

The LA Beat

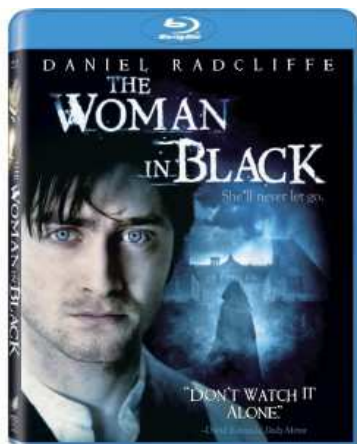
Los Angeles-based Entertainment,
Dining, Health, and Arts

Disc Junkie: DVD and Blu-ray New Releases, May 22-28, 2012

Posted on [May 24, 2012](#) by [Paul Gaita](#)

Please note: titles released solely in DVD format are listed in *italics*, while DVD/Blu-ray combos and Blu-ray only titles are listed in both *italics and bold font*.

MULTIPLEX



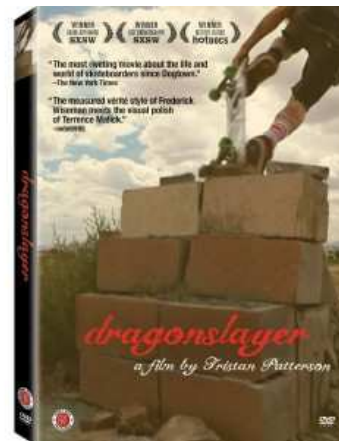
The recently revived Hammer Films, England's legendary house of horror from the 1950s through the early '70s, continues the winning streak (artistically speaking, if not financially) begun with such fine fright efforts as *Let Me In* and *Wake Wood* with ***The Woman in Black*** (Sony), an effective period ghost story starring Daniel Radcliffe from the Harry Potter franchise. Radcliffe acquits himself well as a widowed lawyer dispatched to a remote English village to complete a deceased client's paperwork. There, he becomes aware of the shadowy title figure, whose presence is the source of great dismay for the locals. What follows is an atmospheric Gothic thriller with enough scares to satisfy patient modern horror fans with an appreciation for slow-building suspense and

visual style. The Blu-ray includes commentary from director James Watkins and screenwriter Jane Goldman (*Kick-Ass*).

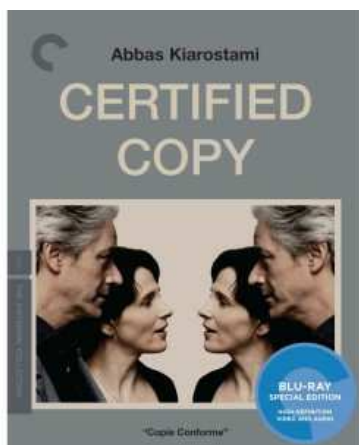
Already among the highest-grossing Japanese animated films of all time, ***The Secret World of Arriety*** (Walt Disney) is the latest effort from Studio Ghibli, which oversaw such critically acclaimed anime features as the Oscar-winning *Spirited Away* and *My Neighbor Totoro*. Penned by Ghibli's co-founder, Hayao Miyazaki, *Arriety* scales less epic heights than its astonishing predecessors in its story (adapted from the novel *The Borrowers* by Mary Norton) of a young boy with a heart condition whose sense of adventure is re-ignited by a tiny, headstrong girl from a secret race of little people. Their friendship, as well as attempts to keep Arriety from a prying housekeeper, form the backbone of the film, which is engaging if slight; what sets the picture apart from other animated projects is the dazzling animation, which injects a genuine feeling of otherworldliness missing from the interaction between its human and Borrower heroes. But even with its reduced scope, *The Secret World of Arriety* has enough wonder and excitement to captivate most younger viewers, as well as those enamored of Ghibli's previous accomplishments. Disney has also released this week DVD/Blu-ray combo sets of Ghibli's *Whisper of the Heart* and *Castle in the Sky*.

ARTHOUSE

Dragonslayer (First Run), which I forgot to include in the May 15-21 column, is a polarizing documentary about skateboarding champ Josh “Skreech” Sandoval’s descent from the spotlight into an apparently permanent state of nothingness, punctuated by runs through empty pools in Fullerton (itself seemingly enveloped in a hazy twilight) and brain cell erasure at parties populated by hangers-on leeching off his waning popularity. A redemption of sorts is presented in the form of long-suffering teenaged girlfriend Leslie and a child from a previous relationship, but Sandoval appears entirely unready to rise to the challenge of fatherhood, as evidenced by a wince-inducing scene in which he struggles with a collapsible stroller. Your appreciation of director Tristan Patterson’s film is dependent upon whether you can find sympathy for Sandoval’s miniscule efforts to drag himself out of his predicament; some may see a glimmer of hope in Patterson’s honeyed visual compositions, while others may find themselves praying fervently for Sandoval’s offspring.



While Robert Downey Jr. stands astride the box office this summer courtesy of *The Avengers*, his father, avant-garde director and world-class provocateur Robert Downey Sr. receives his due with *Up All Night with Robert Downey Sr.*, which is part of Criterion’s Eclipse Series. Downey Sr. turned up the heat on social mores during the 1960s and 1970s, exposing the inherent lunacy behind politics, race, consumerism and sex in his black-and-white satires. *Putney Swope* (1969), which is perhaps his best known work, is included here, and its story of a black advertising exec who wreaks politically incorrect havoc after assuming control of his agency, remains an irreverent and provocative production, as well as an entirely accurate weathervane for the direction of comedy in the 1970s. The four other features included in the set range from punchy low-budget satire (*Babo 73*, with Warhol superstar Taylor Mead as a daffy President) to Dadaist experiments (*No More Excuses*, which veers wildly between a story about a time-traveling Civil War soldier and Downey’s own “expose” of the swinger scene). There’s also *Chafed Elbows* (1966), Downey’s jittery take on the monumental social change of the 1960s as it wreaks havoc on his hapless, mother-obsessed hero and the women in his life, all of whom are played at the point of nervous distraction by his then-wife (and Robert Jr.’s mom), Elise. No extras save for detailed liner notes, but you don’t need ‘em: Downey Sr.’s movies are special features unto themselves.



Criterion also has *Certified Copy*, director Abbas Kiarostami’s extended meditation on the nature of relationships and art as viewed through the prism of a seemingly random encounter between an author (opera singer William Shimell) and a woman (Juliette Binoche) who attends a reading of his latest book. Their trip through the Tuscan countryside appears to reveal that the pair have not only met before, but have been romantically entwined, though Kiarostami keeps viewers guessing as to whether their statements are the genuine article or an act. Themes of authenticity in both emotion and art are at the core of this intimate film, which is beautifully photographed and performed by its leads (Binoche won the Best Actress Award at Cannes in 2010).

Criterion’s set includes Kiarostami’s rarely seen second feature, *The Report* (1977), which examines life in his native country, Iran, prior to the ousting of the Shah from the perspective of a couple’s collapsing marriage, as well as interviews with the director and a making-of featurette.

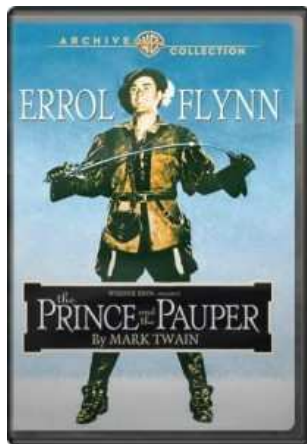
It’s tempting to label *95 Miles to Go* (Video Services Corp) as the “light” feature in this week’s Arthouse roundup, and in truth, the documentary, about comedian Ray Romano performing an eight-date tour shortly after his series, *Everybody Loves Raymond*, wrapped its final season, doesn’t quite explore the human condition with the same depth as *Certified Copy*. That doesn’t mean that the film, directed by *Raymond*

writer/producer Tom Caltabiano, who also serves as Ray Romano's opening act on the tour, is fluff. On the contrary, the picture can be seen as an extension of *Raymond's* central thesis – that real life is funnier, stranger and more poignant than anything produced in Hollywood – by examining the highs and lows of how we travel and work together. Romano, who comes across as a more sober presence in real life than his sitcom persona (though it extends to his work as well evidenced by the late, lamented *Men of a Certain Age*), has his likes and dislikes, as well as a small host of personality quirks, all of which are put to the test by the environment of the road (lack of bathrooms are a major stumbling block). It's not fun to go from here to there, and being a major celebrity does not seem to alleviate the situation. Thankfully, Romano has an outlet in stand-up comedy, where he is able to channel the everyday irritations, as well as his observations on family and maturity, into very funny truths about our shared experiences, which is the key to his enduring success. His stand-up is featured prominently throughout the documentary, as well as in the disc's abundant extras, which include some amusing on-camera commentary by Romano and Caltabiano. They're also featured in Q&As at the Magic and Comedy Club in Hermosa Beach and at SXSW, the latter of which is hilariously "crashed" by *Raymond* co-star Brad Garrett.



REVIVAL HOUSE

Four fine screen adaptations of classic adventure stories are available on MOD from Warner Archives. Though he doesn't show up until the picture's halfway mark, Errol Flynn is an invigorating presence in *The Prince and the Pauper* (1937), action specialist William Keighley's take on the Mark Twain novel about twins switching



identities in Tudor England. Drink and poor health had stolen most of Flynn's famed vitality by the time he was top-billed in *Kim* (1950), with Dean Stockwell as Rudyard Kipling's young hero of destiny, but he handles the action scenes like the old professional he was, and the location shooting in India (as well as the *Hills in the Sky* remains stunning. By the time of its release, Flynn was being replaced as Hollywood's top action star by younger players like Stewart Granger, who wields a sword with considerable aplomb in the 1952 remake of *Scaramouche*, which still offers one of the longest (eight minutes) and most exciting screen fencing duels in film history, as well as a fine supporting cast including Mel Ferrer, Janet Leigh and Nina Foch (and yes, Oscar Goldman, a.k.a. Richard Anderson). The late Mr. Ferrer is also front and center in *Knights of the Round Table* (1953), a swell, high-gloss version of the Arthurian legend, with Ferrer as Arthur, Robert Taylor (shortly after *Ivanhoe*) and Ava Gardner as Guinevere.

Warner Archives also has four silent features with the legendary Lon Chaney Sr. working outside of the genre that made him a star – horror films. That's not to say that there aren't elements of the macabre in three of the offerings; Tod (Dracula, Freaks) Browning helmed *West of Zanzibar* (1928), with Chaney as a crippled magician who rules an African outpost through a voodoo scam while cultivating a scheme to avenge himself on the man (Lionel Barrymore) who took away his wife and mobility; *Where East is East* (1929), Chaney's final silent film, and another morbid turn as a scarred animal trapper trying to protect his daughter (Lupe Velez) from her fiendish mother); and the milder *Blackbird* (1926), which casts him as a master thief by night and kindly, crutch-bearing mission keeper by day. *Tell It to the Marines* (1926) rounds out the trio, with Chaney sans both makeup

