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And the Oscars go to...

Movies feed our imagination or our intelligence, and the best movies provide nutrition to both. Yorgos Lanthimos's glorious 2023 fantasy, **Poor Things**, a Searchlight Pictures and 20th Century Fox Films Blu-ray release (UPC#786936900842, \$41), is essentially a lampoon of Nineteenth Century culture and values that quite piercingly underscores how that culture and those values have yet to disappear from today's social consciousness. It is a film that Tim Burton surely must have wished he had made, and is fabulously designed, spectacularly scored, incisively performed and brilliantly executed. Based upon a book by Alasdair Gray, the 142-minute film has the breadth and resonance of a novel, and is a consistently dazzling display of original images, inventive performances, humor and humanity. Like the best movies of all, it also feeds the soul.

Emma Stone won the Best Actress Oscar for a performance that does Cliff Robertson one better, portraying a woman who has had a baby's brain (her own baby's brain, actually) transplanted into her head, as the film uses a common sci-fi trope—accelerated development—to depict her character's advancement into adulthood. The film utilizes sex and nudity in exactly the way it ought to be used in enlightened entertainment, with the offhand titillation being almost irrelevant compared to the insightful commentary on sexuality it is constantly providing, along with its satirical exaggeration (perhaps ALL sex is a joke—the origins of humor arising when molecular replication became too complicated) and legitimate character development. Stone manages the incredibly challenging verbal demands of the role as forthrightly as she manages the various physical demands, and as the centerpiece of the film's narrative, it is a consummate exhibition well deserving of the awards she received.

The amazing production designs depict an alternate and fantastical version of the Victorian Era, one that essentially grasps onto the era's most forward looking or enthusiastic ideas and brings them to life as only the movies can. In addition to Stone's Oscar, the film won three statuettes for its designs, all of which are well served by the superb image transfer. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1, the film begins mostly in black-and-white, and only shifts to color as Stone's character matures and becomes self aware. Every frame, however, is sharp and precise. The blending of hues are dazzling and the image is consistently transfixing.

Jerskin Fendrix's musical score is so advanced for its day that while it was nominated, lesser music won out. An incredible gathering of dissonant tones that works its way through the film like masterfully herded cats, the music and its instrumentalization arise with precision in every direction on the disc's 5.1-channel DTS audio track. Not only does the sound deserve to be raised to a high volume, but the wider apart one can separate the speakers, the better. There is an audio track that describes the action ("Prim points across the garden. Felicity drops the ball and the chickendog looks over. Bleating like a goat, Alfie rolls some greenery on his tongue, then munches on some leaves. A sutured wound scars a shaved patch on his head. Bella and Toinette share a toast."), alternate French, Spanish, Italian and German audio tracks, and twelve subtitled options, including English.

Mark Ruffalo also received an Oscar nomination for a supporting role as one of the lovers Stone's character beguiles. Willem Dafoe, Ramy Youssef, Christopher Abbott and the lovely Hanna Schygulla are also featured. Many of them are interviewed on the very satisfying 21-minute production featurette that is included with the film, which goes over the complex details of the film's intriguing creation. Also featured are 3 minutes of worthwhile and amusing deleted scenes.

Winner of the 2023 Oscar for Best Adapted Screenplay, **American Fiction**, an Orion MGM Amazon Studios SDS Studio Distribution Services Blu-ray (UPC#883929824151, \$35), interlaces a very amusing story about an academic African-American author, played by Jeffrey Wright (earning an Oscar nomination, as well), who writes a brainless crime thriller featuring black stereotypes to blow off some steam and is flabbergasted when it becomes a bestseller, with the soap opera dramatics of his family life presented in a more serious fashion, although there is little to differentiate that drama from the Tyler Perry stories that are the butt of a couple of gag lines. The sister of Wright's character has passed away, his mother (the lovely Leslie Uggams) needs to move to an assisted living facility, his brother (another Oscar nomination, for Sterling K.

Brown) has come out, and the writer's own romantic life, the history of which is not elaborated upon, is jeopardized by his abrasive personality. Directed by Cord Jefferson, the 117-minute film has several laugh out loud scenes, and while the rest of it is more conformist than it wants to admit, it is enough to hold a viewer's attention and provide a valid backdrop for the comedy.

The film does not start up where it left off if playback is terminated. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and the color transfer is precise. There is a nice Oscar nominated jazz score by Laura Karpman that is well served by the 5.1-channel DTS sound. An alternate audio track is included that describes the action ("After opening his laptop, Monk pours himself a drink and takes a sip before starting to type. He writes a title, 'My Pathology' and then deletes some of the letters and misspells it, 'My Pafology, by Stagg R. Leigh.'"), along with alternate French and Spanish audio tracks and optional English, French and Spanish subtitles.

Da'Vine Randolph won a Best Supporting Actress Oscar for her portrayal of a cook in Alexander Payne's 2023 drama, **The Holdovers**, a Miramax release (UPC#191329241974, \$20), and Paul Giamatti was nominated for Best Actor, although he did not win (playing a misanthropic academic very much like Wright's character—the two performances are so similar and so thorough they might have deserved a joint Oscar). The film is a Christmas movie and may perhaps become a perennial. It is too early to tell. The filmmakers were very gracious and gave screen time to Randolph's character that does not directly affect the primary story about the relationship and maturation of a teacher, played by Giamatti, and a boarding school student, played by Dominic Sessa. The film, which runs 132 minutes, was marketed as a comedy, implying that Giamatti's character would have to watch over a half dozen or so students at the upscale school over the Christmas holiday, specifically in 1970. In fact, the other students disappear fairly quickly and the film is instead a leisurely depiction of how the three remaining characters come to know one another and grow from the experience. Some will find the performances—which are uniformly excellent—and the realistic but still nostalgic holiday mood sufficiently engaging, while others will chafe at the generally uneventful narrative and predictable resolution. It is a nice film, but not an exceptional one.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The colors are accurate, but the presentation has a general softness. The sound is listed in the menu as being in 3.1-channel Dolby Digital, although it registered with us as 5.1-channel. In any case, the music has a mild dimensionality and otherwise things remain generally centered. The film's one New Year's Eve firework has less of a boom than just a pop. There is an audio track that describes the action ("Angus winks and sprints towards a springboard. He launches off the board and flips, landing behind a stack of mats."), alternate French and Spanish audio tracks, optional English, French and Spanish subtitles, 9 minutes of deleted scenes, and 19 minutes of very nice promotional featurettes.

The 2023 Oscar for Best Documentary went to the gripping story of the last Associated Press team to leave the Ukrainian city of Mariupol as the Russians overrun it in 2022, **20 Days in Mariupol**, a WGBH Frontline PBS release (UPC#84188704-8026, \$25). The 94-minute film intends to depict what it can of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as the Ukrainian team, Mstyslav Chernov, Evgeniy Maloletka and Vasilisa Stepanenko (they also won a Pulitzer), stays mostly in hospitals, shooting the mayhem as it arrives, but also venturing out now and then to depict the destruction and anguish in localized areas still under Ukrainian control. Only as their options recede do they attempt to join the final Red Cross convoy out of the battle zone. In the meantime, they grab horrifying footage of what could otherwise just as easily be an American town, as bombs and shells shatter people's bones and lives. The film deftly cuts between the footage that the team takes and the excerpts from that footage that made it into broadcasts on Western news channels, documenting not the fight of soldier against soldier, but the maiming and slaughter of innocent people by faceless noises and machines. True, the film is in one way numbing, but the suspense that accumulates as to whether the team itself will survive the horror gives the narrative all of the forward momentum it needs to pull a viewer, however numb, along, while the seemingly abstract concept of a modern society being eviscerated by unnatural forces is brought vividly to life.

Oscars (Continued)

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The image is unnervingly sharp and accurately replicated. The stereo sound may not match the elaborate separations and bass effects of a Hollywood blockbuster, but the mere dimensionality of the stereo sound has a disturbing you-are-there effect, adeptly aided by Jordan Dykstra's musical score, and the results of the in essence live sound and immediate video imagery are transporting. Chernov's narration is in English and is supported by optional English subtitling, but most of the conversations are in Ukrainian and supported by permanent English subtitling.

The joys of a sports film

Motion picture depictions of true sports stories, usually involving underdogs who succeed in the face of doubt and adversity, are a generally unheralded but highly rewarding genre. The challenge just comes down to getting people to see them, because while the films often address obscure topics, from golf to bobsledding, they are inevitably uplifting and emotionally satisfying. In fact, most of them make you so high with good feelings that you float on air for hours after the film is over. A case in point is George Clooney's wonderful 2023 feature, **The Boys in the Boat**, an Amazon MGM Studios SDS Studio Distribution Services Blu-ray (UPC#883929824038, \$35), about the University of Washington's junior varsity rowing team (yes, the JV team) at the height of the Great Depression, which had a fabulous win streak.

Seattle had struck it rich when gold was discovered in Alaska, and became more than a coal and timber exporter, but the Depression hit it hard and William Boeing had yet to make a killing with World War II. It was essentially still a backwater town just a couple of generations removed from its pioneer founders, and the university, although bordered by a lake and a canal, was in no real position to do the hoitiest toitiest sport this side of polo. But the California—or more exactly, San Francisco—universities needed a 'local' West Coast team to compete with, and so rowing had become part of the university's sporting traditions for several decades, good for an annual regatta and a fallback when the football team wasn't doing well.

Although Clooney tells the story primarily through the eyes of only one rower, played by Callum Turner, who is the sole character given more than rudimentary development, he also makes sure that it is understood from the get go that rowing is a team sport—as much as it relies on the strength of the rowers, it also relies on the precision of their unison—and as the rowers succeed, their 'team' becomes not just their tight group, or even their school, but their entire community. What they accomplished was so incredible that generations later it was still discussed in Seattle with awe, and if it had started to fade from collective memories, Clooney's film brings it back to the fore. Running 123 minutes, the film uses the decorations of nostalgia and a touch of romance to pace its focus on athletics. There is nothing splashy about the movie—at least not figuratively—but there doesn't have to be. Clooney manages to give the viewer a way in—Joel Edgerton plays the coach, whose challenge is to put all of the puzzle pieces together, coupled with the experiences of Turner's character, which brings life to those pieces—and then just tell the story as it happened. If you want a full dose of joy, happiness and benign excitement, look no further.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The picture transfer is lovely, and we live in an age where quick special effects shots can set a period mood that is as exciting as it is fleeting. The film was actually shot in England, but that is the Thirties Seattle skyline, just on the other side of the hills from **Tugboat Annie**. The Dolby Atmos sound is not showy, but it fills the room with music and cheers, and adds to the thrills. There is an audio track that describes the action (“At the end of one race, they all grimace with exhaustion.”), alternate French and Spanish audio tracks and optional English, French and Spanish subtitles. The disc does not pick up where it left off if playback is terminated.

U.N.C.L.E. 4K

Approaching it still seething from the resentment that the film messed with a beloved television show from our childhood, we watched the Arrow Video 4K UHD release of the 2015 MGM Guy Ritchie feature, **The Man from U.N.C.L.E.** (UPC#760137153719, \$50) and to our surprise found it to be highly enjoyable. The precision of both the image and the Dolby Atmos audio track is invigorating, and adds to the film's energy and wit in all of the right ways. We reviewed a Warner Bros. Blu-ray in Dec 15, but even the standard Blu-ray also released by Arrow (UPC#760137153771, \$40), which is pretty much identical to the Warner BD, does not have quite the same crispness that the 4K version has, and subliminally, the standard BD is more easily dismissible.

Set in the Sixties, Ritchie has a great time populating the film with automobiles, outfits and even actors reflecting the era. Alicia Vikander, who has the third lead in the film, has an Anna Karina hairstyle, and she pouts the same way, too. Henry Cavill, as the American spy, has clearly done his Robert Vaughn homework, and brings an incisive pitch to his line reading that is really quite amusing. Don't get us started on the multi-level gag that was played by casting Armie Hammer as the Russian spy, and while he doesn't quite achieve the refined humor that Cavill manages to accomplish, his just being there is amusing enough. From that beginning, then, the 116-minute film just goes along with its stop-the-villains-building-a-bomb plot and Ritchie's creative and invigorating action scenes, but whether it is the designs

or the crashes and explosions, the 4K playback is so rousing that we just had to put our resentments aside until the film was finished. Too many moments were too much fun.

Hugh Grant, Jared Harris and Elizabeth Debicki co-star. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. There are optional English subtitles. Both releases have the same special features, including a decent 29-minute piece on the original TV series and its various adaptations; a passable 25-minute overview of Ritchie's career with an additional 3-minute look at Ritchie on the set; a 5-minute segment on Cavill and Hammer; a 9-minute piece on the film's wonderful production designs; a 7-minute segment on the movie's action and the efforts to do something that hasn't been done before with each sequence; an enjoyable 5-minute segment on the film's antique motorcycles; a 16-minute interview with producer Lionel Wigram about his own background and his contributions to putting the film together; a nice 15-minute interview with co-star Luca Calvani about his approach to his part and his experiences on the shoot; 5 minutes of enjoyable behind-the-scenes footage; a trailer; and a small collection of promotional photos in still frame.

A fairly good commentary track from spy film experts Bryan Reesman and Max Every goes into extensive detail about the film's off-again on-again road to production (it was actually proposed before the first **Mission: Impossible** movie), the fad of resurrecting Sixties TV shows (“The fun part about these retro movies is that they can fix certain things that were different, because with the Motion Picture Production Code, certain things couldn't be shown, it was more male dominated, so this is kind of evening the score out a little bit.”), the backgrounds of the cast and crew, the details of the Sixties production designs and the history of the TV show that it was based upon (which Ian Fleming actually had a hand in creating), while also having time to go over specific incidents and locations in the film. They also desperately offer scenarios in which a sequel could still be forthcoming and heck, after watching the 4K BD, maybe that isn't such a bad idea after all.

Hitchcock comedy

Alfred Hitchcock had a crush on Carole Lombard, and it was enough to lure him away from the comfort zone of suspense thrillers and make a screwball comedy in 1941 for RKO Radio Pictures, **Mr. & Mrs. Smith**, which has been released by Warner Bros. as a *Warner WB Archive Collection* Blu-ray (UPC#840418305621, \$22). To emphasize his sympathies, he even superimposes his director's credit over the nameplate of Robert Montgomery's character in the film's opening scene, and follows up by having the hair of Montgomery's character styled in the same manner as what was left of his own at the time, underscoring that with a reference to Montgomery's supposed, 'slanted forehead.' Montgomery and Lombard portray the title couple who, through an unfortunate bureaucratic mishap, learn that they have never been officially married. This sets them to bickering, hesitating and exploring alternatives for the film's 95 minutes before they can agree to marry again.

Hitchcock always disparaged his comedies because they were not as successful as his suspense films, but the two genres are actually very similar, both requiring a great deal of pre-planning and careful, meticulously timed staging to elicit strong emotional responses from an audience. In general, Hitchcock's humor was just too dry for the masses, and the film is riddled with barbs directed at his own connubial shackles, but it is brilliantly composed from beginning to end and contains one sequence, where Montgomery attempts to punch himself in the nose to garner sympathy, that is worthy of anything ever staged by Charles Chaplin. There is also a scene with a phallic champagne bottle that can have you laughing aloud with greater and greater enthusiasm as it progresses, once you spot the gag. We won't even go into the bondage finale with the snow skis.

But more importantly, every single squared, full screen black-and-white frame in the film is meticulously designed—a film school could easily make a semester class out of it—and has now been meticulously transferred on the Blu-ray, which looks substantially smoother and cleaner than the Warner DVD we reviewed in Jan 06. The compositions are fascinating, often breaking up the screen diagonally rather than vertically or horizontally, and usually centered with a subliminal intensity that is in effect taking the viewer by the hand and guiding the viewer through the narrative. There is a continuity flaw involving Montgomery's hat that was probably the result of Hitchcock not wanting to use more takes to get the gag right, but otherwise, the planning that went into the film clearly represents the passion that Hitchcock was attempting to communicate to his leading lady, and the clarity of the BD allows the viewer to savor every message.

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The monophonic sound has some age-related noise but is reasonably strong, and there are optional English subtitles; a trailer; a good 16-minute retrospective documentary that appeared on the DVD; an impressive 20-minute 1941 Technicolor Warner short, *Cinderella's Fella*, telling the fairy tale with song numbers, featuring a mostly child cast (the only black performer is presented as an exotic singer, in wrist chains) and some nice special effects; an 8-minute 1940 *Merrie Melodies* cartoon, *Holiday Highlights*, featuring Tex Avery's blackout gags about the different holidays throughout the year; and a 7-minute 1940 *Merrie Melodies* cartoon, *Stage Fright*, in which two dogs chasing after a bone encounter various props, animals and curiosities in a vaudeville theater.

Two radio adaptations of the feature have been included and both are terrific, expertly compensating for the film's visual humor with added verbal exchanges, although one so vastly outshines the other that they should be listened to in reverse of the order they are offered on the menu. Both broadcasts, incidentally, add topical references to wartime that were not in the film. Errol Flynn and Lana Turner star in a 1942 *Screen Guild Theater* adaptation that runs 30 minutes. As is usual with the *Screen Guild* programs, the story is heavily abridged, and in this case the ending is significantly altered, as well, but it does convey the gist of the situation, which is enough for the stars to do their thing. Both Flynn and Turner deliver adept, amusing vocal performances that make the segment quite worthwhile. But it is overshadowed by the 60-minute *Lux Radio Theater* broadcast from 1941 featuring Lombard and Bob Hope. Even though Hope seems to discard every movie punchline for one of his own, the star power created by Lombard's practiced delivery and Hope's exceptional comedic timing is a delight from beginning to end.

4K Rain

The 4K format can make a real difference when it comes to enjoying films of ambiguous value. The 1984 musical that introduced Prince to the rest of the world, **Purple Rain**, is made up of hard rocking funk songs interspersed with melodramatic, romantic and comedic nuggets, building just enough of a narrative to string the viewer along from one number to the next. Directed by Albert Magnoli, the melodramatic and romantic components have a sweet, youthful naiveté and the humor is childish clowning, but the music locks everything in, and if it is delivered with strength there is no escaping the film's appeal no matter how silly it seems at times. That is where the Warner Bros. SDS Studio Distribution Services *4K UltraHD* Blu-ray, **Prince Purple Rain** (UPC#883929813780, \$34), comes into play. The vivid, glossy colors add a secondary sense of rhythm thanks to the precision of the image, while the 5.1-channel DTS sound brings out each component of the music with such clarity that its crispness, like the sharpness of the image, pokes at your spirit with needles of excitement.

We are as far away in time now from when **Purple Rain** was made as it was from the wartime Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney musicals, so that its simplicities can now be fully excused by the nostalgia it offers up for an era long past. Maybe hairstyles and outfits never really looked like that ever, but their quaint eccentricity is no longer an assault on the established norms. It is part of the movie's hermetic world, which wittily shifts between the realities of its Minneapolis locations and the fantasies of its nightclubs, somehow managing to do so without ever upsetting its make-believe mood. Prince portrays the head of one band trying to hold onto its slot at the nightclub, and Apollonia Kotero portrays a singer who falls for him even though she is recruited to be part of a rival band. Morris Day is the scheming manager of the other band, playing his part for exaggerated laughs that seem initially to infantilize the entire endeavor until you realize that compared to his presence, the simplicity and youthful innocence of Prince's performance gains a maturity through contrast. The only real class brought to the feature is the casting of Clarence Williams III as Prince's frustrated and abusive father, but it is a thankless part. The film's flamboyance is closer in spirit to **Victims of Sin** (see page 5) than to the Garland and Rooney films, but at its soul its let's-put-on-a-show attitude never grows old, even if it can never grow up.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. No matter how dark the image gets in the nightclub or the alleys behind it, details are always clear, and no matter how deep the colored lighting becomes, the picture is always sharp. Fleshtones are precise, to the point that the 4K presentation makes each performer more appealing and graspable.

The film's songs are all played twice, as there is a medley of them accompanying the end credit scroll (which is purple, not black; the film is pluralistic in its casting—you're never quite sure of the racial background of any character—so that along with everything else, the film can serve as a reminder that when you mix red, white and blue together, you get purple), but the crispness of the musical score goes beyond that. Every passage of background music when a song isn't playing is also fully enhanced and delivered by the 4K audio playback, again mitigating the shortcomings of the dramatic interludes by accentuating the effects of the music's intricacies, and reminding one that another song is not far away. There are alternate French, Spanish and German audio tracks and twelve subtitling options, including English.

If you still can't get enough of the music, which is, after all, why you're there in the first place, in addition to the credit scroll reprise, nine numbers appear on eight separate music videos, running a total of 52 minutes. The videos have some footage from the film (serving as a demonstration of how much better the transfer of the film is, particularly when it comes to keeping the red lights under control) but also include original stagings and two fairly lengthy live concert segments. A commentary that appeared on Warner's DVD (Dec 04), featuring Magnoli, producer Robert Cavallo and cinematographer Donald E Thorin, is included, along with a 12-minute piece about the Minneapolis setting that was also on the DVD, as were the videos.

Neorealist outdoor thriller

A highly appealing outdoor 1961 thriller created with an Italian neorealist aesthetic, **Bandits of Orgosolo**, has been released on Blu-ray by Radiance (UPC#760137155836, \$40) with a stunning squared full screen black-and-white picture transfer that defies what one normally expects from such features from that era. Shot on Sardinia, the film, directed by Vittorio De Seta, uses entirely local actors and has a simple but methodical narrative in which a shepherd, having crossed paths with a group of bandits, is accused of collaborating with them by the police. Not wishing to be thrown in jail, he takes his sheep to the highlands with his younger brother, and must work his way to safety as a large contingent of law enforcement officers attempt to track them. Running 96 minutes, the film pairs the basic suspense of its plot with fascinating details about the impoverished lives of the characters, and uses the incredible vistas and landscapes of the island to supplement the action. The cinematography is outstanding, and the crisp, precisely calibrated image is enthralling. As the heroes stand on a cliff to look for pursuers below, the camera peaks over their shoulders and you grip your chair to hold on.

The monophonic sound is also in reasonably good condition, and there is a very fine musical score by Valentino Bucchi. The film is in Italian with optional English subtitles and comes with a trailer; a good 11-minute introduction to the film, explaining its background and pointing out the film's similarities to **Bicycle Thieves**; and a fascinating 28-minute interview with Luciano Tovoli (who is credited as the camera operator but was in fact the co-cinematographer with De Seta, and also a general production assistant; it was his first gig), who shares many terrific anecdotes as he describes how the two of them went to Sardinia intending to make a documentary and ended up staying much longer and creating the film.

Ninety minutes of entertainment

With a widescreen, gorgeous looking picture and a lovely monophonic jazz score, the Radiance Blu-ray release, Tai Kato's 1967 **Eighteen Years in Prison** (UPC#760137157656, \$40), would be enjoyable even if it had no narrative at all. Beginning in the immediate period after the end of the war in Japan, Noboru Ando is a former officer who wants to clean up his neighborhood and begins dealing in black market goods in order to fund his plans. On the night of a big score, however, he is cornered, and sends his partner off with the money they have made and instructions on what to do with it as he distracts the encroaching authorities and is captured. He remains an honorable man in prison, but his partner less so on the outside, and as his release date approaches, the partner begins to panic and come up with ways to prevent him from getting out. The 91-minute film has plenty of decent action sequences, a very nice array of dramatic conflicts (there is also a girl involved, and her delinquent younger brother) and a consistently engaging style that amplifies the quality and satisfaction of every sequence.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The color transfer looks gorgeous, and it is only when the image is deliberately dark or the setting is deliberately grungy that it looks anything less than pristine. The sound is smooth and clear. The film is in Japanese with optional English subtitles, and comes with a trailer, an excellent profile of Kato and Ando by Tony Rayns running 24 minutes ("The cinematic sensibility that is in play in Kato films is quite a few notches above the average in Japanese cinema at the time, and although he's working in genre film, the genre films that he makes are better, more interesting, more visually stimulating and, I think, more achieved than most other genre films of their moment."), and an enjoyable summary of Japanese prison films—a genre that apparently did not take hold until the Sixties—by Tom Mes, running 17 minutes.

Bland Samurai

Blue Velvet (Jul 24). **Picnic at Hanging Rock** (May 24). **Blood Simple** (Mar 24). **Dazed and Confused** (Jul 23). Heck, **Perfect Days** (see page 4). With a disturbing consistency, the Criterion Collection 4K Blu-ray releases have had darker, more subdued color transfers than their standard Blu-ray counterparts. Fortunately, Criterion has included a standard BD platter with the 4K platter in every release, and other than the drab hues, the images on the 4K presentations are sharper than the images on the standard BDs, so it is not a complete loss. If this anomaly occurred across the marketplace, we wouldn't be as bothered, but virtually every other, non-Criterion 4K Blu-ray has the same colors or even brighter colors than the regular BD. What Criterion is doing makes no sense, even though both versions are there and it gives you an excuse to watch a great movie more than once. It seems, time and again, like a missed opportunity. And it has happened again, with a film that is appealing almost entirely because of the way it seduces a viewer visually, Jean-Pierre Melville's 1967 **Le Samourai** (UPC#715515299015, \$50).

We reviewed Criterion's standard Blu-ray release in May 22, and that release has been included as the second platter in the set, so nothing is lost, but the 4K presentation leaves so much in the shadows, it is barely worth viewing. The colors are flat, fleshtones are pallid, and the film's thrilling dichotomy between the glitzy world of the gangsters and the purgatorial rot that a hitman, played by Alain Delon, is living in is replaced by blandness on both ends. The image may be a little sharper in spots, but the woolly swirl of ultra coolness and moral dissonance that Melville, at the height of his compositional powers, achieved is missing. Running 105 minutes, the film is still entertaining, and perhaps the sharpness heightens the back-and-forth effect of the cuts between the cops, led by François Périer, trying to track Delon's character down and Delon's character trying to find out who betrayed him, but the film no longer feels like the joyful masterpiece of crime and despair that the standard BD delivers.

The monophonic sound is also very crisp, although differences between the two presentations are minimal. The film is in French with optional English subtitles. The 4K platter has no special features. The standard BD comes with a trailer, 24 minutes of retrospective interviews and two analytical pieces that run a total of 55 minutes.

Wim Wenders in 4K, 3D and on the road

Periodically a film will come along that may seem inconsequential at first, but gets under the skins and seeps into the brains and hearts of those who see it, to the point that some begin watching it dozens of times. Such a film is the 2023 Wim Wenders feature set in Japan, **Perfect Days**, which has been released as a two-platter 4K Blu-ray by Neon and The Criterion Collection (UPC#715515299312, \$50). Koji Yakusho is a bachelor who rarely speaks to anyone and works six days a week cleaning public restrooms in various city parks, driving from one to the next in his van, although he also takes the time to savor the ambience of each park. He follows ordered and habitual routines, but over the course of the 124-minute movie, which appears to depict several weeks in his life, there are interruptions and intrusions, which is all that is needed to keep a viewer fully engaged with the narrative. You don't want it to end (in this day and age, surely somebody could make a TV series from it), and the memories of it linger and call back to you.

As a supplement to Yasujiro Ozu's **Late Spring** (Apr 08), Criterion included a feature-length profile of Ozu shot by Wenders, *Tokyo-Ga*, and so clearly, the influence of Ozu's filmmaking and attitudes has penetrated very deeply in Wenders's approach to the film. But the movie also taps into one of Wenders's favorite and most often utilized genres, the road movie, because even though the protagonist does not leave town, his daily travels have the same sort of vignettes and character interactions (the people he sees, by and large, have a great deal of turmoil in their lives) that typify a film about life on the road. What is most remarkable about **Perfect Days**, however, and why it will inevitably become a compulsion for many fans, is the resonance it transfers to you after it is over. Not only do you suddenly recognize the habits and routines you follow in your own life, but you realize, thanks to the film, that these actions that you do every day can give you strength and bring you peace when you accept the activities for what they are. Thus, thanks to the film, turmoil subsides.

Like Ozu's movies, the picture is in a squared full screen format. **Perfect Days** ought to be a film that is ideal for watching in 4K format, since much of its power is subliminal, but despite the advantages in sharpness that the 4K presentation provides, the colors are brighter and more satisfying on the standard Blu-ray included in the set. While it is perfectly fine when viewed by itself, the 4K presentation is darker and blander than the standard BD, and in scene after scene, the standard BD playback is more invigorating.

On both, the 5.1-channel DTS sound is filled with environmental precision and detailed directional effects. The music Yakusho's character plays in his van has a subdued dimensionality, but that is a valid representation of the van's sound system. The film is in Japanese with optional English subtitles. In addition to a trailer, the standard BD has a great 14-minute interview with Yakusho, who contemplates the art of acting and absorbing a character; a fascinating 9-minute interview with Koji Yanai (listed as a producer, he is actually the person responsible for the conception and placement of public toilets in Tokyo; one of the joys of the film is the unique and varied modern designs of the restrooms—you actually look forward to revisiting them as the film progresses) talking about what he learned from Wenders; and a 26-minute interview with Wenders, who talks about how he discovered and was influenced by Ozu's films, how he shot the film as if it were a documentary, and what the backstory of Yakusho's character involved, while also sharing a number of lovely anecdotes about working with Yakusho.

A pleasing 9-minute black-and-white dance film by Wenders (who provides a 4-minute introduction—the dancer, Min Tanaka, has a small part in **Perfect Days**, too) shot in 2023 to the jazz music of Jun Miyake entitled *Some Body Comes Into the Light* rounds out the supplement, depicting an elderly man with a heavy load of sticks on his back, responding to and finding renewal in sunlight glittering between the branches and leaves of a tree, a motif that is key to the conclusion of **Perfect Days**, as well.

Wenders created an outstanding 3D dance film, **Pina Dance, Dance, Otherwise We Are Lost** (May 15), and now tries his hand at the 3D format again with another art-related program, **Anselm**, a Janus Films Criterion Channel two-platter 3D Blu-ray (UPC#715515300018, \$30). Anselm Kiefer is a German painter, sculptor and art installationist who was born just a couple of months before Wenders in 1945, and he exhibits the same sort of subdued anger toward the Nazis in his creations that shows up in some of Wenders's films. The 2023 documentary is essentially a profile, although it contains little in the way of expository material and primarily explores Kiefer's studio (which seems to be as big as an airplane factory—he uses a bicycle to move around it), his installations and his works in progress. There are also shots of a younger actor and a child actor (Kiefer's son and Wenders' young nephew, actually), who apparently represent Kiefer at different stages of his life, wandering around buildings and the artwork. Running 93 minutes, the film is fairly effective at conveying the motivation behind the rot and incendiary destruction that many of his works represent, so that at the conclusion, when you see a lovely Renaissance hall in Venice covered up with what at first glance are simply enormous, ugly smears of charred blacks and browns, achieved in part by taking a blowtorch to his canvasses, you genuinely understand the passion and validity behind the exhibition.

The film is presented on a standard 2D Blu-ray platter, and on the 3D platter. The 3D format, however, is the only real way to appreciate the depth, as it were, of Wenders's creation. In addition to conveying the true scale of Kiefer's work, it also explicates some of his skeletal structures and is better at drawing the parallels between history and what Kiefer is burning onto his canvases. In 2D, Wenders utilizes a number of double exposures to depict the swirling influences that are guiding Kiefer's art, but in 3D, each image has its own plane, so that they merge emotionally within you instead of on the screen. For sheer visceral excitement, the film in 3D cannot match the power of **Pina Dance**, but by presenting a pathway to understanding the abstract complexities of a prominent artist's ideas and aspirations, **Anselm** is a worthwhile application of a format that has yet to explore more than the bare edges of its exciting potential.

The program does not begin where it left off if playback is terminated. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1, colors and gradations of light are finely detailed. The 5.1-channel DTS track has an elaborate dimensional mix that is delivered with a stimulating clarity. The film is in German with optional English subtitles. Both platters have same 2D special features, a trailer and a good 16-minute interview with Wenders (who says, apropos of **Perfect Days**, "I am an animal of habit.") talking about the reasoning behind his approaches to the film, including the discovery of the amazing composer he used for the score, Leonard Küssner.

Most movies fade away in the years following their creation, but some just continue to grow in stature year after year. Every time a new film or TV series comes out based upon Patricia Highsmith's Tom Ripley character, interest in Wenders' 1977 **The American Friend** (*Der Amerikanische Freund*), another Criterion Blu-ray (UPC#715515165716, \$40), surges with a newfound enthusiasm. Clearly, the film is never going to go away, and yet it is the very antithesis of a normal Highsmith adaptation. For one thing, Dennis Hopper, who plays Ripley, is anything but suave. He is a gauche American, bilking Europeans and leaving one mess after another in his wake. For another thing, the film itself is not suave or elegant, either. It is clunky and the narrative is messy, leading to a somewhat unkempt conclusion. Bruno Ganz plays a frame maker who believes he has a fatal illness and is hired by a mobster to take out a rival anonymously, so his family will have security after he is gone (yeah, he is "framed"). Nothing more can really be said about the plot without spoiling too much, but Hopper's character is there from the beginning and becomes involved when things don't go well. For all of its faults, however, the film is highly addictive, as if you go back to it every time not so much to fill in the pieces, but to bask in its partialities and suggestions. The color cinematography may be rough and realistic, for example, but the lighting is nevertheless exquisite. With the superb image transfer that Criterion has delivered, every frame is captivating, no matter how much of New York and Hamburg's urban blight it is depicting. We reviewed an outstanding Anchor Bay Entertainment DVD in Aug 03, and it looked fantastic in its day, but the BD adds a solidity and sharpness to the image that makes the presentation even more exceptional. The DVD's 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound also gives the BD's DTS sound a run for the money and may have a stronger sense of dimensionality, although the clarity, smoothness and heft of the BD's audio is ultimately preferable.

The great commentary with Wenders and Hopper is carried over from the DVD (among other things, they talk about working with Sam Fuller and Nicholas Ray, who both had supporting parts in the film), as are the trailer and the 35 minutes of deleted scenes with an optional Wenders commentary. Additionally, there is a fresh 38-minute interview with Wenders from 2015 that includes wonderful memories about Hopper ("It wasn't possible to get him off all the drugs, but at least we got him off some of the drugs."), Ray and Fuller as he retells the story of the film's production and eventual success; and a 27-minute interview with Ganz from 2015 sharing his reminiscences about the shoot.

We mentioned that Wenders likes road movies. Criterion even bundled three of them together as a three-platter Blu-ray release, **Wim Wenders — The Road Trilogy** (UPC#715515177313, \$100). Each film appears on a separate platter, and all three star Rüdiger Vogler.

A German magazine writer, played by Vogler, attempts to do a story about driving across America, but he becomes blocked and ends up traveling back to Europe, only to get saddled with a pre-adolescent girl when her mother pulls a fast one on him in the very sweet 1973 *Alice in the Cities* (*Alice in den Städten*). What happens is the two of them start journeying around Germany looking for the girl's grandmother's house, in effect discovering the variety of land and people there that the writer couldn't recognize in the United States. The performances are appealing, making the viewer feel like a silent companion to the company of the characters. Running 113 minutes, the film unfolds in a leisurely manner but makes for a charming little adventure, never staying in one location long enough to become tiresome.

The black-and-white film was shot in 16mm, but as an opening title card talking about its transfer explains, Wenders and cinematographer Robby Müller intended for the film to be slightly matted, and so it is presented as intended, letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. The image is often quite grainy, but that actually adds to what is now an unintentionally nostalgic period setting. The monophonic sound is okay, and the film is mostly in German, with optional English subtitles. There is a really nice 27-minute piece intercutting retrospective interviews with Vogler and co-stars Yella Rottländer and Lisa Kreuzer, talking about the film and working with one another; a 15-minute segment on the complicated effort going into restoring all of Wenders's early films (he had to completely replace the songs on one film—not one reviewed here—because he never secured the rights when he made the movie); and 16 minutes of silent outtakes accompanied by the film's score.

Two Wenders short films are included, as well, but neither is all that interesting. *Same Player Shoots Again* from 1967 runs 13 minutes to generic music and, with a little bit of other material on each end, consists mostly of the same tracking shot repeated five times showing the legs and torso of a soldier striding as he is about to collapse. The first presentation is in black and white, and then the subsequent presentations have different tinting. *Silver City Revisited* from 1968 is mostly a collection of stationary shots of traffic, presented again with periodic surges of generic music. There are also shots of trains, a photo of an airplane, and a (silent) television broadcast of a Rolling Stones performance.

Wenders, Vogler and Rottländer (who was nine when they made the film) provide a commentary track for the feature in German, with optional English subtitles, mostly discussing their memories of each scene and the many different locations they shot in. One scene went on so long (after lengthy work the day before) that the cameraman fell asleep while it was going. Wenders ended up trimming it. But most of the time, the making of the film centered not around Wenders but around Rottländer, since everyone had to adapt to her resources, capabilities and whims. "Didn't I ever get on your nerves?" "I've blocked that part out."

Beginning at the North Sea and concluding in the Alps, Wender's next road trip, the 1975 *Wrong Move (Falsche Bewegung)*, never leaves Germany. From a script by Peter Hanke, inspired by a novel by Johann Goethe, the film presents a fairly clever metaphor. Völger plays a writer again, just getting started and less mature than his character in *Alice in the Cities*. He leaves home and gets on a train for the first leg of his trip, when two people—an aging (and former Nazi) street musician played by Hans Christian Blech and his companion, a street juggler played by a young Nastassja Kinski (in her first role)—intrude on him in his cabin and begin tagging along. A 'famous actress,' played by Hanna Schygulla, sees him from the window of another train and gets word to him to meet her, which he does when the three arrive at their train's destination. Another person begins tagging along, as well. What is clever about all of this is that it replicates what a writer goes through emotionally as he is writing a story. The characters intrude upon his life, and while he has some say in where they go and what they do, they also have a certain amount of free will. The only problem with the 104-minute film is that it comes immediately after the very humanistic *Alice in the Cities*, and really requires exposure to some other film, say Wenders's *Wings of Desire*, to better straddle the transition between reality and abstraction. The movie certainly has some nice moments, including a lengthy and involving scene depicting the conversations between some of the characters as they walk up a very long, winding hillside road overlooking a river, and the performances are very appealing in a superficial way, but most of it is folderol (what Schygulla's character could possibly see in Völger's character is deliberately never explained) and is essentially too clever for its own good.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1, and it has a very nice color transfer, with minimal grain and accurate flesh tones. There are some very lovely shots, as befits a film on the road, and the image is consistently solid and sharp. The 5.1-channel DTS sound is good, bringing a pleasing dimensionality to the music and atmospheric effects, and the film is in German with optional English subtitles. A 64-minute interview with Wenders is included that goes over all three films and what led up to them. Vogler and Kreuzer sit (separately) for a 22-minute interview from 2016 talking about their experiences on the shoot, and there are 4 minutes of interesting behind-the-scenes footage. Wenders also provides a commentary track for the feature in English, going over his experiences making the film.

The ultimate German road movie, Völger stars in the 1976 *Kings of the Road* as an itinerant motion picture projector repairman, who drives around the hinterlands in his truck servicing and repairing projectors and speakers in small movie theaters. Hanns Zischler plays a psychologist who drives his VW into the water where it sinks, and hitches a ride in the truck. They develop a gradual companionship for a while. The film runs a daunting 176 minutes, and it is leisurely from beginning to end—the narrative never accelerates or even has much in the way of forward momentum—but if you have the basic patience for it (which is helped by having been dosed with the other two films), it is a highly rewarding and memorable portrait of the characters, the landscape they transverse and the society they glimpse along the way. Of course, 'film' is always lurking in its periphery, but it is the actual equipment that is fetishized, rather than what is running through it (Zischler's character turns out to have skills at typesetting and running a press, and the contrast to operating a projector is deliberate). At one point, Völger is seen rather explicitly defecating, and yet the moment is oddly not as gratuitous as it ought to be. There is some male nudity (enough to garner an 'X' rating in its initial American release), but only fleeting female nudity. The film may be slow paced, but it is always interesting and never redundant, and it may not dig too deeply into its characters or life or anything, but it is magnificently textured with psychology, emotion and even spirituality.

While the cards at the beginning discussing the film's transfer suggest that it will be like *Alice in the Cities*, in fact the black-and-white image, letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1, looks excellent. Much of the nighttime and day-for-night cinematography is precisely rendered, and the image is almost always smooth and sharp. Best of all, the film has a 5.1-channel DTS soundtrack, bringing a wonderful dimensionality to the musical score, with smooth, warm tones, and plenty of directionality to the sound effects. The film is in German with optional English subtitles. Also featured is 31 minutes of enjoyable interviews with Völger (who found driving the truck challenging—mainly because of the camera mount in front of it), Zischler (who makes note of the film's spiritual similarities to *The Last Picture Show*) and co-star Kreuzer (whose young son also landed a brief but poignant part); and 21 minutes of very nice silent unused footage accompanied by Axel Lindstädt's Springteenish music, including a couple of songs that he wrote for the film in English.

Wenders provides a commentary track for the entire movie, speaking in German and supported by optional English subtitles. He explains how each scene was accomplished, gets into details about the lens and filters and so on, and talks about how the film was conceived and executed without any idea about where or what would occur from one day to the next. "By now we were really itching to get back on the road. We filmed the entire film chronologically. Every single shot was filmed in chronological order. We followed the story and continued writing the story as we continued our travels. I could take those risks mainly because Rüdiger Vogler and Hans Zischler were always up for anything. Never knowing what would happen the next day wasn't a problem for them."

He also shares loads of practical guidelines for filmmakers ("I can only advise prospective directors to never use real alcohol when shooting a drinking scene. The bottle of real whisky was gone in half an hour, and it was all downhill from there.") and shares plenty of trivia about the locations and the props. Völger's character is reading William Faulkner's *The Wild Palms* and Wenders says it was his favorite book at the time, but it must still be, since Yakusho's character in *Perfect Days* is also reading it.

High camp in Mexico

Apparently, the Latin American actresses that made a splash in Hollywood with their exaggerated gestures and expressions, such as Lupe Vélez, Carmen Miranda and Maria Montez, were not an aberration but a genuine component of Latin American entertainment. Without wishing to get ourselves into trouble here, we would nevertheless suggest that there are aspects to the rituals of the Catholic Church that are campier than the rituals of any other major religion, and that Latin America, having been

separated from Europe for several centuries before mass media could reunite it, tended to magnify these rituals (in part because the indigenous peoples they wanted to convert responded to the flourish) in the same way that vowels and pronunciations in a dialect alter when separated for too long from the mother tongue. Not only did Latin Americans psychically absorb the display and manner of the church rituals, those who entered the vocation of entertainment often drew upon those same impulses of sacramental exaggeration. Nothing else can explain the iconic performance of Ninón Sevilla in the absolutely wacky 1951 Mexican production directed by Emilio Fernández, *Victims of Sin (Victimas del Pecado)*, a Criterion Collection Blu-ray (UPC#71551529-7615, \$40).

Sevilla plays a popular nightclub dancer who rescues a baby from a trash can and raises it as her own son, forced to work on the streets and then on the literal other side of the tracks in a seedier nightclub (the house band only has drums, no brass) to support him. The film runs 84 minutes, and its leaps in time from one situation to the next is not a bug but a feature, underscoring the shorthand Fernández employs to communicate everything from moral standing to emotional status. Sevilla, blonde in a land of dark brunettes, has no figure, but when she rumbas she suddenly turns into an hourglass that was designed to run all day long. Her frantic dancing consists of bumps, grinds and wild arm swings that at first appear to be the motions of a kewpie doll with a broken spring, until you gradually come to realize that she is not an amateur coping with a bee in her chemise but has in fact been deliberately choreographed, as much to embellish her attributes as to keep her aerobically thin. The villain, a pimp played by Rodolfo Acosta, is clownishly draped in an overly large zoot suit, and the comical manner in which he is introduced magnifies the intensity of evil when his actions turn vicious. With the drama providing the emotional equivalent of Sevilla's dancing, the film is not just high camp, it is ultra high camp.

In an odd way, one film, besides *Purple Rain*, that might make an expressive double bill pairing with it is *Tokyo Drifter*. The squared full screen black-and-white picture has a noir minimalist design. The sets are dank and oppressive, to underscore the hopes of the characters, but Fernández, one of Mexico's most esteemed directors, then enlivens the sets by jam-packing them with people, made all the more lively by the exquisitely tempered lighting from the equally esteemed cinematographer, Gabriel Figueroa. The transfer is gorgeous. The image is spotless and contrasts are crisp, as if the high quality of the transfer itself were another addition to the movie's glorious exaggerations. The monophonic sound is solid and reasonably clear. The film is in Spanish with optional English subtitles.

Along with a trailer, there is an outstanding 17-minute profile of Sevilla, explaining how she rose to stardom and the influence she had on the films she was in (when she achieved success, she began hiring the best directors and cinematographers to make her films); an excellent 16-minute analysis of the Figueroa's riveting cinematography and his career; and an engrossing 28-minute 1983 episode of a Mexican TV series, *Those Who Made Our Cinema*, about the 'cabaret' films of the Forties and Fifties that followed the rise of nightclubs that were fueled by wartime tourism, which features many more terrific film clips and a quick interview with Sevilla before focusing on another significant cabaret film, *Salon Mexico*, for most of its second half (with enough clips that you really get the gist of the film—it's worth it).

Criterion has released a decent handful of Mexican films in its day, but only one company has genuinely embraced delivering Mexican cinema to the American market, from Luis Buñuel art films to El Santo wrestling adventures, and that is VCI Entertainment. VCI and MVDVisual's most recent Mexican classic to be issued on Blu-ray is Roberto Gavaldón's 1952 western soap opera, *El Rebozo de Soledad aka Soledad's Shawl* (UPC#089859920929, \$23).

Arturo de Córdova stars as a doctor who never quite makes it to his job in the modern day city because he is repeatedly pulled back to care for the peasants in a small rural village culturally and economically locked into the ways of the past. Running 114 minutes, the film takes its time establishing de Córdova's character and the exploitive environment under which the peasants labor, waiting until well into the film before Pedro Armendariz shows up as a more amiable but still powerful landowner who runs his competitors off and institutes better conditions for the peons working the land. Both men fall for a peasant woman played by Stella Inda, and things begin to churn.

The film is positively demure in comparison to *Victims of Sin*, but even in comparison to *Duel in the Sun* it is reserved in its emotional expression, addressing wider social issues that are pleasurably sidetracked by accentuated passion at appropriate moments. As a result, the distraction of the romance gives the film an opportunity to draw a subversive analogy between the exploitation of the land and the exploitation of healthcare, integrating these issues with the concerns of the characters. The medical sequences are surprisingly graphic for their day and even the sex scenes are more explicit than what Hollywood was allowing at the time, but the drama never goes over the top, giving the emotions of the characters a chance to blossom and fall into conflict without undercutting the movie's political interests.

The squared full screen black-and-white picture is sharp and free of damage, with nicely detailed contrasts. The film's lighting is consistently expressive and adds to the film's underlying emotions in scene after scene. The image is not quite as pristine as the image in *Victims of Sin*, but it is almost as good. The monophonic sound becomes scratchy during orchestral surges, but is adequate if held to a modest volume. The film is in Spanish and is accompanied by optional yellow English subtitles, but the translation tends to lean toward awkward literal transpositions that fail to take on a Hemingway-esque insightfulness, although you get used to them after a while ("Pretty the wedding is going to be. And Camilla presumes that she loves the boyfriend very much."). Also featured is a succinct 27-minute summary of the film's history, the backgrounds of its cast and crew, and its weaknesses and strengths. The film received a number of awards when it was made, but faded from view and will perhaps have its reputation restored thanks to VCI's efforts.

Irresistible Berri

Claude Berri made several indelible epics, but he is also known for his small, almost inconsequential films that are so charming and delicate in the portrayals of their characters that they readily become irresistible. Berri's 1983 **Tchao Pantin**, a Radiance Blu-ray (UPC#760137157663, \$40), runs 94 minutes and the first hour seems entirely without consequence, but then there is a completely unexpected plot turn and suddenly the film becomes, yes, impossible to resist. Richard Anconina portrays a young drug dealer who is messing around near a gas station one evening and takes up a conversation with the nighttime attendant, played by the actor known as Coluche. They gradually become friends. At the same time, Anconina's character meets a girl who is impressed by his stolen motorcycle, played by Agnès Soral, but their date doesn't go all that well. We have to stop there, because we don't want to spoil what happens next, but the performances are wonderful, the characters are carefully and intricately discovered, the film's mood is exquisite, and the movie, a crime film, is well worth tolerating as it leisurely but purposefully puts all of its pieces in their places.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. The color transfer looks very nice. Most of the film is set at night, with expressive lighting, and the image is always sharp, clear and glowing. Presented in French with optional English subtitles, the film is nominally in stereo, but the sound effects and even the music are mostly centered. There is a trailer and a brief but thoughtful 7-minute overview of the film. Finally, a great 52-minute retrospective documentary originally presented as a 2003 episode in the French TV series about the cinema, *Un Film & Son Epoque*, features interviews with many members of the cast and the crew. After seeing the rushes, Berri moved up the release of the film to the end of the year and the gamble paid off with multiple awards. The show also goes over Coluche's career—he was a popular stage comedian who had flirted with politics, initially as a joke, and was floundering a little when Berri's producer realized he'd be perfect for the role. His career took off again, but sadly he died in a traffic accident a couple of years later.

Apu in 4K

Ironically, the Criterion Collection 4K Blu-ray release of the Satyajit Ray 1955 classic, **Pather Panchali**, the first part of Criterion's 4K **The Apu Trilogy Pather Panchali Aparajito Apur Sansar**, being sharper than the standard Blu-ray presentation that is also included in the six-platter set (UPC#715515291118, \$125), also has more discernible scratches and lines. The softer image of the full screen black-and-white picture on the standard BD disguises them. That same crispness that is revealing more flaws, however, also brings the viewer more immediately into the magnificent world that Ray constructed and recorded, and since the markings—the film's original source material was destroyed in a fire and this is the best that can be done—coincide with the poverty in which the characters live, they are never a distraction. Faces are sharp, the minutest environmental details—the legs of the insects scooting along the surface of the water—are clear and the shifts in shadows and light are unambiguous. In 4K, the film does not just take you into the lives of the characters living in the Bengal hinterlands and doing their best to function as a family would function anywhere in the Fifties, with the mother trying to maintain her home, the father trying to generate income and the two children, a girl and a boy, playing no differently than the kittens in the decrepit courtyard play, but following in their limited education and chores the gender roles laid out for them—the film is exceptionally moving because you get to know the characters so intimately and understand their dilemmas so vividly. What the film also does, especially with the precision of display and audio fidelity that 4K enables, is thrill you with the breadth and remarkable magic of the art of cinema. It may be true of anywhere in the world, but to specifically sit in the comforts of a Twenty-First Century suburban American house and to be transported for 125 minutes to Bengal in the Fifties and become so absorbed in the lives of the characters there that you feel their chills, their hunger, their happiness, their amazement with the world, their tragedies and their love of life and existence is a tribute to the fusion of Ray's masterful artistry and the medium's masterful replication of Ray's vision. The glory of each is elevated by the other.

The 1956 **Aparajito** begins immediately where **Pather Panchali** ends, but changes locale as the family moves from the countryside to the city. Running 110 minutes, the film is essentially split in two parts, one that continues the boy's experiences in the city and the second when he becomes an adolescent and goes to college. While it lacks the confined perfection of **Pather Panchali**, it expands the story in a satisfying and moving manner, conveying the fascinating new worlds that the hero is adjusting to while still capturing every emotional nuance among the characters. Again, the scratches that were present before on the full screen black-and-white picture are a bit more noticeable on the 4K presentation, but the increased sharpness of the 4K image is riveting, providing more textures to the faces, the clothing and the environments of every shot. Since there is no dodging the scratches anyway, it is another worthy tradeoff.

The same is true for the final film in the trilogy, the 1959 **Apur Sansar**, which seems to have fewer scratches overall, but is still softer on the standard BD and more involving on the 4K presentation. As we have expressed in the past, while the 106-minute feature is excellent, the two previous films are exponentially better, especially the first film, and it is best to take a break between each movie to savor what each has to offer free of the expectations brought by the predecessor. The 4K format does help as well to

keep a viewer involved as the hero, for most of the film, diddles away his adulthood in grief and only gets his act together for the closing shot. The film remains rich in moments and explorations, and with the crisper picture one has more patience with it anyway. Just avoid jumping into it because you are looking for the fix that the other two films delivered.

Each of the three films appears on a separate platter in the 4K format, in Bengali with optional English subtitles, and each appears on a standard Blu-ray that is identical to the three-platter Criterion set we reviewed in Dec 21. Only the standard BDs have the special features, including a 38-minute retrospective piece about the **Trilogy**, 29 minutes of audio-only segments with Ray, 50 minutes of retrospective interviews with members of the cast and the crew, a 29-minute PBS (before it was PBS) segment profiling Ray at work, an 11-minute appreciation specifically of **Aparajito**, a 7-minute appreciation of Ray's artistry, a 3-minute clip of Ray from the 1992 Oscars, and 16 minutes of pieces on the effort that went into the restorations.

More Noirs

Released previously by Olive Films, the 1950 Paramount feature, **No Man of Her Own** (Jul 12), has now been included in another lineup of great early Fifties crime features from Kino Lorber Incorporated as **KL Studio Classics Blu-rays, Film Noir The Dark Side of Cinema Volume XIX** (UPC#738329265854, \$50). Barbara Stanwyck stars in the wonderful story about a destitute pregnant woman who suddenly finds herself mistakenly placed in a luxurious situation, going along with it until a blackmailer shows up. Based upon a Cornell Woolrich story, not only does the 98-minute feature improve with each viewing, but you start crying earlier and earlier into the film as well, knowing how it plays out. The fact that pregnancy could be presented so forthrightly was part of the drip, drip, drip of post-War dramas watering down the Production Code, which gives the drama a pleasingly adult edge. Between Stanwyck's compelling star presence, Woolrich's masterful plotting and the clarity and efficiency with which Mitchell Leisen's direction pieces everything together, **No Man of Her Own** is a classic that deserves a great deal more dissemination than even these home video releases have managed to give it.

John Lund, Jane Cowl, Lyle Bettger and Henry O'Neill co-star. All three films in the set have squared full screen black-and-white pictures, slightly noisy but workable monophonic sound and optional English subtitles. The picture on **No Man of Her Own** has more obvious wear than Olive's DVD, but is sharper, which tends to bring out the minor speckling and scratches, although overall the basic crispness and better defined contrasts on the BD are preferable. Generally, the image is a bit worn, but workable.

Along with a trailer, the film comes with two commentary tracks. Film noir enthusiast Imogen Sara Smith provides an incisive analysis of how the film straddles the thriller and romance genres, as well as going into detail on the backgrounds and careers of Woolrich, Leisen, Stanwyck and others involved with the film. "I should say something about John Lund, who did tend to get stuck with these sort of utility parts, and I admit I had always thought of him as one of those actors who was adequate at best, sort of a placeholder for more exciting and distinctive stars when they were unavailable, often supporting women stars, which was a place for men in Hollywood in these years. However, reading up on him, I find him so personally charming that I now feel a bit guilty about having been so dismissive, because he himself said that he always felt he was miscast, that he was really meant to be a character actor, not a romantic hero or leading man type. He was disarmingly funny in assessing his own looks and appeal, saying, 'I look best from a great distance and in a bad light. I have a peculiar face, an odd walk and about as much sex appeal as a goat.'"

The second commentary features film historians Julie Kirgo and Peter Hankoff, and you might want to listen to it first, since while it gives a general introduction to the film, it is not as penetrating or as informative as Smith's talk. Kirgo even dismisses Richard Benjamin's wonderful adaptation of the story, **Mrs. Winterbourne** (Mar 02), although she admits she's never seen it, and her insights on the story and the performers are few and far between, although not entirely lacking, such as in her admiration for Stanwyck's outstanding performance. "The movie is, in a way, about 'imposter syndrome.' She is, in fact, an imposter, but the self hatred is totally there, and she's so good at it that it makes you wonder."

Charlton Heston not only has top billing, but he has an 'Introducing' credit on the terrific 1950 thriller Paramount thriller, **Dark City**. Much of Heston's career was spent playing men with conflicted emotional cores, and this was where that started. He plays a professional gambler who is targeted with his cronies for revenge after a mark commits suicide. The film is a bit of a misnomer, because while it was obviously shot in Hollywood, the story is set in not one, not two, but three major American cities. Where **No Man of Her Own** hits you in the heartstrings, **Dark City** is a solid punch in the guts. The supporting cast is absolutely fantastic, including Lizabeth Scott, Jack Webb, Viveca Lindfors, Dean Jagger, Ed Begley and Harry Morgan, with Mike Mazurki showing up near the end. Directed by William Dieterle and featuring a musical score by Franz Waxman (with Scott's character singing several classic standards, including *I Don't Want to Walk without You* and *That Old Black Magic*), almost every single performance is slightly against type, and all of them are fantastic, but Heston is the best of all, holding onto a viewer's sympathy and patience even though his character is morally challenged in general and cold toward Scott's character in particular. Running 98 minutes, the film keeps you in its thrall as it bounces around the country, mixing mystery, suspense and crisply executed drama, and there is a dandy scream at its climax.

The image is sharp and contrasts are well defined. Despite occasional speckling, the presentation is very nice, and the close-ups of the youthful but commanding Heston are especially pleasing. There is a trailer, and an efficient commentary track by film expert Alan K. Rode, talking about the producer, Hal Wallis, as well as the cast and the crew, and providing details about the day-to-day production and its expenses.

A few other characters pop in and out, but the 1952 RKO Radio Pictures *Beware, My Lovely* is basically a two-character film. Ida Lupino is the owner of a boarding house who is straightening up after all of her guests leave for Christmas vacation—yes, it's a Christmas movie, but not really—and Robert Ryan is a day laborer she hires to help her with the cleaning. Turns out, he has serious mental issues, although since it is Ryan in the part, you knew that already. Running 77 minutes, the film is essentially a home invasion thriller, although the level of threat in Ryan's character is ambiguous because of the character's emotional swings. It is a very fine showcase for the two stars and is effectively directed by Harry Horner (there is a thrilling shot of Lupino slumped in a chair next to the Christmas tree as Ryan suddenly appears above her, reflected simultaneously in several of the bulbs on the tree), but there really isn't enough substance to the film to carry a modern viewer, far more steeped in the genre, along.

The picture is reasonably sharp, but does have noticeable wear in places. A wobbly, smeared trailer is included (it is still definitely better than no trailer at all). Film historian Jason Ney provides a satisfying commentary track, going over everything that is known about the story sources that the film was based upon, the production history of the film, and its fate at the boxoffice and with the critics, as well as providing a decent, positive analysis of the film's artistry, a good overview of Ryan's life and career, and the story of Howard Hughes's stint running RKO. But he spends most of his time, talking about Lupino (who directed the film for several days when Horner had an emergency) and her career making and producing films.

A collection of three Forties crime films controlled by Universal have been gathered in the Universal Kino Blu-ray boxed set, **Film Noir The Dark Side of Cinema VIII** (UPC#738329259402, \$50). Only the first film comes even close to qualifying as 'film noir,' but it is no matter since all three make for fine, escapist entertainment. Each full screen black-and-white monophonic film appears on a separate platter and is accompanied by optional English subtitles.

A dandy Woolrich amnesia thriller, the 1942 Paramount production directed by Jack Hively, *Street of Chance*, stars Burgess Meredith, who has an accident at the film's opening and is shocked into discovering that he has no memory of who he is or what he has been doing for the previous year. Sheldon Leonard is a tough guy he discovers is relentlessly chasing after him, and Claire Trevor is apparently his girlfriend, helping to hide him from Leonard's character. Since it is the story twists that make the 74-minute film so engagingly entertaining, nothing more should be said except that indeed, a murder has been committed. The performances up and down the line are terrific, and it is Hively's focus on the characters and the cast (there is an elderly stroke victim who can only communicate by blinking her eyes) that enriches the deliberately cagey plotting so effectively.

The picture is reasonably sharp, but it is littered with scratches and speckles.

Ney supplies an excellent commentary track, not only going into interesting production details and the film's history, as well as profiles of the cast and crew, but supplying a worthwhile overview of amnesia and amnesia tales. "I believe that out of all the genres in storytelling, film noir provides the best match for amnesia tales. Noir stories already explore social anxiety and isolation, as well as a pervasive psychological instability due to characters not knowing who they can trust. They are fatalistic tales that place characters at the mercy of forces far larger than themselves. And those forces are, at their best, indifferent to these characters' plights. At their worst, they're actively hostile. Amnesia simply takes these concerns to their logical extremes. These amnesia stories must, either implicitly or explicitly, address the nature versus nurture question, which in turn speaks to some of the biggest questions of life. Who are we? What defines being human? Do consciousness and memory define our existence? If those memories are taken away, are we still the same people? This film tackles that by asserting that we do have a nature that's fixed. We're not completely subservient to our surrounding environment."

A character who has been popular in everything from a French Netflix series to Japanese anime was also in a 1944 attempt to establish a franchise at Universal Pictures, *Enter Arsene Lupin*. Charles Korvin is the title character, a 'gentleman' jewel thief, and it is in all likelihood that this amoral occupation was enough to keep him at the time from really stealing the hearts of American moviegoers. Still, the 72-minute film is quite delightful, as the hero lifts an emerald brooch from an heiress, played by Ella Raines, but returns it when he realizes what a hot number she is, only to discover that her wicked relatives, played by George Dolenz and the wonderful Gale Sondergaard, are plotting to murder her so they can obtain the emerald, and the rest of her inheritance, themselves. In the meantime, although the story is set in Britain, a bumbling but tenacious French detective, played by J. Carroll Naish, is hot on the hero's trail. Korvin does not have the twinkle that David Niven brought to a similar character, Raffles, in the same era, and the machismo that he does project is undercut by the errors his character has to make for the sake of the plotting. Raines' performance is absolutely terrible,

and every time she is supposed to be looking into Korvin's eyes, she seems instead to be staring at the top of his head, as if he were wearing a propeller beanie or something. None of this matters in the least. Directed by Ford Beebe, the film delivers all of the entertainment and satisfaction that a 'B' film is meant to deliver, and it is a shame Universal was not emboldened enough to move forward with the series.

The picture is in reasonably decent shape, with minimal wear. A trailer is included. British film expert Anthony Slide supplies a good commentary track, going over the cast and crew, the history of the Lupin character, and the failed attempt by Universal to create a series, although the fact that the movie was made in America and set in Britain tends to get under his skin, particularly when the characters are driving through what is obviously Southern California on the way to the estate. He also laments, "The entire film, actually, doesn't give one a very favorable impression of either the French or the British police, but then, this is Hollywood."

One box gets checked off right away on the genre requirements for the 1946 International Picture production, *Temptation*, and that would be the *Femme Fatale* box. The story is set mostly in Egypt during an era where women regularly walked around with parasols, and is told in flashback, with Merle Oberon falling for a local stud played by Korvin and plotting with him to poison her loving archeologist husband, played by George Brent. Paul Lukas is also featured. Running 98 minutes, the film is more of a period romance than anything else, but Oberon sells the wicked heroine thing quite effectively, so it can be enjoyable to watch her eyes as they range from desire to duplicity. That said, the film, directed by Irving Pichel, is of limited interest, choosing to wrap up the fate of Oberon's character off screen and report upon it afterward.

The picture is mildly grainy and a little soft, but has no overpowering flaws. The sound is somewhat fuzzy at times. Film historian Kelly Robinson supplies a very good commentary track, going over not just the careers of the cast and the crew, but a history of the source material, Robert Hichens's bestseller, *Bella Donna*, and the previous films that had been made from it (this feature was the final adaptation). In summarizing her theme that some movies and some stories are locked in their era and cannot move forward, she reads an Oberon quote about the style of a film she had wanted to make in the Seventies and how it would be in conflict with the Seventies zeitgeist, "There's a lot of purity in this picture," she says, "[That] a lot of people today, unfortunately, don't believe in. It's a pure love story, and people are so jaded. I'm sorry, it's sad. The world has passed me by. I don't understand what's going on, and they don't understand me, and they won't understand this picture." Robinson goes on to ruminate, "Maybe this isn't a film with a whole lot of purity in it, but a lot of what she says is something that could be said about *Temptation*, or a lot of older movies. That the world has sort of passed it by. It may be hard for some to understand today what's going on, why this film is the way it is, why these particular choices were made. We have to work a little to understand films sometimes."

Hollywood at its best

When a Hollywood production has adventure, romance, glamour and excitement, it is darn near irresistible, and that is the case with the 1948 Paramount feature directed by Leslie Fenton, *Saigon*, a Universal Kino Lorber Incorporated *KL Studio Classics* Blu-ray (UPC#738329266622, \$25). Alan Ladd is a bomber pilot still in Shanghai just after the war who accepts an assignment with his two military buddies, played by Douglas Dick (handsome and dying of a movie disease) and Wally Cassell (the New York kid, full of wisecracks) to fly a wealthy man of questionable morals out of town. As the heroes wait by the plane, the man's secretary, played by Veronica Lake, shows up, and then there are explosions in the distance and they decide not to wait around. A belly landing in a rice paddy, a trip in a steamboat down the river and soon they are in a movie studio Saigon, tailed most of the way by an effete policeman who knows more than he lets on. There is also a briefcase full of money.

From the moment that rickety plane takes off, and maybe even before that, the 94-minute film is wholly spellbinding in a Hollywood entertainment sort of way. Ladd and Lake are wonderful—he encourages her to romance Dick's character, but the two just can't keep their hands off of one another once they stop bickering—and the supporting players are delightful. The Asian stereotyping that undercuts some of the charm in a number of these films (Ladd did several for Paramount, all named after exotic locales in the East) is kept to a comfortable minimum (the villain's henchman is nasty, but doesn't overdo the ethnicity of his character), and the production is just one joyful movie moment after another. While the ending is succinct and has to come when it does, we still wished that the film could have been stretched out another half hour or so, but otherwise the movie is a total, old fashioned delight from beginning to end.

The squared full screen black-and-white picture has its share of speckling, but the image is reasonably sharp most of the time. The monophonic sound is also rough in spots, but workable. There are optional English subtitles and a trailer. Film expert Lee Gambin and costume expert Elissa Rose provide a passable commentary track, going over the careers of the cast and the crew, the problems Lake faced in the industry because she was not a team player, and the story's dynamics. They also dissect the costumes and the film's other design considerations.

Family problems

Not even Frank Borzage could do much with the 1938 MGM romantic drama, **The Shining Hour**, a Warner Bros. *Warner WB Archive Collection* Blu-ray (UPC#840418305638, \$22). Joan Crawford is a nightclub dance star who marries a farmer played by Melvyn Douglas and goes to live in the part of Wisconsin that looks like Big Bear Lake. Robert Young plays the farmer's brother, Margaret Sullavan (who has the strongest presence in the film) plays the wife of Young's character and Fay Bainter is the unmarried older sister of the Douglas and Young characters. They all live in a mansion and while they talk about animals now and then, you don't actually see anything that appears farm-like. Basically, Bainter's character resents Crawford's character, stirring the pot. Young's character falls in love with Crawford's character, and there is almost infidelity, except that it is 1938, so everything works out after a big disastrous house fire that does not touch the mansion they've been living in. Under Borzage's guidance, the performances are carefully measured and never get carried away (Hattie McDaniel plays the maid of Crawford's character and gets to deliver the film's humor). Here and there, a sensual moment occurs, whether it is the fire reflected upon the characters, Crawford's opening dance number, or just two characters strolling down an overgrown path with bushes partially blocking our view them, but Borzage was limited by what he had to work with, and the best that can be said for the 76-minute feature is that its flaws are limited (although seeing Sullavan wrapped in bandages can elicit a guffaw if you're not careful).

The squared full screen black-and-white picture looks beautiful, with smooth contrasts and minimal grain. Borzage's lens gauzes appear to have also been kept to a minimum. The monophonic sound is passable and there are optional English subtitles, a trailer, a 23-minute radio promotion for the film from 1939 that provides an abridged audio-only presentation of the drama (the film was based upon a stageplay) and then concludes with a comedy skit based upon a popular MGM short about men playing cards like women, and three creative Warner *Merrie Melodies* cartoons—the color *Love and Curses* from 1938 running 8 minutes and spoofing 1890 melodramas, the black-and-white *Porky's Five & Ten* running 7 minutes and cleverly imagining what fish would do with the contents of a general store, and the color *The Sneezing Weasel* from 1937 running 7 minutes about 'Willie the Weasel' (a great example of a 'failed' cartoon character) trying to eat a baby chick as the chick and his brethren fight back. It's pretty wild.

Wartime romance

Affecting a pronounced accent, with her signature locks of blonde hair pulled up into a bun, Veronica Lake is a refugee working as a housekeeper on an estate in Britain at the start of World War II and Franchot Tone is a conscientious objector living there who has fallen in love with her in the 1944 Paramount feature directed by Frank Tuttle, **The Hour before the Dawn**, a Universal Kino Lorber Incorporated *KL Studio Classics* Blu-ray (UPC#738329266615, \$25). Both performances are excellent, and go a long way toward making the 74-minute feature, an attempted adaptation of a novel by W. Somerset Maugham, terrific entertainment. It is exciting just seeing Lake stretch her parameters a bit, and Tone's presentation of his arguments against killing are, to pardon the pun, tone perfect. The film also contains a number of lovely miniatures. Made during the war and intended as a patriotic booster, the film is ultimately compromised by the restrictions of the marketplace that it has been burdened with (it is a great candidate for a telefilm remake), but there is nothing really wrong with the ending other than it is rushed and must gloss over uncomfortable details, and the lead up to the finale is fully engrossing and suspenseful. If you enjoy watching movies for the pleasure of watching them rather than for their pleasure as a whole (i.e., the journey, not the destination), the film is a wonderful experience.

The squared full screen black-and-white picture is generally in good condition. It does have some mild wear and is a little soft at times, but there are no significant distractions. The monophonic sound is adequate and there are optional English subtitles. Along with a trailer, there is a good commentary track by Lake biographer Paul Talbot, who shares thoroughly researched information about the entire cast and crew, the production itself ("For these exterior scenes, Tone and his double had to wear a tweed coat and felt hat in the hot sun, while the crew had short sleeves and umbrellas.") and Maugham. Of course, he also has plenty to say about Lake (the War Department asked her to change her hairstyle during the war, because too many working women who imitated it got their hair caught in machinery), and shares a telling parable about Hollywood in general as he describes Lake's desperate attempts to hide her pregnancy (for fear of losing income—he notes without drawing conclusions that Tone's wife was also pregnant at the time, but it was no big deal) and describes the tragic complications from an accident on the set led to her baby dying shortly after birth.

Our noble/not-so-noble ally

Two versions of the Samuel Goldwyn Productions World War II film directed by Lewis Milestone have been bundled together in the two-platter Paramount Kino Lorber Incorporated *KL Studio Classics* release, **The North Star / Armored Attack!** (UPC#738329266776, \$30; curiously, the cardboard slip jacket promotes both films, but the plastic jacket actually holding the two platters only promotes the first feature with no mention of the other one on the front, back or spine). Both squared full screen black-and-white features have passable monophonic audio tracks and optional English subtitling. While there is some mild wear in spots, for the most part, the

transfer looks quite good on both presentations, with smooth contrasts and clear details.

The 1943 *The North Star*, made at the height of America's glorious wartime alliance with the Soviet Union and written by the gung ho leftist, Lillian Hellman, opens in Ukraine with a shot of an unrecognizable Walter Brennan (until he starts talking) riding on an ox cart like Tevye through his quaint farming village. When he pauses to say hello to a family, the attention then moves into the house and settles on a prominent doctor and writer, made up to look like Stalin and played by Walter Huston. All of this is happening, by the way, to music by Aaron Copland, who scored the 106-minute film. It is 1941. While the horrors of war are being reported on the radio, they are still abstract to the youngsters graduating from school and preparing for a vacation hike to Kiev. Anne Baxter, Dana Andrews, Dean Jagger, Ann Harding, Jane Withers and Farley Granger are also nestled in the happy populace. The first half hour is practically a musical, with several songs, culminating in a bizarre Russian hoedown sequence.

But once the bombing starts, the shuffling in your seat ceases. Milestone does war really, really well, and the action scenes are terrific. The Germans, led by Erich von Stroheim and Martin Kosleck, set up a field hospital in what is left of the village, and begin using the village children as plasma spigots. One set of heroes has to get a supply of guns past the German convoys and bring it to the other set, who are organizing to rescue the children. Copland was just getting started with the hoedown, and really lets loose once the action begins. If you can overlook the sad and painful irony that Ukraine is now experiencing the same set of horrors in the hands of the Russians themselves, the film is a rousing and inspiring patriotic feature that allows you to believe that good can triumph over evil, no matter how better equipped evil is.

In 1957, at the height of the Red Scare, people still had to make a buck, so National Telefilm Associates took the original movie and trimmed it down to 76 minutes (the war now begins around the 7-minute mark), calling it *Armored Attack!* (the film's title card doesn't have the exclamation point, but the platter typeface does) and adding a mostly pointless voiceover narration, although there is a cute documentary epilog that does indeed point out the Soviets turned into Nazis themselves, something that has become a lot less dated now than it would have seemed a few decades ago. Don't worry, though. Every frame of Milestone's action scenes are intact, and indeed, unless you have a hankering for the sappy communal stuff, this is the version that gives you the goods with the least blather.

Film historian Adrian Martin provides a decent commentary track for the film, readily admitting that it is—and always has been viewed as—flawed. He goes over the backgrounds of the filmmakers (he has less to say about the stars), the history of pro-Russian Hollywood features, and the extent of negative and insightful criticism that has been written about the film. But he is always admiring of Milestone's skills. "Milestone's imagination, his inventiveness as a filmmaker [is] fixed on 'How do you depict war? How do you represent war? How do you represent the maneuvers on a battlefield?' Which of course, on one level, are completely spontaneous. Soldiers in war, people protecting themselves and the community have to make split second decisions on a terrain that they haven't necessarily mapped out beforehand. They have to draw up this spontaneous kind of plans and try to imagine grids and positions. This is what a lot of Milestone's directorial style is about. It's precisely about grids and positions and lines, points of view, vantage points, what the characters see and what they can't see. What strikes them by surprise and what they can anticipate. This is all part of Milestone's work, and sometimes quite a rich and inventive part of Milestone's work."

WWII film enthusiasts Steve Mitchell and Steven Jay Rubin supply another good commentary track on *Armored Attack!*, going into more detail about the talents of the cast and the crew, Milestone's many tracking shots, the equipment being depicted (sometimes American weaponry disguised as German weaponry), and other aspects of the film's action and structure.

Ford silent

A 1928 silent film directed by John Ford, **Hangman's House**, has been released as a *Silent Classics Collection* title by Alpha Video (UPC# 089218861597, \$9). Set mostly in Ireland, June Collyer is the daughter of a judge who is pressured by her dying father into marrying a cad, played by Earle Foxe, when she actually loves her neighbor, played by Larry Kent. Victor McLaglen, who is top-billed, is a wanted revolutionary who returns to town with his own grudge against Foxe's character. Opening with a Ford signature shot from a dark interior at a doorway with the brightly lit outside, the 70-minute film is sharply directed. Scenes are clear and to the point, and the melodrama plays out with a suitable number of enjoyable confrontations and viable twists. There is a fairly thrilling horse race in the midsection, and a spectacular fire in the finale. Although the squared full screen black-and-white picture is soft and smeary, and is best watched on a smaller screen, the individual scenes are so well performed (McLaglen is wonderful, but Ford keeps everyone from overplaying their parts, and characters act with respect to the despised British military presence, even as they undermine it) and engagingly shot that the movie still holds the viewer's full attention from beginning to end, even in its weakened condition. The film is accompanied by adeptly applied cuts of generic classical music (Rimsky-Korsakov, Mozart, etc.), and the monophonic sound is adequately delivered.

Roy Rogers debut

Running 65 minutes, there is enough energy packed into the first film to feature Roy Rogers as its top-billed player (he'd done a number of bit parts through much of the Thirties), the 1938 Republic Pictures **Under the Western Stars**, to send his career into the stratosphere. Released on Blu-ray by Film Masters as an *Archive Collection* title (UPC#840418306109, \$20), Rogers is a singing cowboy who wants to put a stop to a water company that is overcharging ranchers, so he runs for Congress to change the water laws. Not only does the film, by incorporating topical politics (Rogers sings a song about the Dust Bowl to documentary footage of its ravages), avoid the standard movie western narrative templates, but the 'campaign' includes a song promoting the candidate, so that the marketing of Rogers as a cowboy star is not just enabled by his character having his name, but by a catchy song about him, as well. But the endeavor, directed by Joseph Kane, would not have succeeded were it not for the charisma of Rogers himself, who combines his singing and yodeling with some good, hard riding action scenes and plenty of quick draw maneuvers. With Carol Hughes along for some sassy romance and Smiley Burnette for slapstick humor, the film jams pretty much everything you could want into Rogers's brisk but indelible debut.

The squared full screen black-and-white picture has a thin vertical line running through it from time to time, and other tentative wear, including a few quick hidden splices, but it remains stable and presentable. The image is a little soft, but reasonably clear, and there is a fairly impressive day-for-night campfire scene. The monophonic sound may be antique, but it is clear enough to appreciate the songs and follow the dialog. There are optional English subtitles. The film does not start up where it left off if playback is terminated.

Jean-Claude Van Damme is getting old

As action stars age and want to remain in the game, they have to rely more upon the thespian skills they have acquired over the course of their careers and less upon the fading athleticism that had once supported their stardom. Jean-Claude Van Damme still has muscle memory, so he can do a move or two if the editing is good, but the rest of the movie he has to carry on his charm alone, and hope that a viewer's memories will automatically respond. Van Damme stars in the 2023 Saban Films Sony Pictures Home Entertainment release, **Darkness of Man** (UPC#043396637184, \$25), portraying a Los Angeles cop who is trying to protect the son of a former witness in the middle of a turf war between Korean and Russian gangsters. Directed by James Cullen Bressack, the 108-minute film takes a good half hour to get into gear. Van Damme plays into his senescence. He can still get the drop on the bad guys, but he is more vulnerable when the blows are returned, and the pains clearly linger. His accent suppresses nuance in his performance, but he communicates his feelings well enough, has a viable sense of timing, and once everything is established and put in motion, it's another Van Damme movie, with plenty of hard edged action, some decent gore, and a relatively coherent narrative. Cynthia Rothrock and the late Shannen Doherty have cameo parts, and there is a nice epilog during the end credit scroll.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. In the bright sunlight, the picture looks fine, but that isn't the title of the movie. Most of it is set at night and is hazy and grainy, with weak contrasts so that details can get lost in the fuzzy shadows. The film relies on moodiness to get past its shortcomings, and survives the same way Van Damme does, by soldiering on. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound provides a basic dimensionality for the music and a few atmospheric effects, but its strength is limited. There are optional English subtitles.

Jackson story

A 2018 adaptation of the beguiling Shirley Jackson tale of madness and murder, **We Have Always Lived in the Castle**, has been released by Albyn Media Ltd and Brainstorm (UPC#602573752784, \$20). Two sisters, played by Taissa Farniga and Alexandra Daddario, continue to live in a mansion after their parents are killed, along with a handicapped uncle played with his usual dry wit by Crispin Glover. Then a cousin, played by Sebastian Stan, shows up, upsetting the routines the sisters—who try not to leave the house and grounds unless they absolutely have to—have grown accustomed to. To say much more would be to spoil the story's surprises, but the pleasure of the 95-minute film, directed by Stacie Passon, comes from the quirkiness of the characters and their interactions with the rest of the world. It is the relationship between the two sisters that sustains the intrigue as the otherwise quizzical story plays out. Jackson's creation will either seem too weird, or will be more than enough to keep the viewer mesmerized. To emphasize the movie's sense of being on some sort of cusp, it is a period movie set in the Sixties, but early in the Sixties, when they were still part of the Fifties, and while it is set in a small New England town, it was filmed in Ireland. In one shot of the town's street, there is both an Irish-style phone box and an American-style mailbox, except that the mailbox is off kilter. The whole film is off kilter and that is the point, exploring some of Jackson's popular themes, such as the power of mass hysteria and, um, ghosts.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The color transfer looks good, with fresh hues and no more than a mild softness. The stereo sound has a pleasant dimensionality, and there is no captioning.

Colorful rubber suits

The popular anime series with a concept similar to **Blue Beetle**, in that a young man comes into contact with an alien device that inhabits his body and turns him into an undefeatable monster machine, **The Guvver**, was made into a live action feature in 1991, which has now been released as a three-platter 4K Blu-ray set by Unerthed Classics (UPC#760137148951, \$60). Jack Armstrong is the hero, who wants to save the daughter of a scientist when she is abducted by aliens, gaining his powers when he comes across the device the scientist had discarded before being killed. The monsters are all busily detailed colorful rubber suits, and the hero's outfit is just a little sleeker. Running 92

minutes, the first third of the film sets up the story, the second third is a lengthy battle set in a motion picture studio and warehouse, and then the finale is another lengthy battle set in the villain's laboratory, where the villain, expressively played by David Gale, is busily making more monsters. Mark Hamill, giving a reasonably nice performance, has a major role as a detective who also wants to save the girl, played by Vivian Wu, and Jeffrey Combs, Linnea Quigley and Willard E. Pugh all have bit parts, with forgotten TV star Jimmy Walker mostly voicing a costume as one of the monsters. It is generally a juvenile endeavor. The costumes are showy enough to be appealing, but not the least bit convincing, and a lot of the fighting is redundant.

The 4K presentation does not turn the movie into a masterpiece, but it at least makes much of it tolerable. Grain is kept to a minimum, fleshtones are lovely, and the details in the monster costumes are intricate. Fans will definitely be pleased. The transfer also looks reasonably nice on the standard Blu-ray platter included in the set, but the image is not as smooth as the 4K presentation, and the film needs all the help it can get. The movie defaults to the original Ultra-Stereo audio track, and while there is an alternate 5.1-channel DTS track, it is actually blander, since the raw separations on the original track, while somewhat rougher, have more zing. There are optional English subtitles.

The directors, Steve Wang and someone who has taken the name of 'Screaming Mad George' provide a very good commentary track, sharing all of their experiences during the shoot, explaining how the special effects were executed, talking about how they split their duties (sometimes one would have the first unit and the other would have the second unit—since the actors in the costumes were different than the characters out of costume—and then they would switch) and sharing stories about the cast members (Hamill was great and also shared some inside **Star Wars** info; Wu didn't want to do the kissing scene) and discussing the extensive infusion of humor and how they targeted the **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles** audience.

Even better is the second commentary with crewmembers Ted Smith and Wyatt Weed. The were childhood friends and effects enthusiasts who moved to Hollywood separately but quickly hooked up once they were both there. They did all sort of jobs on the set—Smith was even in one of the costumes and also had a second supporting part when another actor dropped out at the last minute—and share many stories about the shoot and the details of their work on the film. They talk about how Walker was treated at the time, which would definitely have gotten the directors into trouble today (they wanted him to act 'more black') and pointed out how Gale would cleverly draw out his reading of a line while he tried to remember what the next one was. But overall, they are very proud of the film and their contributions to it. "This movie, seeing it on Blu-ray and 4K, in all its glory, this movie has never looked so good. Unless you saw it 35mm at like the cast and crew screening, it's never been seen like this. I honestly never knew how pretty the film was. It's really well lit, the colors are awesome, and for as kind of silly and sort of tongue in cheek as it can be at times, the look of the film is just fantastic. You've never seen the film look better. It really looks gorgeous."

Wang and Mad George also talk over 32 minutes of costume tests and outtakes, while Smith and Weed provide a second track over the 7 minutes of costume tests. Additionally, there are four trailers; an extensive collection of promotional and production materials in still frame; a 6-minute alternate opening credit sequence in English, Spanish and German; a 57-minute interview with Mad George (a lot of it repeating what he shared in his commentary); and a 36-minute interview with producer Brian Yuzna, talking about his career, putting the film together, and his beefs with how it was marketed (it went straight to video).

One component of the film that Smith and Weed repeatedly call out for ridicule is Matthew Morse's musical score, which they find portions of highly similar to Jerry Goldsmith's music for **Total Recall**. Nevertheless, the third platter in the set is a 44-minute CD of the mostly pulsing electronic music, and without the counterpoint of the images, it is actually a pretty decent soundtrack, with plenty of energy and a nice flow of excitements.

Argentine horror, sort of

A 1934 Argentine horror film, **El Hombre Bestia**, is being released by Gemini Entertainment (UPC#655498638923, \$10). As an introductory title card emphatically explains, there was only one fragile copy of the film left when it was transferred to VHS tape, and then that source disintegrated completely, so only the tape was left. The squared full screen black-and-white picture is in really bad condition, with blotches, blurs and so on, but it is watchable. As for the sound, well, most of the movie is actually silent, intercut with scenes of conversation (mostly in Spanish, but some in Italian). The silent sequences have a very shrill musical score. There are optional yellow English, French, Spanish, Italian and German subtitles. A text essay is included that delves further into the film's history and value.

Running a merciful 52 minutes, a WWI pilot crash lands somewhere, loses his memory and lives off the wild until another plane comes along. He kills the pilot, flies the plane back to civilization, lands in a sort of suburban area where several scientists work, and is given a serum by a scientist that makes him go wild again. He abducts women and keeps them in a cave, as the locals try to stop him and fail, until they don't. Directed by Camilo Zaccaria Soprani, the film is a total mess, and despite the inclusion of some brief footage of actual surgery, it feels like something that industrious junior high school kids might have put together. It's a hoot, and the text essay emphasizes what we cannot share enough, that every film ever made in Argentina needs to be preserved and restored, but that said, and despite its de facto status as perhaps Argentina's first—and, up to now, Argentina's earliest surviving—horror film.

Page turner

If you're looking for the TV equivalent of a summer page turner, don't miss the marvelous two-platter Netflix BBC DVD release, **Inside Man** (UPC#883929822980, \$28). Normally, we take a dim view of programs that generate high levels of anxiety in a viewer, but the show is just too much fun to be undermined by how close the drama comes to giving you the feeling you have when you dream that you have murdered someone before you wake up and realize it was a dream. Other people have dreams like that, right? Actually, although there are a couple of deaths during the course of the entertainment, no one is actually murdered, but not for the want of trying. What makes the show so enjoyable is its crosscutting. Without giving away too much of the many, many story hooks, Stanley Tucci is a convicted murderer on Death Row in a penitentiary in the American Southwest who willingly lends his deductive skills and understanding of man's darker sides to those who feel they have been wronged. He even has an assistant fellow prisoner, embodied with great humor by Atkins Estimond. Dylan Baker is the accommodating warden, and yes, the show does stretch reality now and then—and even has a couple of hiccups in logic—to deliver its many, many pleasures. And meanwhile, in an unremarkable London suburb, David Tennant is a local vicar who, by a set of very unfortunate circumstances, ends up imprisoning his son's math tutor, played by Dolly Wells, in his cellar. When his wife, in an exceptional performance by Lyndsey Marshal, learns of those circumstances, she begins helping him, and it is up to Tucci's character, eventually, to rescue the tutor. So, while it is the constant crosscutting that keeps you absolutely glued to the screen for the entire 246-minute running time, it is the vivid exploration of how good, normal people can, step-by-step, do things that are neither normal nor good that justifies the rollicking entertainment those choices have created. You're just glad it's not you.

Although the platter typography claims that the first three episodes appear on the first platter and just one episode appears on the second platter, in fact two episodes appear on each platter, accompanied by a 'Play All' option. Don't quit the show when the end credits appear on the last episode, incidentally, or you will miss a cute epilog or teaser for another season with Tucci. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound supplies a nice surround environment of incidental noises and such, and there are optional English subtitles.

All aboard

Of course, the Underground Railroad was neither underground, nor a railroad. It was a loosely organized string of safe houses that enabled a fair number of escaped slaves in the South to make their way to the North. But the metaphor was a powerful one, embracing the burgeoning industrialization of America that would indeed lead to the end of slavery as an efficient economic model, and the idea of an actual subterranean passenger locomotive became an enduring myth that was separate from the genuine conspiracy network that had been given its symbolic name. This may well have helped the conspirators, creating a fanciful imaginary distraction that would outshine the possibility that disappearing slaves were getting genuine collaborative assistance in their quest for freedom.

Embracing the myth, Colson Whitehead wrote a prize-winning novel that was adapted and directed as a ten-episode miniseries by Barry Jenkins and has been released in a four-platter Blu-ray set by the Criterion Collection, **The Underground Railroad** (UPC#715515297813, \$80). The first episode is like **12 Years a Slave** meets **The Polar Express**, but the episodes branch out on several different paths, some indistinguishable from history and some quite fanciful, creating an alternate universe version of the South (in one episode, there is a very tall building in South Carolina, with an elevator; North Carolina has outlawed Negroes and hangs any one of them who ventures across the border; and so on) to put forth a mesmerizing examination of the relationship between black people and white people in America, and how the devastating African-American experience, which nevertheless provided the economic foundation for the republic, has forever shaped viewpoints and understandings.

In the silent film era, Erich von Stroheim, far ahead of his time, tried to turn a novel into a motion picture without sacrificing its detail. He failed because no one wanted to sit in a movie theater for that long, and even movies half that long, with plenty of action and other confections, could not earn back the costs of their productions. Installment serials could last a few hours but had to sacrifice character development for nothing but action and confection and, because of their high sugar content, as it were, could only be digested in short segments. Following serialized magazine stories that authors would utilize to underwrite their novels, radio created soap operas, substituting the confection of action with the confection of romance, and in the transition to television, soap operas quickly followed. But then, for a couple of decades, the actual potential television presented to adapt full length novels without compromise languished, in all likelihood because the simpler format of established characters in unlinked narratives was so lucrative no embellishments were required. Eventually, however, longer narratives found their way to the marketplace, first in Britain, where government funding could help offset any potential monetary disappointment from bringing the likes of Thomas Hardy and Charles Dickens to the screen without abridgement, but eventually in America, where the adaptation of really popular bestsellers demonstrated that television could deliver what the movies could not.

But if adaptations of popular novels, especially on cable and streaming, are now a regular part of the motion picture market, full length

adaptations of innovative, critically acclaimed novels are much harder to come by. Thus, what Jenkins has achieved, while not unique (**Patrick Melrose** was also a pretty gutsy creation, although it was only half as long, and of course there was **Berlin Alexanderplatz**, but so far as American productions are concerned, the greatest long form programs have all been original works), is exceptional. From securing the financing to conceiving and executing the production, his accomplishment is damned exciting.

The three of the most significant boxoffice achievements at the beginnings of modern motion pictures, **Birth of a Nation**, **The Jazz Singer** and **Gone with the Wind**, were all embarrassing interpretations of slavery and American race relations. Upending those standard perspectives, the life and condition of slavery in **Underground Railroad**—whether immediate or as a lingering consciousness—is presented as 'normal,' while those outside the world of the slave are abstract and strange, and the further away from that world and people the show ventures, the more abstract and strange it seems. Thuso Mbedu stars as a girl born into slavery whose mother runs off from the plantation in Georgia after a tragedy. The girl eventually sneaks off as well, half hoping to reunite with her mother, and journeys across the South in a zig and zag route that takes her to Indiana. Mbedu does not appear in a couple of the episodes, or 'chapters,' which shift to the stories of other characters she has come into contact with. These are not normal TV episodes, however. The entire work runs 585 minutes, but one episode lasts little more than 20 minutes and another is barely twice that length. As the story gets closer to its end, the fantasy begins to fade away—most notably, what appears at first to be part of the railroad system turns out to be a track for hauling ore out of a now abandoned mine. Despite some great storytelling devices, as an entertainment, the show is challenging, and that is why the fantasy elements are so critical to its pleasures (Guillermo del Toro tried to accomplish the same effect in **Pan's Labyrinth**), but as a pure drama it is a highly rewarding adventure, peopled with many intriguing and fully developed individuals, both in front of and behind the whip, as it were.

The power of images has been a strength in Jenkins's films throughout his career. His choices of lenses compel the viewer to feel the position of vision. It is god-like even during intimate moments. That vision is uncompromised by the miniseries format, and the cinematography is outstanding. With the Blu-ray's delivery, practically every shot is breathtaking for its beauty, whether during moments of peace or passages of horror. While he has had no call for it previously, Jenkins demonstrates an acute skill for staging action sequences and discriminate but unflinching violence. The picture alternates between being letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and 2.39:1, sometimes transitioning from the one aspect ratio to the other within the same shot. The intensity and crispness of the BD's delivery also adds to the impact of the film's imagery. The Dolby Atmos sound has a constantly involving dimensionality and an unnerving bass. There are optional English subtitles.

Each episode must be selected individually as there is no 'Play All' option, but as much as it can be rewarding to take in the show in a single day, the tone of the episodes are really intended to be absorbed with longer breaks between them. The first platter contains 26 minutes of deleted scenes (which also lack a 'Play All' option) for the entire series, which would have taken the program in the wrong direction but are still worth savoring for their individual artistry and character insights. Also featured are a collection of seven teasers for the show as a whole, which collectively run 8 minutes. Jenkins supplies another 3-minute introduction, explaining how they became sort of little works of art in themselves (particularly one where everything happens in reverse). The last platter comes with a good 4-minute promotional featurette and a lyrical 52-minute montage of characters and extras posing in costume—essentially outtakes from similar moments that appear in the show—set to a complete suite of Nicholas Britell's musical score, which is accompanied by a 6-minute introduction from Jenkins. A comic book that tells the story of how the railroad was built is included as an insert with the discs.

Finally, Jenkins supplies a commentary track for every episode and on the first platter, there is a 2-minute introduction in which he identifies the episodes in the order that he recorded the commentaries, so that you can follow his line of thought through the talks if you don't just want to follow the order of the narrative. Nevertheless, he summarizes the theme of the entire work early into his talk on the opening episode, even though it wasn't the first he recorded. "There's nothing wrong with dramatizing the lives of famous people, but it can sort of give you this impression that only the lives of famous people are worth dramatizing or worth telling, and there were so many people, so many human beings who lived life under these horrific conditions who lived lives that were full of drama, and by drama I mean who had families and who had aspirations, and likely love. They had to have had love in order for me to be sitting here telling the story."

The big disaster that happened for him was a budget crunch that occurred well into pre-production that forced him to cancel locations and supporting narratives, making what he did accomplish with what he had all the more remarkable. His earlier commentaries are a bit more rewarding than his later commentaries, although he does bring in cinematographer James Laxton and editor Joi McMillon to liven the talks up a little bit on several episodes. He still references his film school experiences, which would imply that he has a long career ahead of him, and he speaks specifically about the challenges and discoveries that occurred during shooting some of the scenes, the ideas that could not be explored after the budget trims, and the contributions of the many individuals he worked with.

Instant karma

We reviewed an excellent documentary about the Eastern forays of The Beatles, **The Beatles and India**, in Jun 22, but apparently there is plenty of material to go around, because another 2020 program, **Meeting the Beatles in India**, has been released on Blu-ray by Unobstructed View (UPC#778854-241299, \$25). Running 79 minutes, it is a terrific show for Beatles fans, and functions as a de facto supplement to the more comprehensive **Beatles and India**, focusing on the experiences of Paul Saltzman, who would later become a prominent documentary filmmaker. At the time, Saltzman was trying to find himself and looking into transcendental meditation, when he made his way to India and then to the compound where the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi was teaching, just as The Beatles and their entourage had also arrived. He stayed a week and was accepted in the same way that personable people socializing at a resort accept strangers in their midst for the length of the stay. The film begins with voiceover narration by Morgan Freeman (who had worked with Saltzman on other projects), but that falls by the wayside as it pretty much becomes Saltzman telling his own story about that week (which he recalls vividly) and about the benefits of meditation. Some of his stories are illustrated with drawings, while others are accompanied by his photos and archival footage. Since Saltzman also took a mouthwatering array of valuable snapshots, there are also visits to museums where the photos are on display, both in Liverpool and India, and, for the film, he revisits the compound with a Beatles authority in tow. Additionally, there is a terrific interview with David Lynch (who served as one of the film's producers) talking about meditation, as well as with the late Lewis Lapham (who had been assigned as a writer to get the story of what the Beatles were up to in India), Laurence Rosenthal, who marvels as the compositional breadth displayed by the band, and the hunter turned wildlife photographer, Richard Cooke, who was the inspiration for the song, *The Continuing Story of Bungalow Bill* ("What did it feel like to hear the song the first time?" "Well, it's kind of a catchy tune."). Don't worry. Although there is quite a bit of material about meditating in the program, it is never intrusive or annoying, and serves primarily as the key to understanding Saltzman, and through his eyes, the individuals he saw and the ways that life has since unfolded.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1, and the color transfer has a crisp immediacy. There is a lovely 5.1-channel DTS track using mostly Indian-themed music to accompany the tale. There is no captioning. Along with a trailer, there is an additional 58 minutes of material not used in the film, including clips of a concert with Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr that actually has their music playing (nothing like that occurs in the film), more of Lynch, and a lot more about transcendentalism. And one question we've never seen asked or answered—since Mike Love was in the entourage, did he have any input on *Back to the USSR*?

That Bergman box from Criterion

If we were to publish our entire review of The Criterion Collection's **Ingmar Bergman's Cinema** (UPC#715515221917, \$300), it would run a full ten pages and we wouldn't have any room for any other reviews, so we have chosen instead to publish the review for free on our Substack page (<https://dvd-laserdisc.substack.com/p/the-dvd-laser-disc-newsletter-special>) and have also made it available for free as a PDF file for download, which can be requested by writing Bergman Review at DVDLaser@rocketmail.com. If you have no access to a computer and want a hard copy, we unfortunately have to charge \$15 to cover our expenses (\$20 outside of the U.S.). Please write to Bergman Review %The DVD-Laser Disc Newsletter, PO Box 382, Glen Cove NY 11542, and include a check or credit card details. The review also includes reviews of the freestanding Criterion Blu-rays of Bergman films that we had yet to review in the newsletter, **Scenes from a Marriage** (UPC#715515220118, \$50), **Shame** (UPC#71551522-6219, \$40), **A Film Trilogy by Ingmar Bergman—Through a Glass Darkly • Winter Light • The Silence** (UPC#715515230612, \$100), **The Virgin Spring** (UPC#715515217811, \$40), **Sawdust and Tinsel** (UPC#71-5515224215, \$40), **The Magician** (UPC#715515063913, \$40), **The Magic Flute** (UPC#715515227216, \$40), **Persona** (UPC#715515113410, \$40), **Cries and Whispers** (UPC#715515142113, \$40), **Autumn Sonata** (UPC#715515110015, \$40) and **Fanny & Alexander** (UPC#715515088718, \$60). Additionally, we review the only major Bergman film not included in Criterion's set, the Olive Films DVD release of **Face to Face** (UPC#88-7090024402, \$30). The reviews have also been incorporated in our PDF format compilation book available on CD-ROM, *DVDs*, for \$24.95 plus \$4 shipping (\$15 outside of the U.S.). Write to DVDs, The DVD-Laser Disc Newsletter, PO Box 382, Glen Cove NY 11542.

DVD News

CRITERION CORNER: The Criterion Collection will be releasing a pair of wonderful Val Lewton features in 4K, **I Walked with a Zombie/The Seventh Victim**, with a commentary on *I Walked with a Zombie* featuring authors Kim Newman and Stephen Jones; a commentary on *The Seventh Victim* featuring film historian Steve Haberman; an interview with film critic and historian Imogen Sara Smith; audio essays from Adam Roche's podcast *The Secret History of Hollywood*; and *Shadows in the Dark: The Val Lewton Legacy* (2005), a documentary featuring Newman, Val E. Lewton, son of producer Val Lewton, William Friedkin, Guillermo del Toro, George A. Romero, John Landis, and Robert Wise, author Neil Gaiman, Sara Karloff; and others. Masahiro Shinoda's **Demon Pond** will be in 4K and will have an

interview with film scholar Dudley Andrew. G.W. Pabst's **Pandora's Box** will include a commentary by film scholars Thomas Elsaesser and Mary Ann Doane; *Louise Brooks: Looking for Lulu* (1998), a documentary by Hugh Munro Neeley; *Lulu in Berlin* (1971), an interview with Brooks, by Richard Leacock and Susan Steinberg Woll; and interviews with Leacock and Michael Pabst, G. W. Pabst's son. Harmony Korine's **Gummo** will be in 4K and will feature an interview with Korine; a conversation from 1997 between Korine and Werner Herzog; and a *Projections* episode from 2000 featuring Korine in conversation with *Split Screen* host John Pierson.

NEW IN BLU: The following titles were recently issued in Blu-ray—Mind Melters 48, Mind Melters 49, Mind Melters 50 (Acid Bath); Beautiful Accident, The Devotion of Suspect X, Purple Pie Place, A Stranger in the Woods (Bayview); The Debt Collector, Girl's Night Out, Don't Show Mother, The Last of the Pretty Boys, Lucifer's Satanic Daughter, The Men in Black, Rainbow Video, Water Horse (Bounty); The First Omen (Buena Vista); Children As Giants, Derelict, Judge Not, Tapewormz, 21 Miles (Burning Bulb); Roadkill (Canadian); Off Balance (Cauldron); Criminally Insane/Satan's Black Wedding, Fata Morgana, Ostermontag, Sex Apocalypse (CAV); Ali G Indahouse The Movie; The Boy and the Heron, Storytelling, Who's That Girl (Cinedigm); With Love and a Major Organ (Circle); Farewell Scarlet (Command); Anselm, Black God White Devil, Farewell My Concubine, Perfect Days, Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid, Risky Business (Criterion); Ezra, Stress Positions, William Shatner You Can Call Me Bill (Decal); The Ripper (Degausser); Tramps (Dekanalogy); Humanist Vampire Seeking Consenting Suicidal Person, The World of Kanako (Drafthouse); The Arrested Development Documentary Project (ETR); The Plot against Harry (Film Desk); Kamikaze '89, Shanghai Triad, Six in Paris (Film Movement); Attack of the Giant Leeches/Night of the Blood Beast, First Spaceship on Venus (Gemini); Gueule D'Amour (Grasshopper); Along Came the Devil, Along Came the Devil II, Altitude Not Attitude, Ana, Arena Wars, Attack of the Unknown, Autumn Road, Baloney, Between Me and My Mind, Beyond Impossible, Beyond Sixty, Beyond Weight Loss, A Bitter Legacy, Bitter Melon, Blackjack The Jackie Ryan Story, Bobbi Jo Under the Influence, Boys vs. Girls, Bullied, Christmas on Holly Lane, Clean, Conversion, Death Trip, Defining Us, Drugs As Weapons against Us, Ellie and Abbie, End of Sentence, Enemy Within, Exposure, 5 Years Apart, From Hell to Hollywood, Funny Face, Geoff McFetridge Drawing a Life, General Magic, Getaway, Giddy Stratospheres, Girl Next, Going Om, Good Thief, Haymaker, Hell Trip, Insight, Jasper Mall, Joe Crist, Kitty Mammias, Loopers The Caddie's Long Walk, Making Apes, Meltedown, Mission Control, Moments in Spacetime, Monster, Mustang Saviors, Odd Man Rush, The Practice (Gravitas); Arcadian (Image); Beijing Watermelon (Kani); Brokeback Mountain, Bwana Devil, Cannibal Apocalypse, Can't Stop the Music, Carmen, The Cocaine Fiends/The Pace That Kills, Columbo The Return, Come Back Little Sheba, The Country Girl, An Elephant Sitting Still, Girl on the Bridge, The Hairdresser's Husband, In & Out, Kidnapped The Abduction of Edgardo Mortara, Monk Season 8, Nightmare Beach, No Way Out, Paternity, The Rose Tattoo, Turbulence, Twisted, Underground Aces, When Eight Bells Toll, Yvonne's Perfume (Kino); Aankhen, Abhimaan, Ajab Prem Ki Ghazab Khani, Amma Ki Boli, Two Sisters (Leomark); Boy Kills World, Civil War, Unsung Hero (Lionsgate); Food Inc. 2 (Magnolia); Rat Film (Memory); Icons Unearthed The Simpsons, Once Again/Evening, Ultraman Taiga Complete Series (Mill Creek); Bottom Feeders, Mister Lonely (MPI); Ennio (Music Box); Abbott & Costello in Jack and the Beanstalk, Confessions of a Serial Killer, The Crippled Masters, Crocodile, Danza Macabra V.3 The Spanish Gothic Collection, The Double Crossers, Eighteen Years in Prison, The Inspector Wears Skirts 3, The Inspector Wears Skirts 4, It's Love Again, Kentucky Rifle, The Linguini Incident, The Man from U.N.C.L.E., The Nico Mastorakis Collection, Red Line 7000, Sherlock Holmes, Sherlock Holmes and the Deadly Necklace, Street Scene, Tchao Pantin, Titanic The Musical, Under Western Stars (MVD); The Boy in the Striped Pajamas, Halo Season 2, Paycheck, The Ruins, The Tuxedo (Paramount); Deer Camp '86 (Pinnacle Peak); Untouched (Powerhouse); Il Tempo Del Sogno Dream Time (Rustblade); David the Rock Nelson Collection V.1 (Saturn's Core); The Lady from Shanghai, Tarot (Sony); Butchered, Deadly Culture Species X, Deadly Culture The Final Mutation, Maniacal, Zombie Chronicle Infection Zone, Zombie Chronicles Regeneration (Sterling); Lilies (Strand); Dimland, Emma under the Influence (Syndicado); The Craving (Undercrank); Abigail, Back to Black, The Fall Guy, Housekeeping for Beginners (Universal); The Sweet East (Utopia); The Abraham Accords, Challengers, Doctor Who Tom Baker Complete Season 4, Harum Scarum, Idiot's Delight, Justice League Crisis on Infinite Earths Part 3, Marie A True Story, Northwest Passage, Scooby-Doo and the Witch's Ghost/Scooby-Doo and the Alien Invaders, The Stars Fall on Henrietta, Supernatural Complete Series, Ted Lasso The Richmond Way, True Detective Season 4 Night Country, War of the Buttons (Warner); Again (Warp); Alienoid Return to the Future, The Last Stop in Yuma County, Sting (Well Go); Journey from the Fall (Whole Grain); Feed Me (XYZ); To the Moon (Yellow Veil)

NEW IN 3K: The following titles were recently released in 3D—Anselm (Criterion); Bwana Devil (Kino)

NEW IN 4K: The following titles were recently released in 4K format—The Sadness (AMD); Invasion U.S.A. (CAV); The Boy and the Heron, Dark Angel, House of Gucci, Natural Born Killers, Phantoms, Point Break, UHF, Weird The Al Yankovic Story (Cinedigm); Farewell My Concubine, Le Samourai, Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid, Perfect Days, Risky Business (Criterion); Blown Away, Cannibal Apocalypse, Can't Stop the Music, In & Out, Narrow Margin, Nightmare Beach, No Way Out, Turbulence (Kino); Boy Kills World, Civil War, The Strangers Chapter 1 (Lionsgate); Ghoules II, The Man from U.N.C.L.E. (MVD); Brokeback Mountain, Invasion of the Body Snatchers (Kino); Election, Halo Season 2, The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie (Paramount); Captain Phillips, Run Lola Run, Taxi Driver (Sony); Anchorman The Legend of Ron Burgundy, The Fall Guy, Jaws 3, Jaws The Revenge (Universal); Justice League Crisis on Infinite Earths Part 3, Rocky Ultimate Knockout Collection, Twister (Warner)

An index to the reviews contained in this issue

BDs (Alice in den Städten) p4, American Fiction p1, The American Friend p4, Anselm 3D p4, The Apu Trilogy Pather Panchali Aparajito Apur Sansar 4K p6, (Armored Attack!) p8, Autumn Sonata p11, Bandits of Orgosolo p3, (Beware, My Lovely) p7, The Boys in the Boat p2, Cries and Whispers p11, (Dark City) p6, Eighteen Years in Prison p3, El Rebozo de Soledad aka Soledad's Shawl p5, Fanny & Alexander p11, (Enter Arsene Lupin) p7, (Falsche Bewegung) p5, Film Noir The Dark Side of Cinema Volume VIII p7, Film Noir The Dark Side of Cinema Volume XIX p6, A Film Trilogy by Ingmar Bergman—Through a Glass Darkly • Winter Light • The Silence p11, The Guyver 4K p9, The Hour before the Dawn p8, Ingmar Bergman's Cinema p11, (Kings of the Road) p5, Le Samourai 4K p3, The Magic Flute p11, The Magician p11, The Man from U.N.C.L.E. 4K p2, Meeting the Beatles in India p11, Mr. & Mrs. Smith p2, (No Man of Her Own) p6, The North Star / Armored Attack! p8, Perfect Days 4K p4, Persona p11, (Purple Rain) p3, Poor Things p1, Prince Purple Rain 4K p3, Saigon p7, Sawdust and Tinsel p11, Scenes from a Marriage p11, The Shining Hour p8, (The Silence) p11, (Soledad's Shawl) p5, (Street of Chance) p7, Tchao Pantin p6, (Temptation) p7, (Through a Glass Darkly) p11, Under Western Stars p9, The Underground Railroad p10, (Victimos del Pecado) p5, Victims of Sin p5, The Virgin Spring p11, Wim Wenders — The Road Trilogy p4, (Winter Light) p11, (Wrong Move) p5, DVDs, Darkness of Man p9, El Hombre Bestia p9, Face to Face p11, Hangman's House p 8, The Holdovers p1, Inside Man p10, 20 Days in Mariupol p1, We Have Always Lived in the Castle p9, Air Force The Movie, Selagi Beryawa, Tethered, Return to Harwick, Queens of Pain, Rehab Cabin, It's a Good Day to Die, The Accursed, Orders from Above, Population Purge, The Mouse Trap, Snapshots, On These Grounds, Hard Miles, Gassed Up, Breaking Glass, The Train, Buena Vista, Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes, Burning Bulb, Insect, Cheng Cheng, July Rhapsody, Cinedigm, Shifting Gears / A Taste of Love, An American in Austen / Rip in Time / Love Strikes Twice, Dragonkeeper, Blind Date Book Club / Lifelong Love, The Secrets of Bella Vista / Mystery Island, Cinema Libre, I Am Gitmo, Criterion, Not a Pretty Picture, Brief Encounters / The Long Farewell: Two Films by Kira Muratova, Walked with a Zombie / The Seventh Victim, Demon Pond, Totem, Dark Arts, Terror Firma, Decal, Babes, Deskkop, Murder Motel, The Crossroads, Crossscape, Dare to Be Me, The Luckiest Man, Olympians at Heart, Super Detention, What's the Big Deal?, Darwin & Newtons Season 1, Darwin & Newtons Season 2, Into the Cosmos, The Love Destination, Courses Forgiveness Meditations, The Love Destination, Courses Inner Child Meditations, The Love Destination, Courses Morning Meditations, Yoyo Season 1, Yoyo Season 2, Film Movement, Before, Now & Then, Marguerite's Theorem, Freestyle, 500 Days of Silence, The Highest Brass, This Must Be the Place, Surprise!, Full Moon, The Gingerdead Man, Sci-Fi Vixens from Beyond, The Primevals, Doll Graveyard, Gemini, El Hombre Bestia, Grasshopper, Pictures of Ghosts, Gravitas, Elsabeth Season 1, Pompeii The New Dig, The In Between, CSI Vegas The Final Season, Reacher Season 2, PBS Kids Four Seasons of Fun, Peak5, Scuba, Pure Flix, God's Not Dead, Random, Part-Time Killer, Rising Sun, Father of Lies, Decrypted, Heretic, Sinema, Groper Train Wedding Capriccio, End of Term, Samuel Goldwyn, Something in the Water, Sandpiper, The Hound of the Baskervilles (Cushing), Moby Dick, Marat/Sade, Lady in White, Saving Grace, Blame it on Rio, Clive Barker's Lord of Illusions, From Sony, The Garfield Movie, SR5, Chum, Ring Shark, Yuzo The Biggest Battle in Tokyo, Strand, Songs of Earth, Someday We'll Tell Each Other Everything, Rhinegold, Tribeca, In Her Name, The Big Ask, Universal, Monsters of California, Blacklight / Memory / The Marksman, The Bikeriders, Chucky Season 3, Vertical, Prey, House of Dolls, Warner, Beyond Paradise Season 2, Blue Lights Season 2, Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga, Mammals, A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy, September, Silent Witness Season 27, Sister Boniface Mysteries Season 3, Super Friends Complete Series (9 platters), Valkyrie, Vikings Valhalla Season 1, The Watchers, Young Sheldon Complete Series, Wild Eye, Ikenie Man, Harawata Man, Wonderscape, History Kids The Founding Fathers, History Kids Major Battles of the Civil War, Wownow, Johnny Puff Secret Mission

Current Attractions

The following titles recently appeared for the first time: Abigail (Universal), The Abraham Accords (Warner), The Adventures of Mickey Sherlock Mouse and Winnie the Pooh (DragonFlix)*, Africa's Deadly Kingdom Bushveld (Dreamscape), Africa's Deadly Kingdom Coastlines (Dreamscape), Africa's Deadly Kingdom Deserts (Dreamscape), Africa's Deadly Kingdom Grass Plains (Dreamscape), Africa's Deadly Kingdom Kalahari (Dreamscape), Africa's Deadly Kingdom Reefs (Dreamscape), Age Out (Gravitas)*, Alienoid Return to the Future (Well Go), All Eyes (Gravitas)*, All Your Faces (Film Movement) Alone (Electric), Along Came the Devil (Gravitas), Along Came the Devil II (Gravitas), Altitude Not Attitude (Gravitas), America's Most Deadly Police Chases (360), Ancient Astronauts II (360), Ancient Mysteries (360), Ancient Symbols 2 (360), Animalia (MPI)*, Anselm (Criterion), Arcadian (Image), Arena Wars (Gravitas)*, Attack of the Unknown (Gravitas)*, Automata The First A.I. (360), Autumn Road (Gravitas), Baba Yaga (DragonFlix)*, Back to Black (Universal)*, Backfield in Motion (Dreamscape), Beautiful Prison (Dreamscape), Behind the Trees (TLA)*, Beneath the Green (Gravitas), Bigfoot Exorcist (Wild Eye), A Bitter Legacy (Gravitas), Bitter Melon (Gravitas), Black God White Devil (Criterion), Blue Lights Season 1 (Warner), The Blues Society (Freestyle)*, Born Again George Whitefield (Vision)*, Boy Kills World (Lionsgate), Boys vs. Girls (Gravitas), A Brief History of the Future (Paramount), Bubbly Beautiful Kitty-Corn (Dreamscape), The Buddy Cop (Deskkop), Bumbling Ballerina (Bridgestone), Catching Fire The Story of Anita Pallenberg (Magnolia), A Cat's Life (Breaking Glass), Challengers (Warner), Children As Giants (Burning Bulb), Christmas on Holly Lane (Gravitas), Chucky Season 3 (Universal), Civil Christmas (Bridgestone), Civil War (Lionsgate), Clinton Road (Dreamscape), Close the Divide (House Lights), Confessions of a Serial Killer (MVD), Conversion (Gravitas), Countdown to Christmas 4—Movie Collection (Cinedigm)*, The Craving (Undercrank), The Crippled Masters (MVD), D.I. Ray Season Two (Warner)*, Danny McGinlay Season 1 (Bounty)*, Deadly Justice (Level 33), Death on the Border (VMI)*, The Debt Collector (Bounty), Deer Camp '86 (Mill Creek), The Deliverance of Amy Stronghold (Vision)*, Derelict (Burning Bulb), Dimland (Gravitas), The Doldrums (Random), Don't Show Mother (Bounty), Drugs As Weapons against Us (Gravitas), Dynamic Planet (Paramount), East Bay (Level 33), Eddie (Random), The Egyptian Origins of Christianity (360), El Rebozo de Soledad (MVD), Ellie and Abbie (Gravitas)*, Enemy Within (Gravitas)*, Exhibit #8 (Gravitas)*, Exposing Mybridge (Gravitas)*, Exposure (Gravitas), Ezra (Decal), The Face on Mars (360), Fast Charlie (Vertical), The Fence (Freestyle)*, A Fireman for Christmas (Bridgestone), The First Omen (Buena Vista)*, Food, Inc. (Magnolia), Forest Fairies (Dreamscape), Forgotten Mysteries of the 19th Century (360), Frenchy Ruthless (Bounty)*, From Hell to Hollywood (Gravitas)*, The Frontrooms (SRS), Funny Face (Gravitas)*, General Magic (Gravitas)*, Geoff McEfridge Drawing a Life (Gravitas), Giddy Stratospheres (Gravitas), Gift of Fear (Random), Girl Next (Gravitas)*, Girls' Night Out (Bounty), Gladesman The Last of the Sawgrass Cowboys (Gravitas), The Good Place Complete Series (Cinedigm), Good Thief (Gravitas)*, Grantchester Season 9 (Paramount), Great American Eclipse (Paramount), Great Mysteries of Tutankhamun (360), Greatest Mysteries of Ancient Egypt (360), Green City Life (Indican), Grief Share (Vision)*, Grizzly 399 Queen of the Tetons (Paramount), Gueule D'Amour (Grasshopper), HAB Theory Destruction on a Periodic Basis (360), Halo Season 2 (Paramount), History Kids The Electoral College How the U.S. Presidency Is Won (Wonderscape), Holiday Road / Heaven Down Here (Cinedigm), How to Break a World Record (Freestyle)*, The Hyperborean (Freestyle)*, Hyperink (Freestyle)*, I Don't Know Who You Are (MPI)*, Ice Age History & Future (360), iGilbert (Gravitas)*, Innovators of Black History V.1 (360), The Insanity of God (Vision)*, It's Love Again (MVD)*, Jeff Green Live! An Englishman in Australia (Bounty)*, Joe Crist (Indie Rights)*, Journey of Jesus Christ with Kevin Sorbo (Vision)*, Judge Not (Burning Bulb), Kentucky Rifle (MVD), Kidnapped (The Abduction of Edgardo Mortara (Kino), Kids Safari V.7 (Dreamscape), Kids Safari V.8 (Dreamscape), Kids Safari V.9 (Dreamscape), Kids Safari V.10 (Dreamscape), Kids Safari V.11 (Dreamscape), Kids Safari V.12 (Dreamscape), Kids Safari V.13 (Dreamscape), Kids Safari V.14 (Dreamscape), Kids Safari V.15 (Dreamscape), Kids Safari V.16 (Dreamscape), Kindred (Indiepix), The Lake of Scars (Random), The Last of the Pretty Boys (Bounty), Letters to Stephanie (Vision)*, The Linguini Incident (MVD), Loopers The Caddie's Long Walk (Gravitas)*, Love & Jane / Paging Mr. Darcy (Cinedigm), Love of Course (Cinedigm), Lucifer's Satanic Daughter (Bounty), Mahogany Sense and Sensibility (Cinedigm)*, Make a Wish (Freestyle)*, Making Apes (Gravitas)*, The Marias (Leomark), The Mark of the Hawk (MVD)*, The Men in Black (Bounty), Mind Melters 48 (Acid Bath), Mind Melters 49 (Acid Bath), Mind Melters 50 (Acid Bath), Minnesota Mean (Freestyle)*, Mission Control (Gravitas)*, Mobutu's African Movie Theater Episode 9 (Movie Time), A Moment in History (Dreamscape), Moments in Spacetime (Gravitas)*, Mother of All Shows (Gravitas)*, Mount Hideaway Mysteries Exes and Oh No's (Dreamscape), Nanoshark (SRS), Necronomicon (DragonFlix)*, Nick Capper Pork Palace (Bounty)*, Not Another Church Movie (Universal), Now Hear This Season 5 (Paramount), Once upon a Time in Hollywood (DragonFlix), Paternity (Kino), Patrice Leconte Collection (Kino), Paul and Trisha The Art of Fluidity (Gravitas)*, PBS Kids Get Creative (Paramount), Perfect Days (Criterion), Perfect Harmony / Mid-Love Crisis (Cinedigm), Ponsitters Club Fun at the Fair (Dreamscape), Ponsitters Club The Big Sleepover (Dreamscape), The Practice (Gravitas)*, The Preacher to the Popes (Vision)*, The Process (Freestyle)*, Professor T Season 3 (Paramount), Quensdom (Kino), Race to the Red Planet (Dreamscape), Rainbow Video (Bounty)*, Rendel Cycle of Revenge (Cinedigm), Revival 69 The Concert That Rocked the World (Kino), Roots of Comedy with Jesus Trejo (Paramount), So Help Me Todd Season 1 (Paramount)*, Social Studies Kids Freedom of Speech and the Right to Protest (Wonderscape), Spice Here A Projected Odyssey (Gravitas), Spring in Petare (Leomark), Stephen King's A Good Marriage (Giant), Sling (Well Go), The Story of the Twelve Apostles (Vision)*, Street Scene (MVD)*, Stress Positions (Decal), Super Science Showcase The Movie (Dreamscape), Taking Venice (Kino), Tapewormz (Burning Bulb)*, Tarot (Sony), TC Stalling The Story behind the Run (Vision)*, Ted Lasso: The Richmond Way (Warner), This Is Me (Gravitas)*, Tiger Stripes (MPI)*, Titanic The Musical (MVD), Torchlighters The William Carey Story (Vision)*, True Detective Night Country (Warner), Trump's Rosebud (Dreamscape), 21 Miles (Burning Bulb)*, Twisters The Real Story (Amcom), Two Sisters (Leomark), Under Paradise (Kino), Under Western Stars (MVD), Unit One Complete Series (Kino), Unsung Hero (Lionsgate), War on Terror KL Anarki (Gravitas)*, Water Horse (Bounty), The Way We Speak (Gravitas)*, The Whale God (SRS), William Kelly's War (Dreamscape), William Shatner You Can Call Me Bill (Decal), Workplace Drama (Hidden Gem), The World of Kanako (Drafthouse), *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: → Acid Bath: → Sexy Time 9, → Sexy Time 10, → Breast Friends Club 2, → Catch of the Day, → Glitch Ditch, → Glitch Ditch 2, → From AMD: → The Madame Blanc Mysteries Season 3, → The Walking Dead The Ones Who Live Season 1, → The Brokenwood Mysteries Season 10, → From BMG: → Grace of the Father, → Something Good Coming, → Rally Caps, → From Bounty: