



QUEUED UP

BY BRYAN REESMAN

ALLEGIANT (2016)

The set up: In the third part of the *Divergent* trilogy, Tris, her brother Caleb, Four, Christina, and the ever scheming Peter escape walled in Chicago to discover a hidden high tech city outside that reveals a broader world than they knew existed. But the questionable machinations of the seemingly patriarchal David (Jeff Daniels) and his total control over Chicago leads to difficult choices for Tris, whose previously disparaged "divergent" status is now an

asset. But to whom and to what end?

The breakdown: The *Divergent* series generally works better than the solid *Hunger Games* franchise because it feels a little less like a video game and more like a human drama. It's more *Star Trek* than *Star Wars*, and a lot of the cerebral jousting gives it a little extra flair. To that end, *Allegiant* is certainly a fun ride. But the unusual ending almost makes it feel like the



series has concluded even though the last book of the series is predictably being dissected into two movies. Let's hope they can wrap it up in grand fashion and not drag it out unnecessarily.

BATMAN v SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE Ultimate Edition (2016)

The set up: Following the massive destruction of Metropolis in the wake of Superman and General Zod's epic battle in *Man Of Steel*, an obsessed Bruce Wayne/Batman (Ben Affleck) vows to bring down Superman (Henry Cavill), as does a young, psychotic Lex Luthor (Jesse Eisenberg). Oh yeah, Wonder Woman (Gal Gadot) shows up to join the big rumble with Doomsday in the third act.

features plenty of impressive fight sequences, and the Wonder Woman theme music is pretty awesome, but even with the expanded three-hour cut one cannot help notice how Zack Snyder's film is overstuffed with plot points, DC franchise nods, and high powered fights but undernourished in the character department. (It's still hard to buy Supes and Lois Lane together.) There are emotive moments that work, but there's too much dazzle and not enough restraint. And a



little more light in the darkness would have helped. This is for fanboys and fangirls only.

The breakdown: This hot mess

RAY HARRYHAUSEN: SPECIAL EFFECTS TITAN (2011)

The set up: Gilles Pensos' loving homage to the grandfather of Stop Motion animation and effects will serve as a nostalgic flashback for fans who know Harryhausen and a well-done chronological history lesson for younger cinema buffs who lack context for the man or his profound influence. Plenty of interviewees attest to being his devoted disciples—James Cameron, Peter Jackson, Guillermo del Toro, and Steven Spielberg among them.

The breakdown: Between the 97-minute film as well as bonus interviews, panel discussions, and an exploration of his personal archives, Ray Harryhausen gets his due here. Even if you find his work quaint by today's digital standards, it is obvious that the man pioneered techniques that impacted state of the art CGI (right down to specific scenes), and usually with more passion and personal touches. Even if you never end up watching one entire film that he worked on,



this is still essential viewing for anyone who is a student of sci-fi and fantasy cinema. Unleash the Kraken!

FANTASTIC PLANET (1973)

The set up: On the planet Ygam, giant blue aliens called Draags keep tiny Oms (humans) as pets or treat them as insects to be exterminated. But when the enslaved Terr, empowered by knowledge of Draag culture, escapes and bands with untamed Oms, he sows the seeds of a revolution.

Topor crafted a wonderfully imaginative and subversive film that still captivates today. While it does not offer the flashy animation of modern films, that aspect works in its favor. The distinct psychedelic imagery and music make it feel like a darker cousin to The Beatles' *Yellow Submarine*, although its equally timeless message is far less idealistic. The numerous bonus features, including vintage



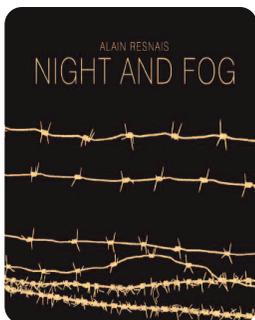
Topor interviews and a foldout poster with liner notes on the back, are wonderful.

The breakdown: Director René Laloux and illustrator Roland

NIGHT AND FOG (1955)

The set up: Years before he made the famous arthouse film *Last Year At Marienbad*, director Alain Resnais worked on this grizzly half-hour documentary juxtaposing color images of German concentration camps a decade after WWII with actual black and white Nazi footage capturing the horrifying Holocaust atrocities of the Third Reich. The last ten minutes are not for the faint of heart and serve as a grim reminder that we should never ignore any genocides.

The breakdown: I recall seeing this while attending NYU, with many students outraged that we were not warned about the horrors that we would be subjected to on screen. Our professor argued credibly that if we had been, would we ever face them? The bonus materials on this Criterion edition, which include an interview excerpt with Resnais and a feature length 2009 documentary about the Holocaust and the impact on and of Resnais' film, reveal how



the French government had long whitewashed their complicity in the Nazi agenda. It's a sobering reminder of how Fascism spreads when it goes unchecked.

THE DUNGEONMASTER and ELIMINATORS (1984-6)

Ah, the '80s straight-to-video revolution. Good, cheesy times, and revisiting them can be a hoot. These two low budget productions from Charles Band's now defunct Empire Pictures actually had some interesting ideas but not enough funds to execute them very well. In *The Dungeonmaster*, a programming nerd is sucked into his computer and turned into a warrior fighting the evil Mestema (aka Satan, played amusingly by *Night Court*'s Richard Moll) for the life of his girlfriend. Seven writer-directors cranked out different sci-fi and

fantasy vignettes in which our hero is tested by the Devil. One of those directors, Peter Manoogian, went on to direct *Eliminators*, a tale of a downed pilot turned Mandroid who seeks revenge against his malevolent creator (who has been perfecting time travel) with the help of a second rate riverboat guide (Andrew Prine), a martial artist (Conan Lee), a flying robot named SPOT, and the military engineer (Denise Crosby) whose technology was perverted for ill use. I'll cut to the chase: the best thing about *The Dungeonmaster* is the



inspired performance cameo by shock rockers W.A.S.P., while the spunky Crosby (the future Tasha Yar on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*) enlivens *Eliminators*. Neither is a good movie, but this two-movie set will likely warm the cockles of the hearts of the '80s video brats who loved them anyway. Newbies need not apply.

I AM THOR (2015)

Back in the '80s, bodybuilder turned hard rocker Jon Miki Thor led the band bearing his last name through a career dogged by drama, soured deals, and short-lived success in his Canadian homeland and England. In 1997, ten years

after retiring from music, he set about on a comeback for a career that barely was, and in 2012 finally landed a few European festival dates that proved some people indeed relished what he did. Featuring footage shot over those fateful

15 years, along with great archival material from the '70s and '80s, *I Am Thor* paints a rather sad portrait heavy on self-delusion and light on genuine gravitas. The similar Anvil music doc was boosted by the fact that those Canadian

headbangers actually had brief but legit international influence at that time. Here, it's hard to take someone seriously who compares his lyrics for "S**t The Pants" to the work of Bob Dylan (of whom I am not even a fan). That said, the increasingly

medicated and bloated Thor is somewhat engaging despite his weirdness, and you may find yourself diving into his vintage '80s tunes, which, while not very original, were pretty damn catchy. I guess that's the real point here.



Netflix Fix: