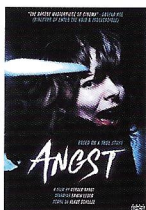


Eclipse line, this set is warmly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Angst ★★★

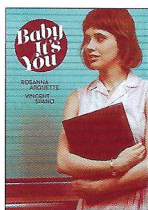
Cult Epics, 87 min., in German & French w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$34.95



Even after 30-plus years, the graphic violence of Gerald Kargl's 1983 fact-based tale of an Austrian serial killer who butchers a family remains stomach-churning—made even more unsettling because the quality of the filmmaking is so high. Kargl based his script on a crime committed by Werner Kniesek, who after serving a seven-year prison sentence for shooting an elderly woman then went on to murder a widow, her son, and her daughter, and was arrested with the bodies still in the trunk of the family's stolen car. The story is told from the perspective of the killer, played to jittery perfection by Erwin Leder, who narrates the appalling events in horrifying voiceover. Zbigniew Rybczynski's carefully crafted camerawork, which combines odd angles with more conventional shots, and Klaus Schulze's tense, brooding score add immeasurably to the creepy effect. But what will still shock most viewers is that Kargl holds nothing back while portraying the carnage: the murderer's brutalization of his victims and his mad ecstasy are gruesome even by the most extreme contemporary standards. So, it's not surprising that *Angst* was effectively censored off the screen in the 1980s, becoming one of the most notorious unseen films of its day, and it remains a rarity even among cult film aficionados. Sporting a new HD transfer, this release confirms *Angst's* status as a work that straddles the boundary between gross-out slasher movie and cutting-edge art film. Extras include audio commentary by Kargl, an introduction by filmmaker Gasper Noé, cast and crew interviews, and a booklet. With appropriate warnings about content, this is recommended. (F. Swietek)

Baby It's You ★★★1/2

Olive, 105 min., R, DVD: \$24.95, Blu-ray: \$29.95



Baby It's You is an anomaly in the career of iconoclastic filmmaker John Sayles, being both a period youth drama and the only film for which he didn't have final cut. To his credit, it remains a strikingly original piece of work, even within the confines of a familiar genre. The story is set in Trenton, NJ, in the 1960s. Instead of a starry-eyed high school romance, the central relationship is all wrong right from the start. Jill (Rosanna Arquette), a high achiever, deflects the entreaties of the self-proclaimed "Sheik" (Vincent Spano), a perpetual truant, before finally giving in to

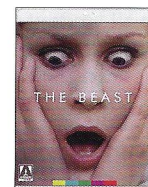
a combination of interest and attraction. Her friends are curious, her parents are worried, and her teachers are appalled, but Jill has a mind—and heart—of her own. The gulf between her middle-class Jewish background and his working-class Italian one could be bridged if the Sheik had any intellectual aspirations, but he unfortunately does not. While Jill plans to attend college to study theater, the Sheik (who worships Frank Sinatra) hopes to become a lounge singer. The Sheik doesn't have a car, so he borrows a friend's customized Ratmobile for dates—a vehicle that will eventually become a getaway car. Sayles follows the course of the couple's on-and-off-again relationship through high school and beyond, with Tracy Pollan and Matthew Modine costarring as fellow collegians. It's no surprise that things don't last, but Sayles skillfully demonstrates how two mismatched people could still have such a profound effect on each other. This edition nicely restores the Bruce Springsteen songs missing from some other versions. Highly recommended. (K. Fennessy)

The Beast ★★1/2

Arrow, 98 min., in French w/English subtitles, not rated, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.95

Walerian Borowczyk's notorious 1975 erotic fantasy revision of *Beauty and the Beast*

began life as a short film in the director's 1974 anthology film *Immoral Tales*, but was more of a sketch than a fleshed-out story about a countess and a bear-like beast that has an insatiable sexual appetite. The Polish filmmaker wound up dropping the short from *Immoral Tales* and expanded it into *The Beast*, which tells the tale of an American heiress (Lisbeth Hummel) who arrives at the crumbling French estate of her betrothed, where she is overcome by visions/sexual fantasies concerning a countess (Sirpa Lane) who once lived in the manor and cavorted with a wild beast that prowled the estate. Borowczyk earned a cult following with his erotic fantasy and horror films, straddling art cinema and exploitation, and *The Beast* is one of his most explicit, filmed with an elegance that lends some measure of grace to a truly perverse dream play of primal urges and corrupt aristocrats (while making literal the implied sexual tension buried in so many fairy tales). The countess, a willing partner of the weird, hairy beast (an actor in a rather ratty ape suit), runs naked through the woods, arouses the creature (Borowczyk repeatedly cuts to close-ups of its erect member, a special effects monstrosity), and indulges



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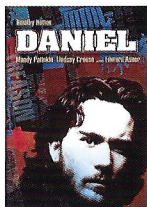
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in all kinds of sex. Featuring explicit nudity, masturbation, and animal copulation, this would certainly be considered pornographic in some communities. Handsomely mastered from a new restoration, extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes, interviews, bonus short films, and an introduction by film critic Peter Bradshaw. A strong optional purchase for more adventurous collections. (S. Axmayer)

Daniel ★★★

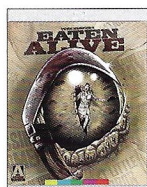
Olive, 130 min., R, DVD: \$19.95, Blu-ray: \$29.95



E.L. Doctorow adapted his 1971 novel *The Book of Daniel* for this handsomely mounted drama directed by Sidney Lumet. Inspired by the real-life case of executed atomic spies Julius and Ethel Rosenberg (and the lives of their children), the complicated, melancholy, slow-burn story didn't connect with Reagan-era audiences when it was initially released in 1983. Timothy Hutton stars as Daniel Isaacson, a graduate student during the Vietnam War whose mother and father (Mandy Patinkin, Lindsay Crouse) were fiery New York Jewish members of the American Communist Party, put to death in the electric chair during the McCarthy era on charges of passing nuclear secrets to the U.S.S.R. While Daniel uses aloof intellectualism to cope, his younger sister's (Amanda Plummer) obsession and rage has turned her into an unstable, suicidal, drugged-up radical. Daniel delves into his parents' arrest and trial, ostensibly to help his sibling but more obviously as a narrative device to trigger flashbacks that revisit the infamous semi-fictionalized case of the Rosenbergs. Excellent performances all around and a strong period atmosphere serve to enhance this often powerful story of loss. Recommended. (C. Cassady)

Eaten Alive ★★★1/2

Arrow, 91 min., not rated, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.95



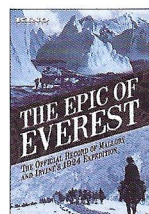
Tobe Hooper's 1977 follow-up to *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* serves up another rural horror story, this one set in swampy southeast Texas. Neville Brand stars as Judd, the addled owner and manager of the Starlight Hotel, a backwoods establishment featuring a crocodile that is kept in a pen next to the hotel porch. The Starlight appears to be rotting away into the local swamp, although the water-stained walls and grimy rooms don't seem to faze the customers who somehow find this place in the middle of nowhere. Over the course of one night, Judd manages to kill nearly every resident in his fetid little hell away from home and terrorize the rest, including a little girl he chases under the porch (the croc chases her back out). A mad nightmare

of hothouse swamp horror, *Eaten Alive* was shot entirely on soundstages lit with red hues that make the area look like a suburb of Hades. Hollywood veterans Mel Ferrer, Carolyn Jones, and Stuart Whitman have supporting roles next to cult horror actors Marilyn Burns (*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*), William Finley (*Phantom of the Paradise*), and Robert Englund (*A Nightmare on Elm Street*). More perverse than scary, the film is weirdly entertaining at times, but also inconsistent and often awkwardly directed. This minor horror item is given Arrow's deluxe treatment with a new restoration (the colors are intense), along with extras that include a new introduction by Hooper, a cast and crew audio commentary, new and archival interviews, a story featurette, and stills and promo galleries. A strong optional purchase. (S. Axmayer)

The Epic of Everest

★★★★1/2

Kino Lorber, 87 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.95, Blu-ray: \$29.95

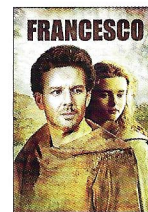


In 1924, a band of British adventurers attempted to climb Mount Everest, the tallest peak on Earth. Two members of the party—George Mallory and Andrew Irvine—died in a final effort to reach the summit (or, some say, returning from it). Amazingly, the expedition was documented by Captain John Noel, who brought along a battery of cameras, and kept up until the bulkiness of the equipment allowed him to proceed no further—after which Noel utilized the most advanced telephoto lenses of the time to trace the team's progress from a distance. A haunting final sequence shows the tiny figures of Mallory and Irvine disappearing against the clouds, followed by shots of the remainder of the party returning to base camp. Preceding the actual climb is ethnographically groundbreaking footage of Tibetan locals, along with sites such as the imposing Rongbuk monastery. Noel had a true filmmaker's eye, fashioning long shots from interesting perspectives and using tinting in some sequences—which is fastidiously recreated in this superb restoration by the British Film Institute—while also offering close-ups of individual climbers and engaging digressions, such as one capturing the birth of a donkey along the way. The original intertitles are also included, notable both for their condescending attitude toward the Tibetan villagers in the early sequences and for the grandiose mysticism adopted after the expedition's failure (which had been prophesied by a lama). An evocative record of a harrowing—some would say foolhardy—endeavor, extras here include an introduction featuring the director's daughter Sandra Noel, a featurette on the score by composer Simon Fisher Turner, and

a segment on the film's restoration. Highly recommended. (F. Swietek)

Francesco ★★★

Film Movement, 133 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$34.95



Presented in a longer "director's cut" version (compared to the edited VHS tape released on home video), filmmaker Liliana Cavani's 1989 *Francesco* dramatizes the life of St. Francis of Assisi, drawing from Hermann Hesse's 1904 monograph *Francesco d'Assisi*. Mickey Rourke, untypically but effectively cast, stars as the titular saint, a privileged son of a wealthy 13th-century Italian merchant, who—following a gradual epiphany (triggered by reading Scripture that was illegally translated from Latin to the common tongue)—renounces all of his wealth and possessions, ultimately leading a religious order based on uncompromising acceptance (welcoming women, embracing lepers) and taking vows of poverty. His ascetic philosophy is perceived as a threat, not only by the upper classes but also by the powerful Church itself. Even with the celebrity lead (and the rather distracting presence of Helena Bonham Carter as a close female disciple), this earth-toned treatment is no Hollywood spectacle but instead a dignified portrait of a driven holy man. Backed by a soundtrack by Vangelis, extras include press conference footage featuring Rourke at the Cannes Film Festival premiere, and a booklet with a foreword by Cavani and an essay by film critic Aaron Hillis. Recommended. (C. Cassady)

The French Lieutenant's Woman ★★★1/2

Criterion, 123 min., R, DVD: 2 discs, \$29.95; Blu-ray: \$39.95



Director Karel Reisz and screenwriter Harold Pinter were able to find the right cinematic approach for capturing the unique perspective of John Fowles' prose in their 1981 screen adaptation of his 1969 novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Meryl Streep stars as Sarah, a Victorian society outcast still in love with the French officer who abandoned her, while Jeremy Irons is gentleman Charles Henry Smithson, who becomes obsessed with Sarah. Charles is engaged but nevertheless enters into an affair with Sarah, who has her own ideas of where their relationship is going. The filmmakers frame this Victorian tale within a modern story: the making of that period film, with Streep and Irons playing actors who are not only also having an affair off the set, but also whose lives (he's married and has a family) are a contemporary reflection of the 19th-century romance. It's a daring narrative gambit that mostly succeeds, thanks to