros. DVD release of Anthony Mann's 1951 MGM period thriller, **The Tall Target** (Jan 10), we have been stopping people on the streets to tell them they should see the movie. Well, at least we recommend it to everyone we know. Now Warner has issued the film as a *Warner WB Archive Collection* Blu-ray (UPC#840418319772, \$22), and we have to start shouting from the rooftops again. This is a fantastic film and you just have to see it. It is set on a train, so that the momentum of the train's journey constantly embellishes the suspense. Dick Powell is a New York policeman (based upon an historical figure ironically named John Kennedy) who has uncovered an assassination plot on the eve of Abraham Lincoln's inauguration ceremony. The conspirators are on the train, traveling from New York to Washington, and Powell's character is there as well, trying to uncover who they are and prevent their scheme from coming to fruition. As the opening title card points out, the dramatically embellished events occurred only 90 years before the film was released—people who lived through it could conceivably have attended the film. The period was still fresh in everyone's minds, and in addition to the 78-minute film's crackerjack excitement, the era details are fantastic. The arguments in the train's sitting room for and against Lincoln's election and the South's secession have yet to fade from the public's consciousness, even today, with realistic concerns—about potential war and how it will affect lives and business—trumping the more abstract arguments about right and wrong. The hardware, the costumes, and the wonderful steam engines fill every frame of the film with historical immediacy. When the train arrives in Baltimore, it must be unhooked from the engine and drawn through town by horses, because residents had complained about the train's smoke spoiling the laundry hanging on their clotheslines, and an ordinance had been passed. In addition to Powell, Adolphe Menjou, Marshall Thompson and, most importantly, Ruby Dee, are featured.

The DVD had a somewhat bland transfer, but the Blu-ray is exquisite. The squared full screen image is sharp and spotless from beginning to end, with finely detailed contrasts. Because the picture is so crisp and the production designs are so conscientious, just seeing the train billowing its steam in the opening at the station quickens one's heart. The monophonic sound is also substantially stronger than on the DVD, adding to the film's many pleasures and underscoring the ever present clackety-clack of impending threat. Along with a trailer, there is a 7-minute color 1951 Tom and Jerry cartoon entitled *Jerry's Cousin* (the mouse's tough guy relative abuses the cat), a 6-minute 1951 Tom and Jerry cartoon entitled *Slicked-up Pup* (the cat mistakenly engulfs the son of a bulldog in mud, and later covers the pup with ink, while chasing the mouse; abuse to the cat ensues), and a fascinating 30-minute 1949 radio broadcast of an intriguing ABC program entitled *Mr. President*—the episodes dramatized lesser known aspects in the lives of the American presidents—featuring Edward Arnold, with this particular episode covering the same incidents that inspired **Tall Target**, from the target's perspective.

### New wave wuxia

The demise of the villain in the climactic fight of the 1980 Golden Harvest production, **The Sword**, released on Blu-ray by Eureka! (UPC#760137167846, \$40), is easily one of the most spectacular movie deaths we've ever seen. We stopped the film immediately (the film was basically over at that point, anyway), backed up a little ways, and then stepped through the nineteen edits a second time, frame by frame. It was still amazing, even when the magic is removed by its deconstruction (during several frames if you look to the right, you can see hand pulling a wire of some sort).

Glossy and elliptical, it takes a good half-hour for the 89-minute film, directed by Patrick Tam, to really get going. There are some athletic and ferocious fights early on, but they are a bit maddening. The editing hides as much as it shows, so that one swordsman comes at the other from several different directions before there is a reverse shot, as if the attacker were actually teleporting from one position in the room to the next. Fortunately, it is all worth one's patience. Adam Cheng is the hero, a young but accomplished swordsman benignly seeking out the land's greatest swordsman so he can test his skills. The greatest swordsman, however, is retired and basically in hiding. The villain also wants to find the old man and kidnaps the man's daughter, who is rescued by the hero. This ultimately gives the hero the in to meet the father. There are darker complications and emotional conflicts to the narrative (Cheng's character is not as wholesome as he looks), but that is the gist of it, and once everything becomes clear, and you become comfortable with how the acrobatic swordfights are being staged, then the film becomes wholly captivating. And really, the disc is worth it anyway just for that final fight—something to show your friends so you can watch their reactions.

Norman Chu, Bonnie Ngai and JoJo Chan co-star. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The cinematography is soft at times, and there is a natural grain, but the film has a glossy Eighties look that conveys a spare elegance. The shots are superbly composed, often rhyming in subtle ways (one character in the beginning of a conversation is on the far left, but when the conversation concludes, the other character is in that position). With the colors coming across in such detailed freshness and accuracy, the film looks terrific right off the bat, and slowly but surely, the plot catches up to the classy quality established by the images. The monophonic sound is okay but the music also takes some getting used to, wavering between garish Eighties electronic dance music and flowering Asian instrumentals. Once again, the better part of it wins out. The film defaults to Cantonese, but there is also an alternate Mandarin track and an English track, with optional English subtitles. Along with two commentaries and a trailer, there is an 18-minute appreciation of the film and Tam's artistry, and a 13-minute overview of the backgrounds of the cast and the crew.

Hong Kong film expert Frank Djeng provides one commentary track, going over the backgrounds of the cast and the crew in more detail, and discussing the history of the film, which was an important Hong Kong New Wave restart to period swordplay features. He suggests that Tam was duly enamored with the French New Wave and with Andrei Tarkovsky, and he points out moments that demonstrate that influence. He also analyzes the film's depiction of forms of love and other themes, and explains why the

film seemed so new and exciting when it first appeared (and still does). "Now we come to this spectacular final fight here. Now, you have to realize how amazing this was for audiences at that time because rival TV networks would not allow their actors to appear at the other network. So, you would never see Adam Chang and Norman Chu together in the same scene, in the same shot in a TV series. Yet here, you know, we have two of the greatest television swordsmen actors in history appearing together in this duel to the death, which is rather spectacular. It is really quite a feat to see this."

The second commentary features Hong Kong film enthusiasts Mike Leeder and Ame Venema, who provide a more conversational take on the film and the artists. While Djeng supplies more raw information, the Leeder and Venema track is more entertaining. Even during the second half, where they still react to major sequences in the film but also go off on a number of digressions about the different Hong Kong New Waves, their own experiences meeting various Hong Kong luminaries, and other topics not directly related to the film at hand, their talk is still engaging.

### More than meets the eye, or ear

Meditation does not require one to empty one's mind—it requires that the mind be opened, so thoughts, ideas and emotions can flow through freely. It is often suggested that in order to do so, the person meditating concentrate upon a single physical point, whether it is a red dot on the forehead of a statue or the sound of a running stream, because this can remove, through isolation, physical impediments that prevent the release of the metaphysical. If done successfully, the knots of emotion created by stress unravel, while creativity and contentment fill the spaces they leaves behind. Because film presents artificial movement and sound, it can function as a meditative focal point, and that was one of the purposes of some early experimental cinema and animation. With the advent of home video in the Eighties, there even developed an entire, marketable genre known as 'image music,' which combined uncomplicated, innocuous depictions of nature and such with repetitive or unthreatening instrumentation. Other artists, such as Godfrey Reggio, were more aggressive, but his collaborations with Philip Glass had a specific political purpose and intentionally guided the viewer's thoughts. Very few programs exist in cinema that are truly full length opportunities for meditation, but one such program, Neo Sora's 2023 recital film, **Ryuichi Sakamoto | Opus**, has been released on Blu-ray by Janus Films and The Criterion Channel (UPC#715515305815, \$30).

Sakamoto, who passed away shortly after completing his work on the film, was a composer perhaps best known, at least in these circles, for contributing to the motion picture scores for **The Last Emperor**, **The Sheltering Sky** and **Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence**. The 103-minute film is simply a depiction of him sitting at a Yamaha grand piano playing a selection of his compositions, including passages from those three films as well as other, free standing works. The piano is set up in some sort of small recital hall, with acoustical foam squares on the one wall viewable behind him. Sakamoto's music often calls to mind Claude Debussy, but without an obsession for portraiture. Individually, the pieces seem unremarkable, but vaguely intriguing. He does obstruct the piano wires for one composition, using bolts and clips to alter the sound, but otherwise he is content to explore calm variations on presented chords, using the foot pedals to shorten or lengthen their lingering aural aromas. It is not improvisational but neither is it compact and simplistic.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. Like the keys on the piano, the program is in black and white. There is even a prevalence in Sora's image compositions for white tones in the upper portion of the screen, including Sakamoto's mane of cropped white hair, and darker tones below, with the keys suggesting a median in the transition. Most of the lines in the film are perpendicular—the squares on the wall, the poles holding the microphones, and there are a few angled lines, including the microphones themselves and the piano lid. Sakamoto often sits in the middle, his body accommodated by the structured surroundings. Sora explores different parts of the Sakamoto—like many older pianists, his hands are skeletal; he also has a pepper stubble on his upper lip and chin—as well as drifting across the piano and looking at other objects in the environment—there is even a close up of the acoustical material on the wall. The picture is consistently sharp and variations in shadows are precisely rendered.

The bass and treble within the music offer another dichotomy. Sakamoto's music has a consistent, relaxed tempo throughout the performance, something closer to breathing than to pulse, a tempo that is maintained by the camera movements and editing. With microphones placed around the room, the Dolby Atmos sound captures every detail, including at times, Sakamoto's own breathing. He also makes mistakes, and stops and restarts, apologizing as he does so. That dialog is in Japanese with optional English subtitles. Along with a trailer, there is good 16-minute interview with Sora (Sakamoto's son) and cinematographer Bill Kirstein, talking about the circumstances surrounding the production (it was known that Sakamoto was dying), the pains they took to not make noises while they were shooting, and some of the visual strategies they employed.

The film's final title card presents a tribute to Sakamoto that further explores its dichotomies, explaining that existence is brief but art lives on, something that is underscored by the Blu-ray. It is as the film progresses that the true power of Sakamoto's compositions and performance comes forth. There is enough variation, as there is with Sora's images, to hold attention, but not enough to break concentration through the excitement of an unexpected moment. Hence, the film systematically clears the mind and allows the viewer to behold not just the beauty of Sakamoto's art or of Sora's, but the beauty of existence itself, and how, while life may be finite, their work can put one in touch with the infinite.

## The Rise and Fall of Peter Bogdanovich

Peter Bogdanovich was the cat's meow so far as Hollywood was concerned when he made the 1973 black-and-white comedic and nostalgic Paramount drama, **Paper Moon**, which has been released as a lovely two-platter 4K Blu-ray by Paramount and The Criterion Collection (UPC#715515305518, \$50). He could seemingly do no wrong, shifting with ease from serious drama to wild slapstick comedy with his two previous films, **The Last Picture Show** and **What's Up, Doc?**, while packing houses at the boxoffice. **Paper Moon** was also a big hit, and drew upon both of those previous films for inspiration. Based upon a picaresque novel by Joe David Brown, it is set in the Great Depression and not really all that far from **The Last Picture Show**'s north Texas locations in Kansas and Missouri, enabling the black-and-white cinematography to evoke John Ford's visions of the Dust Bowl in **The Grapes of Wrath**. One talent that set Bogdanovich apart in those early features was his concentration. Exceptional attention is paid to every aspect of the film, including production design, performances, atmosphere, timing, music cues and the minutest details during every step of the filmmaking process. Not only is that how he manages to shift so smoothly between humor and pathos in **Paper Moon**, but how he managed to elicit a genuinely thorough, tone-perfect Oscar-winning performance from the pre-adolescent Tatum O'Neal. Ryan O'Neal is a small time confidence artist working the Depression era landscape and Tatum is the orphaned daughter of a woman he once knew. Unwilling to admit that there is a kinship between them, he still allows her to tag along on some pretty flimsy excuses, and they become more successful scamming people as a team than he was working by himself. Running 102 minutes, the film is a series of episodic adventures—the centerpiece is memorably a sequence involving a hoochie coochie girl played by Madeline Kahn who supplants the youngster in the man's attentions for a while—as Bogdanovich joyfully savors each and every setting, each and every confidence scheme, and the very natural and very rich back-and-forth between the two O'Neals (all of the performances in the film have an organic, artifice-free feeling to them). By the end of the decade, Hollywood took away the keys to his car. He still had at least one masterpiece in him (what else can **Noises Off!** be called?) but he was never again allowed unlimited resources to see his vision through, and had to be content making smaller dramas, comedies and telefilms to sustain his art. With **Paper Moon**, however, he was still at the very top of his game.

Presented with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1, the 4K presentation is appreciably brighter and sharper than the version presented on the standard Blu-ray also contained in the set. The presentation on the standard version doesn't look bad, but the 4K image is not only more appealing, but draws you deeper into the film and its world. There is less of a difference on the monophonic audio track between the two presentations, which Bogdanovich fills with radio programs that in all likelihood brought him delights as a child. There are optional English subtitles. The standard Blu-ray has a trailer; a very good 9-minute talk by Bogdanovich, lifted from the Paramount LD, explaining his approach to directing the film, filled with outtakes and other interesting materials; a marvelous 11-minute color clip from *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson* with Bogdanovich and the O'Neals (Tatum is a little quiet at first, but by the end she rules the piece); a 25-minute appreciation of the film, going over Bogdanovich's skills and then deconstructing significant scenes within the film; a very interesting 18-minute interview with Polly Platt about finding the film's locations and dressing the cast and the sets; a 16-minute piece narrated by producer Frank Marshall depicting the initial location footage (including a map identifying the locations that were chosen) and comparing it to the footage used in the film; and 35 minutes of retrospective documentaries that are pretty much just an expansion of the introduction but are still informative.

Bogdanovich also supplies an excellent commentary track on both platters, which was recorded in 2003. He shares tales about the personalities of the cast and the crew and he goes into extensive detail about the staging of each scene, consistently explains his rationale for every choice. "She misses him, which you can tell from this way she turns in this shot. This was one of the only times in the picture I didn't know how to shoot this scene in the room, and I actually called it half a day and said, 'To hell with it. Let's go home, I can't figure out how to shoot it.' And then I realized it all had to be in one shot, that moving into the close-up of her. And that's what we did. But I couldn't figure it out. Orson Welles had told me, 'If you don't know how to shoot it, there must be something wrong with the scene.' It was too elaborate, so I just played it all."

It was Welles who suggested to Bogdanovich that he next make the 1974 **Daisy Miller**, and we have always felt that the suggestion was a prank on Welles's part. It was certainly the beginning of the end so far as Bogdanovich's reputation was concerned (on the other hand, Bogdanovich may have gotten his revenge by providing a woefully insipid voiceover narration to Welles's otherwise delightful *The Other Side of the Wind*, long after Welles passed away). Based upon the Henry James story from a script by the normally reliable Frederic Raphael, Paramount seemed to have been looking for a companion to the excitement it thought it would be generating with **The Great Gatsby**, which came out just two months earlier. The film, which is available from Paramount and Kino Lorber Incorporated as a *KL Studio Classics* Blu-ray (UPC#738329266547, \$25), is an artistic accomplishment up to a point (it would make a terrific PBS telefilm), but the heroine, the title character played by Cybill Shepherd, contracts a disease and dies entirely off screen, followed by her funeral, so that the last time you see her (not counting the end credit reprise of her image) is substantially before the conclusion of the movie. That may work in literature, but it is not something that the boxoffice loves, or even likes, since it leaves audiences with what is known in the industry as 'bad word of mouth.' For home video, however, the 91-minute film can be a little easier to take, especially if you know what to expect. Set in the late Nineteenth Century in Switzerland and Rome, the décor is lovely and the costumes are appealing. Bary Brown is an American student finishing his studies and Shepherd's character is traveling with her mother. Both are wealthy but relatively isolated from European society, and they become friends. In Rome, however, Shepherd's character meets an

Italian gigolo, played by Duilio Del Prete, distancing herself from Brown's character while the rest of their 'Americans abroad' circle distance themselves from her. Shepherd talks a mile a minute throughout the film and Bogdanovich applies everything he learned from Welles and Howard Hawks to the dialog sequences, which are breathless and are blocked with occasional bursts of energy and even humor. But the film still plays like long, unbroken paragraphs. The emotional shifts are subtle, but middling, and lead to an alienating conclusion. Technically, the story can be read as a condemnation of American superficiality, the lack of both aesthetic vision and cultural heritage, but Martin Scorsese attempted much the same thing with **The Age of Innocence**, and even though he did a significantly better job of it, it is still considered a sidebar to his career as a whole. Cloris Leachman, Eileen Brennan, and Mildred Natwick co-star.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The transfer is not all that impressive. The colors are fresh, which is great for the locations and the costumes, but there are more stray speckles than decorum normally allows, contrasts are weak, losing details in the darker portions of the screen, and there is quite a bit of grain regardless of the original intentions of the cinematography. The monophonic sound is adequate and there are optional English subtitles. Identified as an 'Introduction,' there is a very good and personal 13-minute talk about the production by Bogdanovich that definitely should not be watched until after one views the film. In addition to a trailer, there is also a 10-minute reminiscence from Shepherd, who has different memories about how the project was instigated than Bogdanovich shares and talks about the film and her experiences making it. "I had to wear a corset. Have you ever had to wear a corset? I don't wish it on anybody."

There is a very good commentary track with Bogdanovich biographer, Peter Tonguetto, who deconstructs scenes from the film but also talks a lot about Bogdanovich's background, skill set and career as a whole. "Peter was the only major filmmaker of that period in America who consciously sought to associate himself with the older generation of directors."

Bogdanovich also provides a good commentary track as he did on **Paper Moon**, going over the details of how he shot each scene, and the lengths they had to go to in order to shoot on location without letting the Twentieth Century slip in. Nevertheless, he was still accused of not being in touch with the era. "The fact that Cybill talks quickly and very American, because she's in these beautiful clothes, it was assumed by some people, some critics and some audiences, that she was being anachronistic, but that was in fact not true. The truth is, she was being the way a girl would have been. If you took her and put her in a western of this time period, which is 1876, in America, of course, nobody would have a problem with it. It's just putting her in Europe, people thought, well, she's being Cybill. As Orson Welles said, when I asked him about this, he said, well, Cybill, of course, was born to play this part because it's very much like Cybill was—flirtatious and playful and a little shocking at times. It was very much like Cybill. That's why she liked the part." He also is emphatic that Shepherd's line in the film, "Did you ever see anything so cool?" is taken verbatim from James.

As Tonguetto underscores, one of Bogdanovich's greatest legacies was not so much as a filmmaker, but as a film historian, although he managed to use his success as a filmmaker to leverage his standing and access with the older directors, and he always tried to share everything he learned. "The problem with movies that use close-ups all the time is you can't make a point any more because you're in close-up right from the beginning. That was the good thing about the classic technique of filmmaking, because close-ups were saved for important moments. Television, because of the small screen, made the close-up very common—talking heads—and so it infected movies, too, so the close-up is no longer an effective device."

During a funeral scene, he points out, "We had a fire going over, where they were burning leaves. We put it in so that you would have that effect, which I borrowed from Mr. Ford, who borrowed it from Mr. Griffith."

And he summarizes his relationship with the film succinctly. "I think from a career and commercial point of view it was probably a mistake to make **Daisy Miller**, but from an artistic point of view I think it was valiant. I'm very, very proud of it, and I'm glad we made it. It's certainly one of my best pictures."

In contrast to the morose **Daisy Miller**, Bogdanovich's 1975 **At Long Last Love** is an outright celebration of American superficiality, but American audiences did not buy into that, either. The film's production values are all on the screen and the movie looks gorgeous, particularly on the very nice 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment Blu-ray (UPC#024543884828). The film is essentially fun enough to provide guilty pleasures to those who savor the same Thirties films that Bogdanovich savors, or to those who just like seeing movie stars in nice clothing singing and dancing around a lot. The expense of its production, however, did not justify the exclusiveness of its attractions, which in Hollywood is the greatest sin of all. Set after the Crash but a couple of years before **Paper Moon**, Shepherd stars with Burt Reynolds, Kahn, Del Prete, Brennan and John Hillerman, playing two couples and their secondary companions who meet and exchange partners, only to exchange again and, well, while the levels of stardom suggest how the characters should be coupled up, the 123-minute film concludes with a touch of cynicism, leaving the resolution open ended. The production designs are genuinely exciting—they are not exclusively black and white, but that is what dominates a number of settings, with the costumes matching the décor, contrasted, among other things, with shades of money green in one sequence. The real star of the film, however, is the plethora of nearly constant songs, all written by Cole Porter and retaining their original Thirties lyrics and topical references. Porter's dazzling command of inventive lyrics and his timeless mastery of appealing musical compositions are magnified by the showcase they have been given. Reynolds and Shepherd gamely step through their numbers (Shepherd's rendition of *I Get a Kick Out of You* is something only a genuine actress could accomplish), Kahn and Del Prete do most of the real work and Brennan and Hillerman steal the show, especially with their rendition of *But In the Morning, No*, which might well be the only memorable number in the entire film, title song included.

The picture is presented with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. The color transfer looks bright and fresh, with accurate fleshtones, and goes a long way toward removing at least some of the resistance one might have to the proceedings. Grain is present at times, but not unduly so, and the source material is free of wear. The audio track is monaural, a purposeful callback to the films of the past, but it is still bright and strong, even though it lacks the reverberation one longs for. There is an audio track that holds just the orchestral score, even during the songs, and there are optional English subtitles.

In 1976, Bogdanovich had his third strike, the loving but not particularly funny comedy about the start of the silent film business, *Nickelodeon* (May 09), and when it failed at the boxoffice, it would be 3 years before he made another film, his budgets never again as open pocketed as they had been during that first precipitous slide on the roller coaster of success.

#### 4K Saddles

Since it is not just in stereo, but in Dolby Atmos, there is no escape from the campfire and beans scene on the WB SDS Studio Distribution Services 4K Blu-ray release of Mel Brooks's 1974 Warner Bros. production, **Blazing Saddles** (UPC#88-3929824359, \$34). The noises surround you and you are just glad the Dolby people haven't developed a similar Smell-o-vision process. Brooks's breakthrough comedy lampooning westerns and assaulting contemporary sensibilities—the 'N' word gets used more often than in the collected films of Quentin Tarantino, combined—is a worthy candidate for 4K playback. No matter where you look on the widescreen image, which has an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, something funny is happening, from the railroad workers not really doing anything with their picks and shovels to the pie fight in the broken fourth wall of the Warner commissary. The sharpness and the lovely, smooth color transfer enhances your awareness of the details not just in the activities in the background, but with the primary players. Harvey Korman and Slim Pickens deliver wonderful comedic performances, yes, but what is even more delightful is how well (and unheralded) they play off of one another. Their timing with each other is exquisite, and with the accuracy of the film's presentation, you are more aware of the collaboration or, at least, more aware of its resultant laughs.

Following the plot device Brooks used in **The Producers**, Cleavon Little is a railroad worker that Korman's character picks to be sheriff of a town he wants to control, because he figures the people would rather leave than have a black guy as sheriff. The plan backfires. Gene Wilder is a drunk in the jail that Little's character inherits with the job, but he sobers up when he sees how competent Little's character is, and turns out to be a faster-than-lightening gunfighter. Little's part was originally meant for Richard Pryor, who was nixed by Warner because of his drug use, but he was still heavily involved in the preparations for the role and the dialog, and it seems very likely that his subsequent collaborations with Wilder stemmed from the gestations of **Blazing Saddles**. In any case, the film has a ton of talented comedians, all given the freedom to exaggerate and otherwise amplify their humorous instincts, including Madeline Kahn, Brooks, Alex Karras, Dom DeLuise, David Huddleston, John Hilleman, Burton Gilliam (who had previously appeared in **Paper Moon** along with Kahn and Hilleman) and many more. Running 93 minutes, the film has a stronger narrative than many of Brooks's later movies, which is an important facet in its success, but it is also jam packed with gags both verbal and visual, and with the 4K presentation, each joke has a greater chance of hitting its target in your funny bone.

In a few interior scenes, fleshtones have a kind of olive shade to them, but it is not a consistent anomaly and otherwise everything looks bright and natural. Campfire scene aside, John Morris's energetically orchestrated musical score benefits the most from the Atmos surround effects, but there are also crowd voices and other directional pleasures popping up now and then. Overall, the presentation is sharper and better detailed than the DVD we reviewed in Jul 97, and the sound is much richer. The good 53-minute commentary that Brooks provided on the DVD has been carried over. There are alternate French, Spanish, Italian and German audio tracks, and English, French, Spanish, Italian, German and Dutch subtitles. Also featured are 9 minutes of less stellar deleted and alternate scenes that were used in TV presentations of the film and 79 minutes of terrific retrospective interviews that also let you relive the best gags, several times over.

#### 4K Talk

The 1942 George Stevens Columbia Pictures dramatic comedy starring Cary Grant, Jean Arthur and Ronald Coleman, **Talk of the Town**, has been released as a 4K Blu-ray by Sony Pictures Home Entertainment. The squared full screen black-and-white picture is free of the scratches and such that marred the DVD we reviewed in May 03. The image is smooth and sharp, clear enough so that you are aware of the sound boom's shadow on Coleman's head in one shot. The picture does not have the slick appearance that some studio films from that era achieve, but the softness of its appearance has a strong thematic underpinning that suggests its manner is purposeful, accentuating both to the fluid nature of the relationship between the three principal characters played by the stars and the imperfections of the American legal system.

Opening on images of a factory burning to the ground—a symbol of the country in crisis—Grant is the arson suspect, an immigrant, who hides from the law in a woody summerhouse owned by Arthur's character, who has rented that house to a law professor played by Coleman. There is nothing flippant about Grant's appearance as man on the run in the woods, wanted by the police after nearly strangling a guard to escape the jail, and yet a little while later he's in the kitchen of the house, wearing a frilly apron and preparing a meal for the three of them. Arthur's character lies to Coleman's character, saying that Grant's immigrant character belongs at the house because he is the 'gardener.' Running 119 minutes, the film continues its parallel-wheeled narrative almost until its end. One circle, the humorous one, is the potential romantic conflict between the three characters—while ostensibly both men are supposedly vying for the affection of Arthur's character, there is an obvious bond developing between the two of them. The other circle, the dramatic one, goes to the heart of how justice and equality are determined in America. Guilty or innocent, Grant's character has broken the law by

escaping. Coleman's character feels it is his duty to turn Grant's character in, but then struggles with his conscience not because he thinks the character might be innocent—that is almost a given—but because he has become sensitized to the relationship the three characters have with one another, and discovers that those feelings supersede his civic beliefs. Arthur's character, as the owner of the house, can be seen as the soul of America. When the ending approaches, Grant's character is back in jail, and a mob is gathering outside of the courthouse to lynch him. As Stevens swings his camera over that mob, you suddenly realize that the entire judicial system is fragile not just because of the world crisis at the time, but because it has yet to fully construct the intricate framework needed to process error and ambiguity. "My great-great-grandfather fought off Indians for a whole week in 1756," Coleman's character declares as he runs off to save the day. America was still a young country—America is still a young country—barely a handful of generations from its founding. Its edifices are still in a state of growth and development, of fine tuning, and it is depending upon its citizenry to look into their hearts and to grasp and cherish the truth, so it can continue to grow and endure.

The monophonic sound is strong and clear. All three actors—and lets add supporting actor Edgar Buchanan, as well—have distinctively melliferous voices that are integral to their stardom, and the disc captures each one's tone with wonderful clarity. There are alternate French and Spanish audio tracks, optional English, French and Spanish subtitles, and an excellent 5-minute talk about the film by George Stevens, Jr., from 2006. The ragged clips used in the piece, incidentally, are a good example of what the film looked like before 4K got a hold of it. Stevens biographer, Marilyn Ann Moss, supplies a commentary track, talking primarily about Stevens and the film, but mentioning the prominence of some of the cast members, as well. She begins to run out of steam in the film's second half, leaving wider gaps between comments and often just providing a narrative play-by-play, but overall the talk is informative and worthwhile, placing the film within Stevens's work as a whole. She points out that he learned the skills of slapstick working with Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy, and she makes note of where such moments are present, when they are often disguised by the ostensible sophistication of the scene. She also explains that they shot two endings (actually, there are five possible endings, but two of the other three were frowned upon in the day and would never have gotten out of the editing bay...) and then let test audiences decide which guy Arthur's character should end up with.

#### Colorful Main

The colors are offset and the image is blurry on the opening RKO Radio Pictures logo for Frank Borzage's 1945 romantic swashbuckler, **The Spanish Main**, but thereafter, the Technicolor feature, released by Warner Bros. as a *Warner WB Archive Collection* Blu-ray (UPC#840418320747, \$22), looks fantastic. The colors are deep, the fleshtones are rich and unless there's some action on the screen, you find it hard to take your eyes off the fruit. Fortunately, there is plenty of action in the delightful tale. Set in the days when pirates roamed the Caribbean, Paul Henreid is one such buccaneer, who kidnaps the fiancée, played by Maureen O'Hara, of a piggish viceroy, played by the wonderful Walter Slezak, and marries her. Soon after that, they even fall in love. Borzage might have been taking it easy in comparison to his social dramas and dark romances, but he is more amenable to black humor than others studio directors, and his competency when it comes to blocking scenes and sustaining the essence of the narrative is masterful. Running 100 minutes, the film is not as athletic as the best pirate movies, but the stars are all appealing, the fights and battles are invigorating and the colors are why you want to leave the real world and live in a Technicolor one forever. The spotless, squared full screen picture looks fantastic from beginning to end. Once in a while there will be a close-up that was constructed with an optical, or a dissolve using the same method, where the image briefly loses its total solidity, but it is only for the extent of the one shot. The intricately detailed costumes look fabulous and the jewels glitter in the lens. The model ships, tacking in the backlot pools, look terrific as well. The monophonic sound is in decent shape and there are optional English subtitles; a trailer; a 17-minute color Warner Bros. musical short from 1945, *Movieland Magic*, staging song and dance numbers in various locations around the lot to show the processes of film production and concluding with a genre mishmash 'hail America' number that could have come straight from the finale of **Blazing Saddles**; and two genre-appropriate 7-minute color Bugs Bunny cartoons, *Buccaneer Bunny* from 1948, in which he torments a Yosemite Sam pirate with various sailing ship gags, and *Captain Hareblower* from 1953, in which he and Yosemite Sam are on opposing battle schooners in a broadside duel with plenty of amusements.

#### Silent mutiny

A hardboiled 1927 Columbia Pictures silent feature that looks so sharp and free of impediments it could have been made last week, **The Blood Ship**, has been released on Blu-ray by Sony (UPC#043396640788, \$25). The squared, full screen image is lightly and effectively tinted, but the untinted outdoor shots are always crisp and finely detailed. Accompanied by a mild but serviceable piano score, much of the 67-minute feature was shot on the water on a magnificent schooner, and every time the camera tilts up to take in the masts and rigging, it is breathtaking. Most of the crew on the ship that is sailing across the Pacific were shanghaied in San Francisco, but even the few men who willingly signed on soon turn against the sadistic captain and his first mate, who do not hold back when it comes to abusing the crew for minor infractions, trusting that fear and their firearms will keep the sailors in line. Eventually, however, the conflicts reach a boiling point. Hobart Bosworth and Richard Arlen star, with Jacqueline Logan delivering a surprisingly mature and steady performance as the captain's daughter, who falls for Arlen's character. There is also a terrific performance delivered by an African-American actor in a major part, Blue Washington, whose character is in every way a peer to his fellow sailors. The film is appreciably violent, even when the actual blows are discreet, and it is the ideal sort of motion picture production that deserves to be preserved and available on Blu-ray, so that the ways of the past can be vividly shared for generations to come.

## Horror variety

Seven highly diverse Japanese features from the turn of the most recent century are presented on the four platters comprising the terrific Arrow Video release, **J-Horror Rising** (UPC#760137164333, \$100). Some of the movies have a supernatural basis and some do not (two of them also involve earthquakes), but all of them were bandwagon movies, so to speak, rushing to the marketplace after the surprise 1998 breakout hit, **Ringu** (Apr 03), forming their own subgenre known as ‘J-Horror,’ which flamed out at the boxoffice in a few short years as subgenres tend to do, only to live on through home video. Japanese horror films have always been different from Western horror features, just as most Japanese culture differentiates itself from the West, with a greater emphasis on spirit and metaphor, and less interest in providing a logical explanation for each event depicted. These differences are not widely pronounced—there are plenty of Japanese movies that make perfect sense and plenty of American movies that make no sense at all—but the differences are there, nevertheless, and they struck a genuine chord with world audiences when **Ringu** hit on just the right formula. As Asian film expert Tom Mes explains in his commentary track for the first film in the set, *Shikoku*, “A person’s face, someone screaming or somebody holding their breath with an expression of terror doesn’t mean you have expressed or communicated the emotion of terror or fear, and so these directors and writers would often discuss how to do that exactly. So, J-Horror is very much a question of cinema. How do you express, through the means of cinema—‘you’ meaning moving images and sound—the emotion of fear, rather than the emotion of shock or the emotion of disgust, neither of which are the same thing as fear, and in the eyes of these filmmakers, therefore, did not count as horror. This is the reason why J-Horror is so different from, for example, American horror films up until that point, which tended to rely on special effects makeup rather than creating a sense of dread. So there’s a fundamental difference in the belief of what horror means as a genre of cinema.” Hence, what is most surprising about the collection is how different, how defiant of formula, each of the seven films are. All seven films are letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.8:1, and all are in Japanese with optional English subtitles.

A packaging designer from Tokyo played by Yui Natsukawa returns to her hometown on the titular island to settle her parents’ estate and looks forward to meeting her two childhood companions in the 1998 *Shikoku*, directed by Shunichi Nagasaki. She meets one friend, but learns that the other has passed away. However, she begins seeing the dead friend in unusually vivid dreams, materializing as a ghost, and other odd things begin happening around town, as well. Soon, the ghost also begins exhibiting jealousy over the heroine and her growing romance with their mutual friend. Running 100 minutes, the film is reasonably logical and has a welcome, relaxed pace that lets you savor its ideas and suggestions as it gradually builds the narrative. The town is picturesque, the romance is appealing and the film is just spooky enough and coherent enough to be fairly satisfying.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The image is often a bit soft. While some sequences are deliberately grainy, darker scenes also have a little grain, but colors are fresh and fleshtones are accurate. The 5.1-channel DTS sound has an appropriate dimensionality that is purposely exaggerated at key moments. Mes supplies a 24-minute introduction of sorts for the entire collection, talking more about the rise of the genre. There is also a very good 23-minute retrospective interview with Nagasaki (“I wanted to say that the title, *Shikoku*, means ‘Land of Death.’ Then there’s the island of Shikoku, pronounced the same way, which means ‘four provinces,’ because it is made of four provinces. Because of the subject matter of the film, the character for ‘four’ is replaced with the one for ‘death.’ ‘Four provinces’ is the original meaning, and the spelling was altered so that it had a double meaning.”), explaining that he sort of lucked out because the film was issued in a double bill with the enormously popular sequel **Ringu**; an earlier 4-minute promotional interview with Nagasaki talking about the challenges the cast faced; a 2-minute promotional interview with co-star Chiaki Kuriyama, who plays the ghost; a 4-minute promotional interview with Natsukawa, who enjoyed visiting the island (it was more friendly than Tokyo); an interesting 3 minutes of behind-the-scenes footage showing the shooting and re-shooting a scene; a trailer; two TV commercials; and a small collection of photos in still frame.

In addition to kind of providing an introduction to the entire set, Mes’s commentary also talks specifically about the film’s narrative and explains quite a bit about the island itself. The smallest of Japan’s ‘large’ islands, Shikoku has a strong tradition of Buddhist pilgrimages that serve as the basis for the story’s conflicts and challenges, and Mes goes into detail describing the traditions that are being followed or subverted in the film.

A young woman with telepathic powers, played by Yoshino Kimura, who is attempting to help earthquake victims, meets another young woman with multiple personalities whose mind she cannot read in the 2000 *Isola: Multiple Personality Girl*, directed by Toshiyuki Mizutani. Things become more problematic when, because of the earthquake, a scientifically-activated revenge-seeking ghost takes possession of the multiple personality girl. Running 94 minutes, the scenes involving the telepathy are very entertaining, and the scenes between the two women are especially pleasing, while the story that is needed to give the film narrative momentum and take it to a conclusion is adequate to the task.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The color transfer looks good and the image is sharp. The 5.1-channel DTS sound has a general dimensionality but is rarely enlivening. Also featured is a 2-minute promotional interview with Kimura; a 2-minute interview with co-star Yu Kurosawa (Akira’s granddaughter!); 3 minutes of behind-the-scenes footage of the two girls shooting a basic stunt; a trailer; and a nice collection of promotional photos in still frame.

Japanese horror film enthusiasts Jasper Sharp and ‘Amber T’ provide a chatty commentary track, talking sporadically about the film at hand and then veering off to speak about other Japanese horror features. Overall, it is a reasonably good guide through the film’s blend of ideas and tropes. Amber also points out that movies

rarely treat people suffering from multiple personalities with much sympathy. “In reality these people are far more likely to be vulnerable than to be dangerous.”

The first two movies have moments of nudity along with their other charms, but Masato Harada’s superb 2001 *Inugami* on the second platter is genuinely erotic, among its many captivating features. It is set in a woody, hillside town in the present day, where a family of papermakers is ostracized by the rest of the community because of a supposed connection to supernatural forces. A new teacher arriving on a motorbike from Tokyo meets one of the women in the family and is immediately taken with her papermaking skills. Later he comes across her again in the forest as she is looking for herbs she uses as dyes and the two are caught in a rainstorm. Love ensues, but at the same time, more odd things begin to happen with his arrival, and the town starts to get rough with the family. The story delves substantially into family relations and hidden pasts, while sustaining an elegant and intriguing demeanor. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1, the picture is gorgeous. From the captivating shots of the papermaking process (all done by hand) to the hillside vistas, the images are calm and inviting, so that the movie’s elegance constantly pushes back against its supernatural premise. Even the finale has more in common with the terror of political isolation than with anything fantastical. Running 105 minutes, it really is more of an art film than a horror film, and that is a very good thing.

The 5.1-channel DTS sound has a terrific dimensionality, many wonderful directional effects, and quite a punch when it is called for. Along with a small collection of promotional images in still frame, there is a nice 30-minute interview with Harada in English, talking about how the film undermined expectations, how he chose the different locations (the movie was actually shot all over Japan) and how great the actresses were to work with.

Japanese film expert Jonathan Clements supplies an excellent commentary track, talking about the history of the film (it was derived from a novel by the same novelist who wrote the source for *Shikoku*) and the ceremonies upon which the film is based, going over the details of the shoot, dissecting specific sequences, and providing extensive backgrounds on the cast and the crew. “I think we’re getting something of a pattern with Harada’s casting here, which I do applaud, this great lack of interest in people who are famous for being famous. Instead, he’s going for people with a much better track record in a live performance. It reflects a genuine directorial desire to do something classy and enduring, and dare I say, even ‘arty’ with this film, despite his origins in a company that just wants to crank out double bill horror features. As a case in point, Harada takes multiple opportunities in this film to show off his knowledge of European Baroque artists, periodically stopping the drama for a tableau that is deliberately designed to evoke famous and not so famous works of art from Europe. There will be several of these cropping up during in the film, if you want to play Baroque I-Spy with me. I have no idea why Harada was doing this in this film, but it’s a fantastic little Easter egg.”

In counterpoint to the near-classicism of *Inugami*, Ten Shimoyama’s 2001 *St. John’s Wort* has the near obfuscation of New Wavey modernism, bombarding you with rapid, almost single-frame cuts and rampant color manipulations, so it comes as something of a surprise when you put up with the opening of the 85-minute film, go along with everything for a while, and discover you are actually in the middle of a completely old fashioned trapped-overnight-in-a-creepy-mansion-during-a-thunderstorm thriller, and a pretty decent one at that (in reality, the two films were originally released to theaters in Japan as a double bill). When the girlfriend of a filmmaker played by Koichiro Saito inherits a mansion that was once the home of a notorious artist—renown for his macabre paintings—he persuades her to let him come along with his video camera when they go to check it out. Meanwhile, his two collaborators are back in the office, hooked up to the video feeds and offering advice. Sure enough, a storm begins, a tree hits their car, and the two are stuck in the house, with glimpses of figures behind them on the video feeds. The film’s presentation may be challenging, but its wit and the suspense of its individual sequences, along with its fresh perspectives and approaches to filmmaking in general, make it worth your concentration.

The film’s colors are heavily manipulated, approaching a solarization effect at times, making the movie irritating to the concentration at first, and even the volume on the 5.1-channel DTS sound gets pushed into the red in a couple of passages, coming across as louder than loud. But all of that helps get past the mundane set up and through the valid if slightly wacky denouement without asking too many questions. Also featured are 22 minutes of passable behind-the-scenes footage; an earnest 20-minute promotional interview with Saito talking about the film and his experiences making it; a pleasant 18-minute promotional interview with co-star Megumi Okina talking about her character(s)—she plays twins) and what the shoot was like; a 4-minute promotional interview with the delightful co-star Reiko Matsuo; a 5-minute interview with co-star Koji Okura (they are pretty much the only people in the cast); a trailer; three TV commercials; and a small collection of promotional photos in still frame.

‘Amber T’ supplies another commentary track, this time on her own. The film is based upon a sort of video game with branching storylines, and she compares it extensively to the game while pointing out its strengths and its weaknesses. Ultimately, she recognizes that the movie isn’t for everyone, but, “If loving this movie is wrong, I don’t want to be right.”

A fantastic urban legend thriller, Kōji Shiraishi’s 2006 *Carved: The Slit-Mouthed Woman*, on the third platter, has oodles of gore—and children are not spared—with several terrific screams. Children begin disappearing in a small city and the rumors on the playground are that a woman with a slit across her mouth is taking them and killing them. Indeed, that is what begins to occur, and it is only by listening to the rumors shared by the children that the adult heroes—a pair of teachers—manage to track the killer down. Running 90 minutes, the film has a supernatural component, but it is in every way an ideal, unforgiving horror film. Be sure to show it to your kids if you want to shut them up.

The color transfer looks great and the image is sharp. The separation effects and dimensionality on the 5.1-channel DTS sound add nicely to the terror. Also featured is an excellent 17-minute appreciation of the film; a good 19-minute interview with Shiraishi talking about why he made various choices in the conception and production of the film; and a brief collection of promotional and production photos in still frame.

Less rewarding than the succinct appreciation in the special features, Japanese film enthusiast Zack Davisson supplies a commentary track. He has a lot to say about Japanese urban legends and the specific changes that the 'Slit-Mouthed Woman' legend has undergone over the years, but otherwise he just sort of follows the story along, particularly in the second half, and periodically comments on what is happening. "Another thing I do love about Japanese horror is this pacing of slowness. I personally find that more frightening than the Western reliance on jump scares. I think a lot of Western movies don't scare you. What they really do is startle you, and those aren't quite the same thing. You find that a lot in Japanese haunted houses, as well, your Halloween haunted houses. They're all very slow and atmospheric, which is so much more terrifying than someone jumping out behind the door and saying, 'Boo!' They don't get your heart racing as much but they certainly terrify you."

The amazing companion film is Takashi Komatsu's 2000 *Persona*, but lord it would make an exquisite double bill with Ingmar Bergman's similarly titled motion picture classic. A sophomore masterpiece, the film has the template of a murder mystery (with a Nancy Drew vibe), including an elaborate denouement scene where the motive and method are explained, but it is first and foremost a film about the most basic and original theatrical trope of all, masks. Masks are so basic that everyone understands their symbolism, but what the film does, brilliantly, is to bombard the viewer with the meanings and layers of meanings and subtleties of meanings and obviousness of meanings of masks. It begins in a high school classroom, the camera moving over students to the rear right of the classroom (the most popular spot to place characters in movie classrooms, by our reckoning). A character with short cropped hair is talking to a friend with long hair and you immediately assume that a boy and a girl are talking, which is correct, except that it is the girl, the heroine, played by Maya Kurosu, who has the short hair and the boy who has the long hair. Elsewhere in the classroom, a student is bullied, but then another student walks into the classroom wearing a white mask. This throws the bullies for a loop. Soon, lots of students who have been bullied are wearing masks, but then the bullies start wearing masks, and then one of the bullied characters who was wearing a mask is murdered. A little while after that, a fashion model wearing a mask is also murdered, and to solve the murders, Kurosu's character takes the model's place. She also meets a dreamy guy played by Tatsuya Fujiwara, who makes masks, except that he has a dual personality because has been abused by his father. And on and on. Running 89 minutes, the film has some decent moments of suspense. For a while, it appears that the kids wearing the masks have joined a cult, and so Kurosu's character tries to infiltrate one of their gatherings, only to be chased off. The climax, when it looks like Kurosu's character is going to be killed in the middle of a fashion show just like the previous model, ratchets up the excitement even more. Meanwhile, if you look at the film through the eyes of a teenager, its contemplation of gender identification, racial identification, social identification and so on is consistently penetrating—there is also a sequence set in a psychiatrist's office that tries to get to the heart of how people use masks to absorb or deflect psychic pain—and if you step back and observe the film as an adult, the symbolism remains entirely valid, the humor of its application is joyously intelligent, and even though the plot jumps all over the place, the movie is tightly constructed, gamely performed and so filled with ideas that, like its Bergman namesake, you immediately want to start watching it again when it concludes.

The color transfer is sharp and clear. The stereo sound has plenty of power and a very satisfying dimensionality. During one of the fashion shows, they play the wonderful Atomic Kitten cover of *Daydream Believer*, almost in its entirety. Along with a small collection of promotional photos in still frame, there is a terrific 17-minute interview with Fujiwara, who makes a self-revelation as he is talking, about the film's similarities to *A Clockwork Orange*, and discusses in general how he approached the project.

The final platter contains a marvelously entertaining found footage film from 2005, *Noroi: The Curse*, also directed by *Slit-Mouthed Woman's* Shiraishi. Most of it is presented as a film within a film, a 'documentary' made by a filmmaker investigating supernatural events who has since disappeared. The documentary itself compiles news programs and other second hand footage with his own investigations and interviews, so that while the film runs 115 minutes, it always feels fresh and interesting, jumping from one topic or situation to the next. He begins by answering a call from a woman who claims she is hearing baby noises next door, even though there is no baby there. He manages to record the sound she has heard, and when the audio is cleaned up, it does indeed sound like babies crying. Meanwhile, he also begins tracking the whereabouts of the neighbor, asking other neighbors if they have heard anything and so on. While he seems to go off on tangents in his investigations at first, soon something will pop up that relates directly to the other material he has gathered. The performances are super, and it is the film's constant shifts in tone and locale that keep it fresh and interesting as it gradually compiles its frights. What Shiraishi has done is to take the remote setting and singular focus of *The Blair Witch Project* and bring it to a more urban and suburban setting with other avenues—there is a wonderful sequence concerning a young girl participating with other children in a mind reading experiment—that gradually begin to lead to the same destination. In any case, it is an ideal conclusion to the set as a whole, mixing equal amounts of spoof and earnest horror.

The aging and video flaws built into the image are perfectly realized, and the transfer is super. The 5.1-channel DTS sound has a wonderfully fresh presence and a sort of stealth score that is meant to unnerve your subconscious. A witty 38-minute follow up 'documentary,' featuring Shiraishi, contains several more 'investigation' segments meant to promote the seriousness of the film's premise (which was apparently used as a TV special) is included, along with a cute 14-minute featurette about how to protect yourself from many different types of curses ("If someone desperate to find a job hands you their business card and you throw it away carelessly, you may find yourself getting a lot of paper cuts.") that uses footage from the film and then expands upon it with great straight-faced amusement, only to conclude with some very solid advice; a decent 22-minute summary of Shiraishi's career and the film's strengths; a similar 21-minute piece about found footage horror and how the film fits into the genre; a 26-minute interview with Shiraishi talking about how he got his start making 'mockumentaries', various details from the shoot, his approach to the film as he finished putting it together ("At the time, I decided that the best policy for me was never to admit that it wasn't real. But these days, now that so much time has passed, I've decided it is fine to talk about it as fiction with people.") and how happy he is the film is getting an international release on Blu-ray; an 18-minute interview with producer Takashige Ichise talking about his career (he also produced *Ringu*, as well as several American films) and sharing his insights on how the film was put together (many different locations, and so on); 29 minutes of very enjoyable deleted scenes that were sensibly removed although they contain more fresh vignettes and incidents; two trailers; three TV commercials; and a small collection of promotional material in still frame.

Japanese film enthusiast Julian Singleton provides a commentary track that not only goes over the film and its many inspired ambiguities, but uses the film's late appearance in the J-Horror genre to examine how it sort of wrapped things up, offering a kind of bookend to Mes's talk on the first film. "*Noroi* can and should be seen as a successful evolution of the primary themes of what we can collectively call 'J-Horror.' *Noroi* is a critical film that bridges two major eras in Japanese horror history. It was formed during a period that celebrated certain aspects of cultural identity, yet one that had gone from revolutionary to repetitive. The era following *Noroi* reflects an evolution of Japanese horror that further embraces more arcane local traditions and influence yet refuses to be bound by them, instead adopting a far more cosmopolitan approach to horror in general. *Noroi* is a film that taps into an incredibly universal curiosity at the heart of horror. It's an essential trait that allowed the film, like [the film's demon], to crawl out of obscurity and distribution nightmares to find the reverent audience it always deserved to have."

Considered one of the films along with *Ringu* that ushered in J-Horror mania, Hideo Nakata's 2002 *Dark Water* is available from Arrow as a standard single-platter Blu-ray (UPC#760137947882, \$35) and as a single-platter 4K UHD Blu-ray (UPC#760137143253, \$50). A proofreader going through a messy divorce moves into a low budget apartment (there actually doesn't seem to be anyone else living in the building) with her kindergarten-age daughter. At first, there is a leak in the ceiling (which is as good as a nightmare, so far as we are concerned), but then the apartment and the entire building turn out to be haunted by a girl the same age as the daughter. We reviewed a Hollywood remake, also called *Dark Water*, in Feb 06. Running 101 minutes, the original film has several very creepy moments and is a pleasing blend of unsettling things, from the anxieties the mother feels trying to prove to people that she can cope on her own (she's had her own psychiatric problems in the past), to the daughter always disappearing or talking to an unseen friend, to the specific split-second glimpses of the ghost and a few more lasting frights. Divorce and leaks in the ceiling are horrific enough, and the film smoothly transitions from the stresses and terrors of life to their more fanciful manifestations, creating a memorable cinematic experience, underscoring the idea that modern lives are not protected from the ghosts and horrors of the past.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The quality is noticeably improved in the 4K release, which has a fresh image transfer from a 2023 restoration. The picture is exquisite, just soft enough to slide past the grime of the apartment building while sustaining the mother's poised self image. In comparison, the hues on the standard Blu-ray are blander, and the softness dissolves a little too quickly into graininess. The 5.1-channel DTS sound has a terrific surround mix and is crisply detailed, and there is less of a discernible difference between the tracks on the two discs.

The film is in Japanese with optional English subtitles. The supplement on both releases includes a good 26-minute interview with Nakata about his films (he also made *Ringu*), shooting *Dark Water*, and the nature of filmmaking; a 20-minute interview with Koji Suzuki, who wrote the original story that served as the basis for the film (again, he also wrote the story that became *Ringu*), talking about his career and the nature of horror ("I think fear, I don't think it occurs that often, that we really face fear in our lives. So I would like you to experience it, at least in films and novels. I would like you to experience psychological fear that drives you into a corner."); a good 19-minute interview with cinematographer Junichiro Hayashi talking about his career, working with Nakata and his technical approach to the film; 16 minutes of great behind-the-scenes footage that show Nakata working with the actors; an 8-minute promotional interview with star Hitomi Kuroki talking about accepting the part, working with Nakata and working with her young costar; a 5-minute promotional interview with teenage costar Asami Mizukawa and great footage from her final audition; a 3-minute interview with composer Shikao Suga about penning the film's end title song; two trailers; and three TV commercials.

### Imitation is a sincere form of entertainment

From the early silent films of Louis Feuillade and Fritz Lang, audiences have been enamored by maniacal villains with visions of world domination and intrepid heroes doing their best to keep up. Although initially it was the villains who succeeded, or, at least, got away unharmed, after World War II, and after Sputnik brought the greatest science-fiction fears to life, audiences sought heroes who could save them from these evil schemes, and so in the Sixties, spy films and caper films thrived on the excitements of new inventions and the wild unrestrained styles such progress encouraged. James Bond became a genre unto himself, but there were only so many Bond films available and audiences hungered for more, all over the world. The world responded with spies, spies and more spies. Serious spy movies were in black and white, but audience pleasers were in colors, taking the hints that the Bond films so elegantly incorporated in their look, and blowing them up like Irma Vep and Dr. Mabuse meet Dr. Goldfoot. Hong Kong was not immune, and three films produced by the Shaw Bros. in the heyday of the spy craze, admittedly leaning a little more closer to Matt Helm than to James Bond, have been collected on the wonderful two-platter Blu-ray set by Celestial Films and Eureka!, **Super Spies and Secret Lies** (UPC#760137168416, \$55—we're not really sure what a 'secret lie' is, but it rhymes good, and in the Sixties, form definitely stopped following function).

All three films are letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and all three have gorgeous, brightly colored and spotless image transfers. The picture is sharp throughout the third film, while on the first two, an occasional shot will be out of focus, cut with ones that are in focus and look perfectly fine. The films are in Mandarin, and the monophonic sound is also strong and delivered with a decent amount of gusto. There are optional English subtitles.

Both films on the first platter were directed by Wei Lo, who would soon be guiding Bruce Lee to his initial successes. The first film, the 1966 *The Golden Buddha*, opens at an airport on a jet plane (which was still an exotic form of travel for Sixties audiences) and then proceeds with the classic accidentally-swapped-briefcases trope. When the hero, a regular businessman played by Paul Chang Chung, arrives in exotic Bangkok and discovers the mistake, he goes to retrieve his briefcase from the friend he met on the plane, discovers that the friend is dead, grabs a letter with some contact information on it, and then goes back to his hotel room to take a good look at the other briefcase, which contains the titular statuette. He discovers its secret before bad guys arrive at the hotel and he gets into his first karate and judo fight. This was the mid-Sixties, so the film can be wholly forgiven for not staging such altercations with kung fu, and after all, it was karate and judo that James Bond used, sort of. The fight scenes are woefully but charmingly static, full of moves you might be tempted to try on a younger sibling (and offering plenty grist to the rumor mill that Lee quickly started ignoring Lo and embellishing his own fight sequences). Anyway, at the end of that first fight, one of the bad guys releases a yellow gas and in the very next cut, Chung's character is sitting calmly in his room as if everything had been taken care of, except the damage caused by the fight. So did he get knocked out or killed by the yellow gas and the rest of the movie is a death dream? For all we know, it could be, since it certainly proceeds in such a surreal manner from that point on. When he takes a train to the hinterlands, following up on the address, outside of the train compartment's window is a painted scroll that is being unrolled to imitate the train's movement. The crazy lesson-in-cinema thing about it is that it works! You still feel like the train is moving even though when you look past the characters and out the window, the background is very clearly a drawing. He arrives in the middle of nowhere, meets a va-va-va-voom girl and has sex with her—there are just snippets of nudity throughout the 106-minute film, but like the hero, you savor every moment—and then rescues the heroine, played by Jeanette Lin Tsui, from her clutches. Eventually the two find themselves in the villain's wildly designed secret lair, full of large circles and triangles and somehow underwater (fish are swimming outside of the window) even though they're in the middle of Thailand. Or near the beach, it's never entirely clear. Anyway, the villain needs the Buddha statuette to locate a fortune in treasure, although why he just didn't keep the money and retire instead of spending it on the construction of the elaborate lair is no more clear than anything else in the simple to follow but totally ridiculous plot. No matter. Cued by John Barry's music from **Thunderball**, Elmer Bernstein's music from we're not quite sure where, and several other themes that Chu-Jen Wang incorporated into his wonderful score, the film is a sheer delight, not for the rip-off imitation it was trying to deliver to audiences in its day, but for the wonderful preservation of spirit that the film captured in its effort, manifesting and conveying with utter pleasure how the spy movie craze had gripped the entire globe.

Lo also has a major supporting part in the film, which co-stars Fannie Fan. Hong Kong enthusiasts Arne Venema and Mike Leeder provide an engaging commentary track, sharing the basics about the cast and the crew, reacting to the film's aesthetics and fight sequences, identifying the Thai locations, summarizing the Bond craze in Hong Kong and otherwise enhancing a viewer's enjoyment of the proceedings.

The second film on the platter, Lo's 1967 *Angel with the Iron Fists*, is more directly an attempt to revel in Bond movie idiosyncrasies, everything from deadly knives in shoes to machine guns in car headlights, but with girls instead of boys. Throw in some jewels smuggled in the detachable head of a corpse. Lily Ho stars as a female agent who goes undercover to infiltrate a worldwide organization bent upon global dominance, also run by a woman, played by Tina Chin-Fei. While the film lasts a full 118 minutes, the plot is much less elaborate than the plot of *Golden Buddha*, since the intended attraction of the film, despite its occasional fight scenes, is its we-can-do-this-too celebration of gadgets, secret headquarters designs (beneath a rocky island—boy we sure wish we had the Shaw Bros. linoleum contract), and women in go-go outfits. What's not to like, right? The musical score lifts from Barry (and Monte Norman) at the very beginning and the very end, but

is otherwise generally original. While the fights are still karate chops and judo, they are slightly better choreographed than the fights in *Golden Buddha*. At the time of its release, the world was starved for anything like Bond and the film was filling that desire. Now? There are many of us who are still starved for anything like Bond in the Sixties that is fresh and at least nominally earnest in its execution, and this delivers it all, in skirts.

Venema and Leeder supply another great commentary track, pointing out the film's similarities to **Dr. No** and other Bond films, discussing the legacies of the cast and the crew, dissecting the film's dynamics and celebrating its idiosyncrasies.

"You can see that door's kind of dented."

"Like someone wanged it, yeah."

"Also, that pink little light fixture thing, also has a rip in it."

"But then you think about it. Nobody, 50 odd years ago, was going, 'One day there'll be a Dutchman and an Englishman, analyzing the quality of our pink paper shades in the background.'"

The film appearing on the third platter, *The Singing Thief*, from 1969, directed by the great Cheh Chang, is not a spy film but a heist movie. Not only does the film look forward to John Woo's greatly underappreciated **Once a Thief**, but it tops off the entire **Super Spies** set with a sense of relative intelligence and class. The plot is not unlike Alfred Hitchcock's **To Catch a Thief** (and several films before it), but the film's style calls forth **The Pink Panther**, with bright, basic colors and round fireplaces. Fu-Ling Wang's musical score is original, but it screams Henry Mancini from beginning to end. And there are songs! Jimmy Lin Chong is a retired diamond thief who is making a living as a campy nightclub singer (singing about diamonds and jewels, naturally) when robberies resembling the ones he used to pull, leaving his signature carnation at the scene of the crime, begin to occur and he is hauled in by the police. Ho and Lih Lo co-star, with Chia Essie Lin, Yan Mui and Wei-Lieh Lan. The musical sequences are an absolute gas, and the film is glorious entertainment for anyone enamored with the Sixties—the film is so Sixties that Chong walks around some of it in a Nehru jacket—but it is also a much better feature than the two movies on the other platter. Running 91 minutes, the story does keep you guessing for a while, and although there isn't any nudity, there is plenty eroticism, as well as intriguing and fairly blatant homoerotic moments—Chong and Lih Lo literally dance with one another at a disco, at least intermittently as they trade off with Ho and Lin. The fight scenes are super and are much closer to where martial arts were heading. In a fight in a crematorium, Chong holds off attackers who are coming at him with the metal shovels used for the ashes. The finale, which takes up almost the final third of the film, is set on the literal Shaw Bros. lot (during a rare day when no one was working), so that villains can grab spears and poles decorating an unused set as they try to do Chong's character in. Fans will take additional delight spotting some familiar sets in disrepair, such the wooden water wheel. Viewers who are not prepared for the film may enjoy some of the actions sequences but will likely be thrown off balance by the changes in genre and tone that the movie goes through. Fans who are already grooving on the Sixties (oh, we forgot to mention, one of the songs in the disco comes perilously close to *Groovin* by The Young Rascals), however, and enjoy the energy and inventiveness that so many Hong Kong films have to offer will find the film to be a total trip, with or without chemical enhancements.

Also featured on the platter is a 17-minute overview of the films, looking at what was derivative and what was new about them, and a very good 22-minute summary of Bondmania both throughout the world and in Asia in particular, as well as a look at the specific Bond derivations in each of the three films. For the third commentary, Venema and Leeder talk extensively about Chang, pointing out the propensity for homoerotic undercurrents in his features, as well as his sophisticated fight scenes and his generally exceptional competence as a director. They also discuss Chong and his singing career, the film's locations, its crazy emotional dynamics, and many other engaging topics.

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Ugo Tognazzi is a travel agent who is abducted by government agents while minding his own business in a café in the 1975 Peter Fleischmann thriller, **Weak Spot** (*La Faille*), a StudioCanal Radiance Films Blu-ray (UPC# 760137171294, \$40). After an ambiguous interrogation, he is taken for what in essence is a joyride by one of the agents, played by Michel Piccoli, and a battle of wits ensues. For a while, it is difficult to discern whether the 111-minute film is a twisty spy feature or a strident condemnation of secret police practices, and that is because it ends up being both. The film is in French (with optional English subtitles) and was clearly shot in Greece, although its setting is never actually identified. Hence, like a spy film, the movie treats the viewer to a travel scenery and booking locations—it even concludes in a museum where a guide behind the characters, ostensibly speaking about the statues, has pertinent things to say about fate and free will—and there are a couple of car chases and some really, really gnarly fight scenes. Ultimately, the viewer will have to accept the movie's ambiguities and darker motifs (in the end, as well, a spy chief suggests that in the future, the world will be a much happier place if citizens just automatically confess to everything), but helped along by the incisive Ennio Morricone musical score and the appealing performances by the two stars (and by Mario Adorf, as Piccoli's earthy partner), the film, which was co-written by Jean-Claude Carrière, is intelligent and intriguing, a viable compromise between seriousness and indulgence.



The picture has an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. The image is not slick but the transfer is fresh. At one point, there is a brief flickering on the left side of the image, and at another point, there appears to be some sort of red flair within the cinematography, but generally the film seeks to counterpoint its exotic local with a grimy, dusty appearance, although hues are fresh and fleshtones are accurate. The monophonic sound is solid and the Morricone score is worth amplifying. There is a terrific 5-minute interview with Piccoli about the film and an excellent 26-minute history and deconstruction of the score, one of the nineteen Morricone did that year. A terrific commentary track is also presented by film expert Travis Woods, who wastes no time comparing the film's politics to contemporary America, having recorded the talk in 2024. Nevertheless, his focus is on the elaborate ambiguities and double meanings that permeate every scene in the film. "The film becomes suffocated, deliriously and deliciously so, with these possible meanings. Ultimately, I think, that is one of the film's most powerful and successful goals that it indeed achieves, to wrench us back, to pull us back from our tourist's stupor. It forces us into a state of heightened paranoia in order to see the world and the structures of its collapsing nation states as it truly is, a place constantly teetering on the brink of authoritarian rule." He goes on to deconstruct many of these symbols and offer extended interpretations of their meanings, which go beyond simply totalitarianism to dissect the assumptions of masculinity itself. If you enjoy puzzles, his talk can become more entertaining than an initial viewing of the film, and it opens the film to many more repeat visits.

### Unfrozen from the Nineties

One character living in the future in the Warner Bros. feature, **Demolition Man**, accuses another of having, "A fascination with the vulgar Twentieth Century," and that pretty much presents the foundation for the 1993 movie. Self-aware and comedic, the film is nevertheless filled with action and pyrotechnics. It doesn't just have its cake and eat it too, it has the whole pastry cart. We reviewed the DVD in Nov 97, but now the film has been resurrected as a 4K Blu-ray by Warner and Arrow Video (UPC#760137165019, \$60). Made before she became a big star with **Speed** (she actually landed that role from working on this one), Sandra Bullock plays a cop in the utopian future who is partnered with a cop from the Nineties played by Sylvester Stallone. He has been unfrozen from his cryogenic state to deal with a psychopath who has also been unfrozen, played by Wesley Snipes. Bullock and Nigel Hawthorne, who plays the villain that runs everything, somehow manage to swim around the obstacles and give genuine performances, while Stallone and Snipes just do wicked parodies of themselves, but it all manages to gel even when it shouldn't. Running 115 minutes, the film nevertheless breezes right by with its grandly staged chases, fights and explosions, its ultramodern designs and its blatant humor about our worst good-natured tendencies manifesting as the way of the future (people aren't allowed to curse or consume unhealthy foods). Directed by Marco Brambilla and bearing the overblown imprint of producer Joel Silver, the film may be silly (a nightclub singer croons ditties from Twentieth Century commercials, such as the Jolly Green Giant tune) or outright stupid, but it always finds a way to be entertaining, sustaining the balancing act of laughing at it and with it while dazzling you with its indulgences.

Initially, the film looks overly soft, but it soon settles down to look just soft and smooth, and the 4K image begins to grow on you after a while. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, the image may not be slick and glossy, but it is confident enough to present the action and character exchanges with a consistency that is free of distractions. Arrow has also released a standard Blu-ray (UPC#760137165057, \$50) that generally has the same color transfer, although the image is a little softer. The Dolby Atmos sound is also, in some ways, subdued, delivering the expected directional noises and maintaining a pleasant surround presence, but not with the energetic embellishments that such mixes would soon begin to take on. The audio differences between the two releases are less distinctive. There are optional English subtitles.

Two versions of the film are presented on both releases, the *US Version* and the *International Version*. Both have the same running time. The difference is that in the *US Version*, the characters attend an upscale restaurant that is identified as Taco Bell, while in the *International Version*, they attend Pizza Hut. The dialog is altered to accommodate each license, and even the end credit scroll, identifying bit players appearing as servers and such, has been changed appropriately.

A commentary track featuring Brambilla and (intermittently) Silver has been carried over from the DVD. Additionally, there is a 2024 commentary featuring Brambilla and one of the screenwriters, Daniel Waters, and while some of the material was already discussed in the earlier commentary, there are more details presented as they ask one another pertinent questions about both the script's intentions and the film's staging. They also talk about the Taco Bell/Pizza Hut licensing stuff, and how McDonalds turned them down because of the R-rated language in the film. Waters is especially cognizant of how the film's unique blend of humor, futurism (more so as some of its predictions have come to pass, though not the Jolly Green Giant thing) and action has embellished its burgeoning cult status, and how perceptions of the film have changed in other ways over the years. "I remember when the movie used to run on Fox TV and, depending on where people's careers were at, they would go like, 'Stallone. Snipes. Bullock.' And then the advertisements were, 'Stallone. Bullock. Snipes.' And then it went to, 'Bullock. Stallone.'"

Another 2024 commentary track features film expert Marc White, who provides a well researched talk breaking down the contributions of all of the different writers and artists, going over a history of the film's production, taking delight in the movie's many quirks (although neither he nor anyone else ever makes a comparison between the futuristic sex scene Stallone and Bullock's characters have and **Barbarella**) and generally offering a justification for enjoying the film. Along with a trailer and a very nice collection of photos and memorabilia in still frame (some pictures, however, appear several times in the shuffle), both releases also have a good 10-minute

interview with Jeff Farley, who aided in creating some of the physical effects; an interesting 6-minute interview with makeup artist Chris Biggs; an interesting 6-minute interview with stuntman Charles Percini explaining how one particular stunt, dropping on a bungee cord from a helicopter, was achieved and what other fights he oversaw; a 14-minute interview with production designer David L. Snyder explaining the logic behind his designs and how they were constructed; and a 17-minute appreciation of the film and an analysis of how film trends at the time guided its creation, along with a dubious attempt to list parallels between the film and **The Wizard of Oz**.

### A Sammo adventure

Sammo Hung's 1987 Golden Harvest Vietnam action film, **Eastern Condors**, has been released on Blu-ray by Fortune Star and The Criterion Collection (UPC#715515306317, \$40). Vaguely set up like **The Dirty Dozen**, but with a Russian Roulette sequence that calls forth **The Deer Hunter** and so on, the film is about an Asian American group of military prisoners sent into Vietnam after the fall of Saigon to destroy an enormous but hidden storage of armaments. The set up is enough to give the characters different personalities and provide action scenes, the latter augmented by Hung's inventiveness and the downright fearlessness of his stunt team. Running 98 minutes, the narrative leaps ahead here and there, suggesting that more plot material was removed to keep the action coming, but the formula works, since the film becomes one dazzling sequence of leaps, fights, gunshots and explosions after another.

Yuen Biao and former Oscar-winner Haing S. Ngor co-star. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The color transfer looks okay, since it is apparent that pristine cinematography was not at the forefront of the filmmakers' priorities. Colors are generally accurate and the image is sharp, without additional wear. The monophonic sound is fine, even if it comes across as more subdued than later, stereo war films. The dialog is in Cantonese with optional English subtitles. In the supplement there is an English dubbed version of the film, which runs 94 minutes, the characters sporting accents from all over the British Empire. Since most of the time, nobody speaks while they are fighting, the subtitles don't really cause much of a problem, while the dub can be distracting, but it's your call.

Although the regular feature begins where it left off if playback is terminated, the dubbed version does not, and neither do any of the other special features, including four trailers; a 9-minute interview with the elderly Hung looking back at his career; another 9-minute interview with Hung talking about his childhood; a 17-minute interview with Hung specifically about the film and the challenges of the various stunts in the film; an 8-minute interview with costar Wah Yuen talking about how important the film was to his career and what shooting it was like ("It's very easy to hit someone. Not hurting them is the hard part."); and a wild and impressive 14-minute display of martial arts and acrobatic action film stagecraft, structured around pieces of the film's narrative, performed live in 1987 at a beauty pageant by most of the film's stars, including Hung, who even sings.

Asian film authority Tony Rayns supplies an excellent introductory commentary track, using the film as an excuse to summarize the rise of martial arts features in the Sixties and Seventies, the history of Hong Kong features in those and subsequent decades, and Hung's career as representative of the success of those features, while also addressing details of the film where appropriate, pointing out the skills and backgrounds of the other members of the cast and crew, and supplying insights on the filmmaking at hand. "Hong Kong tradition was to create sequences shot by shot. There is no 'master take' for the entire scene. Everything is done detail by detail, so there's a sort of brick by brick shot construction for every scene. It's kind of dynamic and exciting to see a kind of filmmaking that does invent itself and tell its stories shot by shot. There's none of the formulaic cutting, none of the patterns of point-of-view and this kind of stuff that are a big deal in classical Hollywood filmmaking. Instead, we have a kind of continuous process of invention that keep us constantly fluid and constantly moving forward in the storytelling."

### A Dolph excursion

One of the better Dolph Lundgren action adventures, the 1994 **Men of War**, has been released on Blu-ray by MDP Worldwide and MVDvisual as an *MVD Rewind Collection* title (UPC#760137156512, \$30). Lundgren is in charge of a group of mercenaries who have been sent to an island in a Southeast Asian archipelago to support a negotiation for mineral rights on the island. When they get there, however, they kind of find a Shangri-La or Bali Hai or you get the idea, and then the group splits up between who wants to get paid and who wants to go native. And then more mercenaries come to seal the deal. Running 103 minutes, the narrative continually jumps forward to keep up a good pace, but still has time to establish the characters and slip in a regular amount of intermediate action sequences before the lengthy final battle. Directed by Perry Lang, the script went through some changes but originated with John Sayles. There is nothing especially elegant about the film, but there isn't all that much that is wrong with it, either. It's exotic, it has explosions and fights, there's a little nudity, a lot of blood and a tolerable amount of humor, a passable amount of drama and it is decent escapist entertainment for those who want to see the world and share in some excitement without leaving the couch.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The cinematography is mildly compromised in darker sequences and so the image quality is not especially pristine, but it is clear that the color transfer is accurate and when the lighting is decent the picture looks great. The disc defaults to the original Ultra-Stereo mix, which is good fun, but the 5.1-channel DTS remix is even better, adding stronger separations and a greater dimensionality to the music, the environmental sounds and all of the explosions. There is an alternate Spanish audio track and optional English and Spanish subtitles. Along with a minute-long introduction Lang, there is a trailer; a good 8-minute montage of memorabilia (including the LD jacket); 10 minutes of interesting silent outtakes (set to the score, as is the memorabilia); and a very good 13-minute retrospective look at the film's production, which points out that its Thai locations were unknown when the film was shot but are now hot tourist destinations.

## Memories are made of these

A fondly remembered western TV series about amnesia, an MGM production broadcast in 1965 to 1966 on ABC on Monday nights, has been gathered in its entirety on the five-platter Warner Bros. *Warner WB Archive Collection* Blu-ray release, ***A Man Called Shenandoah The Complete Series*** (UPC#84041831-6986, \$35). Robert Horton is a gunman who is injured in a fight and left for dead in a storm, but is found and nursed back to health. His head wound prevents him from knowing his name or any of his previous circumstances, and so in each 25 or 26-minute 'half-hour' episode, he wanders into a new town or area, is exposed to teasing hints about his past life, and rights a wrong, solves other people's problems or otherwise has an experience. (We also recall, in the early days of laserdiscs, eagerly obtaining Andrew McLaglen's *Shenandoah*, starring James Stewart, only to be deeply disappointed that the plot had nothing to do with the TV series or memory loss.) In any case, the release of the series as a whole is most exciting, since once again, that hook in every episode where you find out a little something regarding Horton's character is enough to keep a viewer coming back, eagerly, from one episode to the next.

Horton even sings the sweet folk song, *Shenandoah*, for the show's title sequence, albeit with revised lyrics that emphasize his loneliness—without memories, people have no family or friendships—and we have loved the tune ever since. The song also wafts through some (but not all) of the background score. Horton, a handsome guy well suited to be a cowboy star, was best known as a supporting player on *Wagon Train*, but he really missed his calling not having been born a couple of decades earlier, since he was an accomplished singer and would have made a great singing cowboy in the Forties—much of his later career was spent on the stage in musicals.

Although there is one reference to one story maybe being set in 1890, it is an outlier, as the episodes, which are otherwise fairly consistent, set the show around 1870, with many of the identity clues coming from the hero's experiences in the Civil War. America was searching for its own identity after the War, and the many shots of Horton as a tiny, singular figure crossing a vast, empty landscape underscore both the potential that America held for the future, its isolation in the world as a country without a past, and the insignificance of any one person's problems amid the greater whole. That said, not a single African-American actor appears in any episode.

During the mid-Sixties, series television began toying, ever so slightly, with continuing narratives, whether it was with presenting an outright soap opera, notably **Peyton Place**, or just tacking on teasers in the last act of one episode that would lead into an entirely different episode the following week, such as **Lost in Space**. Each episode of **Man Called Shenandoah** is free standing, but there are callbacks in later episodes to the earlier episodes as he gathers clues regarding his past, and if one watches the series in the order broadcast, Horton's character does accumulate and retain more incidental knowledge about his life as the episodes progress. Sadly, the show only ran one season and there is no ultimate resolution.

Thirty-four episodes are spread across the platters and each episode has a 'Play All' option. There is some experimentation in the earlier episodes with the placement of the credits and the theme song, but the creators eventually settle on opening with a teaser, followed by the theme song, and minimal credits, and a quick voiceover explaining the hero's situation, reprising the theme song at the end with an initially altered line of lyrics to reflect the story's conclusion (they have about three variations that they draw from). The squared full screen black-and-white image transfer is consistently gorgeous, with sharp contrasts and zero wear, which adds greatly to the pleasure of watching the series. The production may utilize the same backlot sets for many of the episodes, but they are always dressed differently and you rarely recognize that the show has been there before (or that other westerns have used the same settings). Perhaps more so than a number of westerns, there is often an interest in items and knickknacks from the era, including old toys, odd cooking utensils, and a wonderful decorative antique Victorian brass backless bookshelf that has different displays of curios in different episodes. The monophonic sound is solid, although on one episode during a lengthy segment, we could hear a faint recording of other dialog underneath the episode's audio track. The episodes have optional English subtitles.

Each episode is in essence a short story, presenting a single idea, which is executed efficiently, almost always blending action with drama and occasionally, romance. Because of this, while you feel compelled to keep watching and watching, wanting to know if he will find out more about himself, the episodes also play quite well if you only sample a couple at a time and then let it go for a while, so you don't remember just how much of a tease each story is. The revelations can sometimes be spine tingling, such as the moment when a character speaks Spanish and Horton's character answers back in Spanish without realizing that he knew the language.

Only two of the episodes are real turkeys (the narratives go nowhere, the plot lines are illogical and the resolutions are lackluster in *Obion - 1866* and *Incident at Dry Creek*). There is also a partial clip episode, *Requiem for the Second*, which is still really good despite the brief reprises. Nor is the show perfect. In one episode, an outlaw dying in the hero's arms admits that the hero was not one of his gang before expiring, but it would have been so much better if he had said, "No, you didn't ride with me, you were..." and then died.

But that is it. Every other episode is genuinely fresh and enjoyable, fully satisfying despite its brevity, and there are the usual array of terrific supporting actors—old Hollywood character stars and young, up-and-coming stars—populating many of the shows, including Beverly Garland, Andrew Dugan, Edward Binns, Milton Selzer, Claude Akins, Leif Erikson, Joyce van Patten (in a very nice part), the now forgotten but once rising star Albert Salmi, Louise Latham, Diana Hyland, Martin Milner, Pat Hingle, and an elderly Paul Fix.

Stalwart directors who dabbled in features as well, such as Boris Sagal, Nathan Juran, and Tom Gries, consistently deliver terrific entertainments, but we were also struck by the work of the lesser known Jud Taylor. In the enjoyable *Marlee*, directed by Taylor, John Ireland is a sheriff and Nina Foch is his wife, who is desperate to hold onto the glamour of her past, especially when Horton's character comes to town with a photo of himself and her at a costume ball, much to the sheriff's chagrin.

Taylor includes shots in multiple mirrors to emphasize the awareness Foch's character has of her lost youth, along with extreme close-ups to magnify the tension, and has a great time with the set decoration as well, parsing out the emotional beats to perfection. Taylor also directed *Aces and Kings*, in which a coveting bargirl played by Antoinette Bower (who has a Diana Rigg thing going) wants the mysterious pinkie ring the hero wears, which ends up being part of the pot in the wonderfully suspenseful poker game that takes up most of the episode. Strother Martin has a secondary part.

The best episode, *The Imposter*, was directed by Juran. Too much cannot be said without spoiling anything, but the episode features an outstanding performance by Jay C. Flippen—easily one of the best things he ever did, even though it only amounts to a few minutes of screen time—who demonstrates a remarkable range and a magnetic screen presence every moment he is there. Juliet Mills is also featured, and even Horton, whose performances are generally utilitarian, is pushed to the top of his game. The creators were basically hitting all cylinders. In another terrific Juran episode, *The Clown*, Frank Gorshin is the title character, a clown in a traveling circus who recognizes the hero and panics. The episode doesn't have much action, but Gorshin's performance, including a lengthy monolog, is exceptional. Arthur O'Connell is also featured.

Along with *The Imposter*, the other really great episode is *The Verdict*, which is dazzling from its very opening. A sheriff is just about to give Horton's character a lead when there is a robbery. The sheriff runs outside and gets gunned down without telling him anything. Horton shoots one of the robbers (a very young Bruce Dern), who falls from his horse and is brought to trial for murder. Ed Asner is the defense attorney at the trial, however, impeaching the hero's testimony because of his amnesia problems. That leads to an exciting conclusion. From beginning to end, the episode is exquisite entertainment.

The first episode, *The Onslaught*, of course, sets everything up, while the second episode, *Survival*, leaps right into working the series format, with John Anderson as a sheriff who is the only one standing between the hero and a lynch mob after a woman is murdered. Taut and efficient, with good action and a quick, satisfying drama, the episode sets the tone for whole series. Warren Oates is in the next episode, *The Fort*, where Horton's character is accused of collaboration, and then Cloris Leachman and Kent Smith show up in the next episode, *The Caller*, about a little girl who can't speak, but is the only one who can clear Horton's character of another murder charge and also tell him something about his past. And then Harry Dean Stanton, delivering a tone-perfect, icy performance, shows up as a hired gun in the next episode, *The Debt*, along with Charles McGraw and Whit Bissell, with Stanton's character hired to avenge a killing during the war that Hinton's character, naturally, cannot recall.

Henry Jones, normally cast as a venal bad guy or a quirky comical figure, gets to play an action hero in *Town on Fire*, helping Horton's character pick off the bad guys in an otherwise abandoned town. There is only one episode that includes Native Americans, who are depicted solely as whiskey-mad savages, *The Locket*, but otherwise the action is furious and Martin Landau is great as a bounty hunter, who joins forces with hero to track a guy through Indian country, although Landau's character wants to kill the man as soon as he sees him while Horton's character needs to talk to him first. (In one other episode, there is a brief shot of a character in Native American dress working as a maid in a ranch house.) Lloyd Bochner is a bounty hunter in *Reward*, carrying a wanted poster with Horton's photo on it after Horton's character has settled down a bit in a pleasant town. Once again, it is a clever and very enjoyable blend of drama, action and romance. In our reviews of **Colt .45** (Jul 24) and **The Alaskans** (Nov 24), we disparaged the performances of rising bit player George Kennedy, but he is much better in *A Special Talent for Killing*, playing a steely, determined villain and making up for the mildly far-fetched plot (a town is empty except for four people, but the hero can still get a steak at the hotel).

The series does a lovely shift with *The Bell*. Nehemiah Persoff is pastor trying to transport a large bell over rough terrain and ropes the hero into helping him. Simply by setting everything up, the creators infuse the condition of Horton's character with a valid spiritual resonance that deepens his presence and purpose in the other episodes. A case in point is the next episode, *The Young Outlaw*, which is best left to be discovered except to say that there is a terrific shoot out in a ghost town, followed by a wonderful **Angels with Dirty Faces** turn by John Dehner as a famous gunslinger. Leonard Nimoy is another steely hired killer in the terrific *Run Killer Run*, which pretty much reworks *The Debt* with a different setting (there's a riverboat!), but has a novel's worth of story in its supporting characters and also features Sally Kellerman and Sandy Kenyon. Michael Ansara, with an awesome, completely shaved hair cut, and the divine Susan Oliver are featured in the enjoyable *Rope's End*, about hostages at a stagecoach rest stop. Between the drama and the star power, what's not to like? In *The Lost Diablo*, Horton's character gets a gold map from a lockbox and meets his former partner (who didn't know his real name). Once the two are near the location of the mine, his memory is sparked, but just a tiny bit, enough to find the treasure. It plays out as one might expect, but is still a really nice adventure, especially with James Gregory as the partner and Robert Loggia as a Mexican bandit.

In the only episode that could even vaguely be considered comedic, *Care of General Delivery*, an elderly lady who runs the general store and post office keeps stalling Horton's character when he is looking for a guy who picks up his mail and a check every month from the store. Hollywood couple Jeanette Nolan and John McIntire guest star, and again, the Juran episode emphasizes their performances, with the vaguest but still pointed references to **Arsenic and Old Lace**. The cast in *The Riley Brand* is super, including Joanna Pettet, Warren Stevens, DeForest Kelley and Elisha Cook. The female owner of a big ranch thinks Horton's character might be her long lost brother, and her foreman gets fatally jealous. In an episode early on the fourth platter that sort of works as a turning point for the series, *Muted Fife, Muffled*

*Drums*, Horton's character finds a photo of himself in a cavalry archive (which he apparently steals, since he start carrying it around in later episodes), but a diary in the same archive suggests that one man in the photo might have committed treason, and he has to stand for a court martial. An almost unrecognizable Norman Fell (another character, referring to Fell, says, "At least he knows three's a crowd.") gives an excellent performance as his defense attorney. Horton stretches his own acting muscles in the final episode, *Macaulay's Cure*, visiting a doctor who hypnotizes him to bring up past memories. Unfortunately, one of those memories involves the town's sheriff, played by a disintegrating Gary Merrill, who wants to put a stop to the proceedings. The director, Murray Golden, is kind to Horton, hiding his face during the most critical moments of his performance, but it is still fairly clear that there were limitations to his range. Nevertheless, it is a shame the show was not picked up for a second season, and an even greater shame that the creators weren't allowed to make a **Fugitive**-style wrap up (which then could have led to a wonderful feature film...).

### Murder by hairpin

If we run out of giallo or film noir movies to watch but still need a murder thriller fix, we have no problem turning to *Hallmark Mysteries*. Often broadcast on the Lifetime Channel, they have a little more time to develop a narrative than hour-long TV episodes, and an absolutely fascinatingly subtle female-centric perspective that makes the male characters, even the competent ones, somehow feel like appendages. Cineverse has released the 2024 *Hallmark Mystery Original Movie*, **Crimes of Fashion Killer Clutch** (UPC#767685170465, \$15), a partially Hungarian production directed by Felipe Rodriguez and shot on location in New York and (mostly) Paris. Brooke D'Orsay stars as a psychologist hired by a French designer to aid with coping during stressful fashion shows, a situation that is exacerbated when one of the managers is found stabbed by a hairpin in the middle of a show. Running 84 minutes, a number of the supporting players are Hungarian, thus eschewing the normal cookie-cutter casting one might find in American or Canadian productions for some genuinely unique faces and personalities, such as Eva Magyar, who plays the editor of an important fashion magazine. Gilles Marini is the dashing French detective who helps D'Orsay's character solve the crime, and Paloma Coquant is the friend who helped D'Orsay's character get the job in the first place, discovers the corpse while holding a box full of hairpins, and is the primary suspect. So, if you're patiently waiting for the next season of **Emily in Paris** to drop, this can hold you over. There are a few moments of suspense—especially if rats creep you out—a moderately decent solution to the crime and a nice mix of Parisian locations and outfits. We could not help think, as the camera swirls around D'Orsay and Coquant's characters near the end on a Parisian plaza, hugging one another after the former solves the crime and the latter is released from jail, of Claude Lelouch, but that's just us.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The color transfer looks great, and while the details of some of the long establishing shots of Paris are a bit wiggly if you try to look too closely, overall the image is bright, sharp and glossy. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound even delivers some nice directional effects when the villain shoots at the heroine. There is a game attempt to straddle French and (mostly) English in the dialog, and optional captioning to cover it all.

### DVD News

**CRITERION CORNER:** Since they can't seem to get enough of the big guy, Kazuki Omoni's **Godzilla vs. Biollante** is being released in 4K format by the Criterion Collection with a commentary featuring film historian Samm Deighan, host of the podcast *Eros + Massacre* and coeditor of the book *Revolution in 35mm*; a making-of program from 1993 featuring Omoni and special-effects director Koichi Kawakita, among others; a short documentary from 1993 about the Biollante and Super X2 vehicle concepts; and deleted special effects. Arthur Penn's **Night Moves** will be in 4K and will feature a commentary by Matthew Asprey Gear, author of *Moseby Confidential*; an audio interview with Jennifer Warren; an interview with Penn from a 1975 episode of *Cinema Showcase*; an interview with Penn from the 1995 documentary *Arthur Penn: A Love Affair with Film*; and *The Day of the Director*, a behind-the-scenes featurette. Henri-Georges Clouzot's **Wages of Fear** will be in 4K and will have featurettes with assistant director Michel Romanoff and Clouzot's biographer, Marc Godin; an interview with Yves Montand from 1988; *Henri-Georges Clouzot: The Enlightened Tyrant*, a 2004 documentary on the director's career; *Censored*, an analysis of cuts made to the film for its 1955 U.S. release; and a program on the film's 4K restoration. Alan Rudolph's **Choose Me** will be in 4K and will include a conversation between Rudolph and Keith Carradine; a program featuring interviews with Rudolph, producer David Blocker, production designer Steven Legler, and producer Carolyn Pfeiffer; and excerpts from an interview with Rudolph at the Midnight Sun Film Festival. Michael Mann's **Thief** will be in 4K and will come with a commentary featuring Mann and James Caan, and interviews with Mann, Caan, and Johannes Schmoelling of Tangerine Dream. Charlie Chaplin's **A Woman of Paris** will have an introduction by Chaplin scholar David Robinson; a new video essay by Chaplin biographer Jeffrey Vance; *Chaplin Today: A Woman of Paris*, featuring interviews with Liv Ullmann and Michael Powell; *Archive Commentary: About A Woman of Paris*, a documentary by Arnold Lozano, managing director of Roy Export S.A.S.; excerpts from an audio interview with Chaplin Studios cameraman Roland Totheroh; deleted shots from the original 1923 film; and archival footage. Guillermo del Toro's **Cronos** will be in 4K and will include two commentaries, one featuring del Toro and the other featuring producers Arthur H. Gorson and Bertha Navarro and coproducer Alejandro Springall; *Geometria*, an unreleased 1987 short horror film by del Toro, finished in 2010, alongside an interview with the director; *Welcome to Bleak House*, a tour by del Toro of his home office, featuring his personal collections; interviews with del Toro, cinematographer Guillermo Navarro, and Ron Perlman and Federico Luppi; and a stills gallery captioned by del Toro.

**NEW IN BLU:** The following titles were recently issued on Blu-ray—Breast Friends 3, Glitch Ditch 13, Glitch Ditch 14, Glitch Ditch 15, Glitch Ditch 16, Glitch Ditch 17, Glitch Ditch 18, Glitch Ditch 19, Glitch Ditch 20, Glitch Ditch 21, Glitch Ditch 23, Glitch Ditch 24, Glitch Ditch 25, Glitch Ditch 26, Glitch Ditch 27, Hell Hike, Mind Melters 66, Mind Melters 67, Mind Melters 68, Mind Melters 69, Mind Melters 70, Mind Melters 71, Mind Melters 72, Mind Melters 73, Mind Melters 74, Mind Melters 75, Mind Melters 76, Mind Melters 77, Mind Melters 78, Mind Melters 79, Mind Melters 80, Mind Melters 81, Mind Melters 82, Mind Melters 83, Mind Melters 84, Mind Melters 85, Mind Melters 86, Mind Melters 87, Mind Melters 88, Mind Melters 89, Mind Melters 90, Mind Melters 91, Mind Melters 92, Mind Melters 93, Mind Melters 94, Mind Melters 95 (Acid Bath); Santa Claus Conquers the Martians & Other Holiday Hallucinations (AGFA); Blackest Darkness (Alan Ferguson); Saloom, The Walking Dead Daryl Dixon Season 2 (AMD); Aware of the Wolf, Fist and Faith, Nothing Can't Be Undone with a Hotpot, Pesadilla, PG Love, Searching for Yoo, When Houston Had the Blues (Bayview); The Owners (Big World); Take Cover (Brainstorm); Alien Romulus (Buena Vista); The Standoff, The Tourists (Burning Bulb); Adam Green's Aladdin (Cartuna); A Biltmore Christmas, The Dead Don't Hurt, Golden Harvest V.2 Shining Stars, A Merry Scottish Christmas, Winnie the Pooh Blood and Honey 2 (Cinedigm); Battle of the Bulge Wunderland, D-Day Battle of Omaha Beach (Cineverse); Terrifier 3 (Coven); The Beast, Easter Condors, Evil Does Not Exist (Criterion); Adult Swim Yule Log (Dekanalog); Murder Zone, Murder Zone 2 (Die Star); Ghost Game (Epic); I Am Santa Claus (ETR); Better Than Something Jay Reatard (Factory 25); Severance Season 1 (Fifth Season); Have a Nice Life (Film Desk); Bent, Ginger in the Morning, Here's Flash Casey, Redneck Miller (Film Masters); Takeshi Kitano Double Bill Violent Cop/Boiling Point, 20,000 Species of Bees (Film Movement); Touristic Intent (First Run); Quadrant (Full Moon); The Act of Reading, American Tragedy, Apache Warrior, Are You Happy Now, As Long As We Both Shall Live, At Night Comes Wolves, At the Ready, Bad \*ss Women Doing Kick \*ss Sh\*t, Bad Impulse, Bad Witch, Becoming a Queen, The Book of Job, Brexit The Will of the People, The Burning Season, Caffeine & Gasoline The Evolution of American Rocker, Clapboard Jungle, Dark Figures, Dogman Tales, Ebenezer The Traveler, Eden, Fighting for Daybreak, First Blush, Fittest on Earth Final Showdown in Madtown, Flatwoods, Forever Majestic, 40-Love, From Embers, Getting to Know You, Ghosts of the Republic, A Good American, Goodbye Butterfly, A Great Divide, Heirloom: Guitar, Hello World, The Hills I Call Home, The House in Between Part Two, The Judge, Killer Weekend, The Last Sermon, Loud and Longing, Mags and Julie Go on a Road Trip, Meatball Machine, Merry Christmas, Mobbing, The Motorcycle Illustrated, Mudbrick, The Mystery of the Britannic, #Unknown, Old-Growth Murder, The One You Feed, Persona, Promised, Running Wild The Cats of Cornwall, Sing Me a Song, Sins of the Father, So This Is Christmas, Solomon, Sour Grapes, Stalker, The Stay, Strong Enough, Tipping the Pain Scale, Tribes on the Edge, Truth Is the Only Client, The Unbreakable Bunch, The Unseen, What Lies Inside, Woe, You're Not There (Gravitas); Raphael A Portrait (Ideas); The Story of G.I. Joe (Ignite); Moral (Kani); Hellboy The Crooked Man (Ketchup); Arthur Dong Collection, The Ballad of Josie, The Beast Within, The Beloved Rogue, Below, Blood and Lace, The Claim, Daytime Revolution, For Love or Money, The Killer Is Loose, Miracle Mile, Missing from Fire Trail Road, Mr. Monk's Last Case A Monk Movie, Monte Walsh, Pray for Death, Rage of Honor, Rambling Rose, Rhythm Thief, World Series Champs The 2023 World Series (Kino); Six Days in August (LDS); Breathe, Creatures, Santastein, You and Me and Christmas Makes Three (Leomark); The Secret Art of Human Flight (Level 33); Never Let Go, White Bird (Lionsgate); Sleep (Magnolia); Reefer Madness The Movie Musical, Rippy, The Roundup Punishment, The Soul Eater (MPI); Abruption, The Addiction, The Block Island Sound, The Cat and the Canary, Cheerleaders Wild Weekend, Copkillers, Crust, Cursed in Baja, Demolition Man, Hard Wood The Adult Features of Ed Wood, Horrible History Four Historical Epics by Chang Cheh, The Incredibly Strange Creatures Who Stopped Living and Became Mixed Up Zombies, Las Vegas Hillbillies, The Last Video Store, The Love Light!, Men of War, Riddick, Satan's Sadists & Angels' Wild Women, Scala!! or, The Incredibly Strange Rise and Fall of the World's Wildest Cinema, Toxic Crusaders The Series, Yokohama BJ Blues (MVD); South Park The End of Obesity, Transformers One (Paramount); The Escapees, Requiem for a Powerhouse (Powerhouse); The Apprentice (Relativity); Cast a Giant Shadow, Heavy Traffic, Mulholland Falls, The Land That Time Forgot, The Pope of Greenwich Village, River's Edge, Sleepaway Camp II Unhappy Campers, Sleepaway Camp III Teenage Wasteland (Sandpiper); Fatal Delusion (Saturn's Core); Johnny 316/Seven Angels, Lichtenberg, Scroog'd, A Very Sitcom Christmas (Shoreline); The Blood Ship, Crush, The Forge, The Lords of Flatbush (Sony); Axegrinder 4, Axegrinder 5, Axegrinder 666, Camp Blood Clown Sharks, Camp Blood Kills, Camp Blood 666, Camp Blood 666 Part 2 Exorcism of the Clown, Camp Blood 7, Ghost of Camp Blood, The Occultist 2, Things 4, Thingz (Sterling); The Mean One (Twin Engines); Hercules Returns (Umbrella); Conclave, Piece by Piece, The Wild Robot (Universal); Red Rooms (Utopia); Black Eye, Blake's 7 Season 1, Doctor Who 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Specials, The End of the World in Our Usual Bed in a Night Full of Rain, Joker Folie A Deux, Mr. Lucky, Nora Prentiss, The Spanish Main, The Tall Target, Watchmen Chapter II (Warner); Bangkok Dog, Betrayal, Duchess, Ghosts of Red Ridge, How to Make Millions before Grandma Dies, Mafia Wars, The Stoic (Well Go); The Book of Birdie (Yellow Veil)

**NEW IN 4K:** The following titles were recently released in 4K format—Ahsoka Season 1, Alien Romulus, Hawkeye Season 1, Loki Season 2, The Mandalorian Season 3 (Buena Vista), Aguirre The Wrath of God, The Faculty, Far and Away, The Gift, The Holdovers, Pumpkinhead, Rock 'n' Roll High School, Silent Night Deadly Night, Ted, Wallace and Gromit The Complete Cracking Collection (Cinedigm); Terrifier (Coven); 8½, No Country for Old Men, Paris Texas (Criterion); The Giant Spider Invasion (Dark Force); Immaculate (Decal); Below, Hatari, Internal Affairs, Snake Eyes (Kino); Rippy, The Roundup Punishment, The Soul Eater (MPI); Crimson Peak, Demolition Man, Riddick (MVD); Interstellar, Transformers One (Paramount); The Escapees, Requiem for a Vampire (Powerhouse), Legends of the Fall, Seinfeld Complete Series, The Talk of the Town (Sony); Conclave, Galaxy Quest, Shaun of the Dead, The Wild Robot (Universal); Joker Folie A Deux, The Searchers, Watchman Chapter II (Warner)

An index to the reviews contained in this issue

<b>BDs</b>	Eastern Condors p9	J-Horror Rising p6	Ryuichi Sakamoto   Opus p3	Super Spies and Secret Lies p8
(Angel with the Iron Fists) p8	8½ 4K p2	Joker Folie à Deux p1	(Sbatti il mostro in prima pagina) p2	The Sword p3
At Long Last Love p4	Godzilla 4K p1	(La Faille) p8	(Shikoku) p6	Talk of the Town 4K p5
Blazing Saddles 4K p5	(Godzilla) King of the Monsters p1	Legends of the Fall 4K p2	(The Singing Thief) p8	The Tall Target p3
“The Blood Ship” p5	Godzilla Minus One 4K p1	A Man Called Shenandoah The Complete Series p10	Slap the Monster on Page One p2	Weak Spot p8
(Carved: The Slit-Mouthed Woman) p6	(The Golden Buddha) p8	Men of War p9	The Spanish Main p5	<b>DVD</b>
Daisy Miller p4	(Inugami) p6	(Noroi: The Curse) p7	(St. John’s Wort) p6	Crimes of Fashion Killer
Dark Water 4K p7	(Isola: Multiple Personality Girl) p6	Paper Moon 4K p4		Clutch p11
Demolition Man 4K p9		(Persona) p7		

**Current**  
**Attractions**

The following titles recently appeared for the first time: Abducted in Plain Sight

- (Gravitas)\*
- Abruptio (MVD)
- The Act of Reading (Gravitas)\*
- Afloat (Indiepix)
- Agents (Vision)\*
- Airborne (Gravitas)\*
- Alien Romulus (Buena Vista)
- All about Who You Know (Gravitas)\*
- All Summer’s End (Gravitas)\*
- All That Remains (X4)\*
- All These Sons (Gravitas)\*
- Allswell in New York (Freestyle)
- Ancient Aliens Season 20 (Lionsgate)
- Angel Complete Series V. 1 (Classifix)
- Anonymous Animals (Gravitas)\*
- The Apprentice (Relativity)
- Are You Happy Now (Gravitas)\*
- As Long As We Both Shall Live (Gravitas)\*
- At Night Comes Wolves (Gravitas)\*
- At the Ready (Gravitas)\*
- Average Joe (Pure Fix)
- Bad “ss Women Doing Kick “ss Sh’t” (Gravitas)\*
- Bad Witch (Gravitas)\*
- Bangkok Dog (Well Go)
- Barnabas and Paul (Vision)\*
- Battle of the Bulge (Wunderland (Cineverse)\*
- The Beast (Criterion)
- Becoming a Queen (Gravitas)\*
- Bed of Nails (Random)\*
- Being Rose (Gravitas)\*
- Betrayal (Well Go)\*
- Beyond Bars (Freestyle)
- The Bill Murray Stories (Gravitas)\*
- Black Butterflies (Tribeca)\*
- Black Spruce (Gravitas)\*
- The Block Island Sound (MVD)
- Bloom (Gravitas)\*
- Blue Bloods Complete Series (Paramount)
- Blue Bloods Final Season (Paramount)
- Bottom of a Glass Blues (X4)\*
- Braking for Whales (Gravitas)\*
- Breast Friends Club 3 (Acid Bath)\*
- Breathe (Leomark)\*
- Brexit the Will of the People (Gravitas)\*
- Bully (Gravitas)\*
- The Burning Season (Gravitas)\*
- Caffeine & Gasoline The Evolution of the American Rocker (Gravitas)\*
- Camp Murder (Gravitas)\*
- Cast a Giant Shadow (Sandpiper)
- Cheerleaders Wild Weekend (MVD)
- Christmas at Keestone (Octane)\*
- Christmas Break-in (Gravitas)\*
- Clapboard Jungle (Gravitas)\*
- The Climate According to AI (Gore (MVD)
- Close Your Eyes (Film Movement)
- Colewell (Gravitas)\*
- Come What May (Vision)\*
- Conclave (Universal)\*
- Confessions of a Prodigal Son (Cineverse)\*
- The Connection Severed (N-Take)
- The Conversation (Deskpop)
- Copkillers (MVD)

- Crimes of Fashion Killer Clutch (Cinedigm)
- The Critic (Kino)
- Crust (MVD)
- Cursed in Baja (MVD)
- Danny Go! (Yippeep)\*
- Darius (SRS)
- Daruma (Freestyle)
- Dashcam (Gravitas)\*
- Day of the Clones (Random)\*
- Daytime Revolution (Kino)
- D-Day Battle of Omaha Beach (Cineverse)\*
- D-Day Survivor (Cineverse)\*
- Death Link (Gravitas)\*
- Death of a Superhero (Tribeca)\*
- Doctor Who 60th Anniversary Specials (Warner)
- Duchess (Well Go)
- Ebenezer The Traveler (Gravitas)\*
- Eden (Gravitas)\*
- The Effects of Lying (Freestyle)
- 86ED (Gravitas)\*
- Empire Waist (Breaking Glass)\*
- Everything Puppies/Guiding Emily/The More Love Grows (Cinedigm)
- Everything Will Be Alright (Indiepix)
- Evil Does Not Exist (Criterion)
- Exile (X4)\*
- Expecting (Tribeca)\*
- Fancy Like Walter Hayes (Kino)
- Filthy Animals (Freestyle)\*
- Fittest on Earth Final Showdown in Madtown (Gravitas)
- Flying for the Flag (Gravitas)\*
- Forever Majestic (Gravitas)\*
- Forever Mine (Freestyle)\*
- The Forge (Sony)
- 40-Love (Gravitas)\*
- Fourth Grade (Gravitas)\*
- From Embers (Gravitas)\*
- Futra Days (Electric)\*
- The Ghost Trap (Freestyle)
- Ghosts of Red Ridge (Well Go)
- Ginger in the Morning (Film Masters)\*
- Glitch Ditch 13 (Acid Bath)
- Glitch Ditch 14 (Acid Bath)
- Glitch Ditch 15 (Acid Bath)
- Glitch Ditch 16 (Acid Bath)
- Glitch Ditch 17 (Acid Bath)
- Glitch Ditch 18 (Acid Bath)
- Glitch Ditch 19 (Acid Bath)
- Glitch Ditch 20 (Acid Bath)
- Glitch Ditch 21 (Acid Bath)
- Glitch Ditch 22 (Acid Bath)
- Glitch Ditch 23 (Acid Bath)
- Glitch Ditch 24 (Acid Bath)
- Glitch Ditch 25 (Acid Bath)
- Glitch Ditch 26 (Acid Bath)
- Glitch Ditch 27 (Acid Bath)
- Glitch Ditch 28 (Acid Bath)
- Glitch Ditch 29 (Acid Bath)
- Glitch Ditch 30 (Acid Bath)
- Go Back to China (Gravitas)\*
- God’s Club (Cineverse)\*
- Going Nowhere (Gravitas)\*
- Gotham The Fall and Rise of New York (Gravitas)\*
- A Great Divide (Gravitas)\*
- The Group (Electric)\*
- Guerrillero Del Norte (MVD)
- Heavy Traffic (Sandpiper)
- Heirloom: Guitar (Gravitas)\*
- Hell Hike (Acid Bath)
- Hellboy The Crooked Man (Ketchup)
- Here’s Flash Casey (Film Masters)\*
- Hero (Vision)\*
- Hidden Blessings (Vision)\*
- High Tide (Strand)
- Hitting Licks (CM)\*
- The Hive (Buffalo 8)
- A Holiday I Do (Octane)\*
- The House in Between Part Two (Gravitas)\*

- How to Make Millions before Grandma Dies (Well Go)\*
- How to Solve Your Own Murder (Deskpop)\*
- I Could Never Go Vegan (Kino)
- Ikonophile Z (Deskpop)
- Joker: Folie à Deux (Warner)
- Joy Christmas with the Tabernacle Choir (Intellectual)
- Killer Kabbage (X4)\*
- Killin’ Time (SRS)
- Knock Off (MVD)
- The Land That Time Forgot (Sandpiper)
- Lichtenberg (Shoreline)
- Loud and Longing (Gravitas)\*
- The Love Light! (MVD)
- Love Shot (Gravitas)\*
- Mafia Wars (Well Go)\*
- The Maker of Monsters (SRS)
- Making a Killing (Gravitas)\*
- Mancora (Buffalo 8)\*
- Marooned Awakening (Gravitas)\*
- Men of War (MVD)
- Mind Melters 66 (Acid Bath)
- Mind Melters 67 (Acid Bath)
- Mind Melters 68 (Acid Bath)
- Mind Melters 69 (Acid Bath)
- Mind Melters 70 (Acid Bath)
- Mind Melters 71 (Acid Bath)\*
- Mind Melters 72 (Acid Bath)\*
- Mind Melters 73 (Acid Bath)\*
- Mind Melters 74 (Acid Bath)\*
- Mind Melters 75 (Acid Bath)\*
- Mind Melters 76 (Acid Bath)\*
- Mind Melters 77 (Acid Bath)\*
- Mind Melters 78 (Acid Bath)\*
- Mind Melters 79 (Acid Bath)\*
- Mind Melters 80 (Acid Bath)\*
- Mind Melters 81 (Acid Bath)\*
- Mind Melters 82 (Acid Bath)\*
- Mind Melters 83 (Acid Bath)\*
- Mind Melters 84 (Acid Bath)\*
- Mind Melters 85 (Acid Bath)\*
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- Mind Melters 93 (Acid Bath)\*
- Mind Melters 94 (Acid Bath)\*
- Mind Melters 95 (Acid Bath)\*
- Mind Melters 96 (Acid Bath)\*
- Mind Melters 97 (Acid Bath)\*
- Mind Melters 98 (Acid Bath)\*
- Mind Melters 99 (Acid Bath)\*
- Mind Melters 100 (Acid Bath)\*
- Missing from Fire Trail Road (MVD)
- MobKing (Gravitas)\*
- Mother Mortis (SRS)
- Mother Nocturna (Buffalo 8)
- Much Ado about Dying (First Run)
- Mudbrick (Gravitas)\*
- Mulholland Falls (Sandpiper)
- Murder Zone (Die Star)\*
- Murder Zone 2 (Die Star)\*
- My Generation (Gravitas)\*
- My Last Nerve (Freestyle)
- My Partner (Random)\*
- Never Let Go (Lionsgate)
- Never Look Away (Kino)
- Night Night (Gravitas)\*
- Not on This Night (Random)\*
- Nothing Is Truer Than Truth (Gravitas)\*
- #Unknown (Gravitas)\*
- Old-Growth Murder (Gravitas)\*
- Omni Loop (Magnolia)
- 1 out of 100 (X4)\*
- Only the River Flows (Kino)
- Out Come the Wolves (MPI)
- The Outrun (Sony)
- The Owners (Big World)
- Paralysis (X4)\*
- Paranormal Prison (Gravitas)\*
- Paw Patrol Rescue Wheels (Paramount)
- Persona (Gravitas)\*
- Piece by Piece (Universal)
- Pinwheel (X4)\*

- The Pope of Greenwich Village (Sandpiper)
- The Post (Deskpop)
- Quadrant (Full Moon)
- The Quest Everest (Kino)
- Raphael A Portrait (Ideas)\*
- Redneck Miller (Film Masters)\*
- The Rise of OnlyFans (Shoreline)
- Rippy (MPI)
- River’s Edge (Sandpiper)
- Robin Watch for Wishes (Electric)\*
- The Roundup Punishment (MPI)
- Running Wild The Cats of Cornwall (Gravitas)\*
- Samson (Freestyle)
- Santastem (Brainstorm)\*
- Seal Team Complete Series (Paramount)
- Seal Team Final Season (Paramount)
- 72 Hours (Brainstorm)\*
- 74 Minutes (Gravitas)\*
- Shady Grove (Gravitas)\*
- Shirin Ebadi Until We Are Free (Gravitas)\*
- Sisu (Gravitas)\*
- Sleep (Magnolia)
- Sleepaway Camp II Unhappy Campers (Sandpiper)
- Sleepaway Camp III Teenage Wasteland (Sandpiper)
- Slice of America Charred in the Florida Sun (MVD)
- Slice of America Episode 1 (MVD)
- Snuff Queen (MVD)
- So This Is Christmas (Gravitas)\*
- Songbirds (Gravitas)\*
- The Soul Eater (MPI)
- South Park The End of Obesity (Paramount)
- Space Kids Science in Space (Wonderscape)
- Space Sharks (Wild Eye)
- The Squad (Buffalo 8)
- The Standoff (Burning Bulb)\*
- Starring Jerry As Himself (Kino)
- Strings Attached (Leomark)\*
- The Stoic (Wild Eye)\*
- Strong Enough (Gravitas)\*
- The Story of G.I. Joe (Ignite)
- Sunflower (TLA)
- Sunrise in Heaven (Cineverse)\*
- Take Cover (Brainstorm)\*
- Tears of Blood (X4)\*
- Teddy’s Christmas (MPI)
- Terrifier 3 (Coven)
- This Hits Home (Gravitas)\*
- Time of the Witch (Random)\*
- Tipping the Pain Scale (Gravitas)\*
- Touristic Intent (First Run)
- The Tourists (Burning Bulb)\*
- Town of Widows (Gravitas)\*
- Transformers One (Paramount)
- Treasure Trackers (Level 33)\*
- Tribes on the Edge (Gravitas)\*
- The Unabridged Mrs. Vera’s Daybook (Gravitas)\*
- The Unbreakable Bunch (Gravitas)\*
- Under Pressure (Vision)\*
- Unidentified (Buffalo 8)
- The Unlikely Good Samaritan (Gravitas)\*
- The Unseen (Gravitas)\*
- Use Me (Gravitas)\*
- Vertical Freedom (Gravitas)\*
- A Very Vermont Christmas/Falling Like Snowflakes (Cinedigm)
- Voices American Historia The Untold Story of Latinos (Paramount)
- The Walking Dead Daryl Dixon Season 2 (AMD)
- War Machine World War II (Paramount)
- We Are Not Ghosts (Gravitas)\*

- Welcome to Redville (Gravitas)\*
- What Still Remains (Gravitas)\*
- White Bird (Lionsgate)
- The Whitest Kids You Know Complete Series (Cinedigm)
- A Wicked Eden (Gravitas)\*
- The Wild Robot (Universal)
- Woe (Gravitas)\*
- Women (Gravitas)\*
- WWII Operation Phoenix (Vision)\*
- You Me and Christmas Makes Three (Leomark)
- You’re Not There (Gravitas)\*

\*Did not appear on last month’s Coming Attractions listing

**Coming Attractions**

The following select DVD titles are promised for the near future. How many of them will show up is never a certainty. Logical subdivisions appear unmarked within each division. Titles which did not appear on last month’s list are marked with an arrow (→) and are added to the bottom of subdivisions so that the longest awaited titles appear at the top within each grouping:

- From Alpha:**
  - Guardians of the Wild
  - The Gaucho
  - Eve’s Leaves
  - Silent Slapstick Comedy Parade V.4
  - Beggars of Life
  - Stella Dallas
  - The Shield of Honor
  - Through the Breakers
  - Spirit Riser
- From AMD:**
  - Zraael
  - Little Bites
- From Cinedigm:**
  - A Biltmore Christmas Time for Her to Come Home for Christmas
  - Miracle in Bethlehem PA
  - A Merry Scottish Christmas Falling in Love in Niagara/A Whitewater Romance
  - Gilded Newport Mysteries Murder at the Breakers
- From Cinema Guild:**
  - Cane Fire
- From Criterion:**
  - The Mother and the Whore King Lear (Godard)
  - Last Summer
  - A Woman of Paris
- From Decal:**
  - Monster Summer Rumours
  - The Return
- From Deskpop:**
  - Dead before They Wake
  - Vintage Arizona
  - The Yorlie Werewolf
- From Dreamscape:**
  - Arthur and the Minimoys Season 1
  - Arthur and the Minimoys Season 2
  - Arthur and the Minimoys Season 3
  - Bible Land Passages
  - Climate for Change
  - Extraordinary Ecosystems
  - Heavens to Betsy
  - The Incredible Journey: Daniel The Insanity of God
  - She Has a Name
  - The Story of Bookworm Gogo Transformation
  - The Watches Season 1
  - Alice in Wonderland Season 1
  - Dating Daisy
  - Deedee The Little

- Sorceress Season 1
- Flunk Season 1
- Heavens to Betsy 2
- Mia and Me Season 1
- Penn’s Seed The Awakening
- 20th Century Icons JFK The Assassination
- 20th Century Icons Lewis Hamilton
- 20th Century Icons The Kennedy Legacy
- Vic the Viking Season 1
- The Wild Adventures of Blinky Bill Season 1

**From Film Movement:**

- Sisterhood
- Naked Acts
- Obsessed with Light
- From Found Footage:**
- Found Footage Festival V.9 & V.10
- The Found Footage Festival Cherished Gems
- From High Fliers:**
- St. Patrick’s Day Massacre
- From Indiepix:**
- Tito Margot and Me
- Nadia
- From Ketchup:**
- Weekend in Taipei
- From Kino:**
- Soundtrack to a Coup D’Etat
- Carville Winning Is Everything Stupid
- Separated
- Master Crimes
- World Series Champs The 2023 World Series (Texas Rangers)
- To Dye For The Documentary
- My Name Is Alfred
- Hitchcock
- The Cowboy and the Queen
- Oh Canada
- The Other Widow
- Oscar Micheaux The Superhero of Black Filmmaking
- America Is Sinking
- Alien Rubicon
- The Road to Eilat
- From Magnolia:**
- Things Will Be Different
- The Gutter
- From MPI:**
- Flesh+Blood
- From Mubi:**
- The Substance
- From Music Box:**
- In the Summers
- From MVD:**
- Vixen
- Super Vixens
- Beneath the Valley of the Ultra Vixens
- Dark Sanctuary The Story of The Church
- Shelf Life
- Apache Rifles/Panhandle
- Endless Summer Syndrome
- From My Way:**
- Hanukkah
- From Oscilloscope:**
- Sometimes I Think about Dying
- From Paramount:**
- Criminal Minds Evolution Season 17
- Dracula’s Hidden Kingdom
- PBS Kids Birthday Bash
- Lions of the Skeleton Coast
- Smile 2
- Vienna Blood Season 4
- Attenborough’s Life Journey
- Decoding the Universe
- Rubble and Crew On the Job
- Miss Scarlet Season 5
- Monster High Season 2
- Smurfs Season 1
- Building Stuff
- From Reel Vault:**
- Numbered Woman
- Cartouche
- The People Next Door
- Meatcleaver Massacre
- Sundays and Cybele

- From Rising Sun:**
- The Green Sea
- Daria
- Am Samuel
- In the Heart of the Machine
- Heyday The Mic Christopher Story
- Iona
- God City Da Movie
- Imperial Blue
- Lone Wolf
- Dark Night of the Soul
- Safehouse 1618
- Painted in Blood
- Price of Death
- The Shepherd
- Mick Jagger The Ultimate Performer

**From Shoreline:**

- Nastie
- From Sol Deo Gloria:**
- The Domino Revival
- Lady Larks
- From Sony:**
- Saturday Night
- Venom The Last Dance
- Here
- From SRS:**
- Nundead
- Killcast
- The Last Amityville Movie
- Flesh Eaters
- Kaiju Gem Metal Shark Attack
- Don’t Make a Sound
- Amityville AI
- Cheater Cheater
- From Universal:**
- Quantum Leap Complete Series (7 platters)
- Woody Woodpecker and Friends Classic Collection (6 platters)
- Werewolves
- Saturday Night Live 50th Anniversary Collection Seasons 1-5 (37 platters)
- Wicked
- From Vertical:**
- Elevation
- From Warner:**
- Boardwalk Empire Complete Series (20 platters)
- Full Moon in Blue Water
- Gossip Girl Complete Series (30 platters)
- The Happy Ending
- Juro #2
- Lego DC Super Heroes 11-Film Collection (7 platters)
- Regular Show Complete Series
- Romance & Cigarettes
- Till
- The Wayans Bros. Complete Series
- From Well Go:**
- Get Fast
- A Legend (Jackie Chan)
- Panda Plan (Jackie Chan)
- Escape
- Get Fast
- 100 Yards
- From Wownow:**
- Hermeticism and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn
- Monsterland 3
- Gladiator The Real Story
- Dracula’s Drive-In Atom Age Vampire
- What Did Diddy Do?
- All Hallows’ Eve Trickster
- Watch If You Dare To
- JFK Conspiracy Part 2
- Going Deeper
- Boone Bears The Adventurers Bright Spot
- Boone Bears The Adventurers Adventures at the Museum
- Dracula’s Drive-In Presents Attack from Space