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Why did it take so long?

One of the great mysteries of the American home video market is why several films based upon books by Alistair MacLean have never shown up on disc, even though they are readily available overseas. *Bear Island* and *The Way to Dusty Death* are enjoyable thrillers and it would seem to be a slam dunk that they would appeal to action enthusiasts in the U.S., but so far—what is the term they use these days?—crickets... But at least one MacLean title that we have been wishing for Paramount to put out on disc for more than 40 years is now finally being issued on Blu-ray by Paramount and Arrow Video, Michael Tuchner's 1972 ***Fear Is the Key*** (UPC#760137143079, \$40).

Running 100 minutes, the film has a distinctive three-act structure, and it is the first act that grabs you by your popcorn container and doesn't let go. Barry Newman (coming off of ***Vanishing Point***) is the protagonist, who panics in a Louisiana courtroom, shoots a cop and takes a pretty blonde courtroom observer, played by Suzy Kendall, hostage. Outside of the courtroom, he finds muscle car with keys in it, and the next quarter hour is him and her in the car, being chased by the police like in a Hal Needham movie down the back roads of Louisiana. You could forgive folks for thinking they were sitting through a ***Vanishing Point*** sequel, but that is the movie's initial thrill. It isn't just a quick car chase. It keeps going and going and going, with crashes and spin outs (you can have fun with some shots, counting the number of tire marks in the road from earlier takes) and everything there is to love about car chases.

And it is only after that part of the film and its apparent but exhilarating mindlessness is done that it takes up the second part, set in the mansion of the father of Kendall's character, where Newman's character is being held because of the skill set he possesses. This was one of MacLean's better books, and the story twists are divvied out with a wonderful patience, drawing the viewer into each new situation before upending each assumption. The last act is set in an oilrig and an experimental underwater submersible that Newman's character knows how to operate.

John Vernon co-stars and a very young and almost unrecognizable Ben Kingsley has a significant part. The performances are workmanlike, once in a while Tuchner doesn't use the right camera angle (although the car chase is impeccable, and don't miss the way that Newman's stomach is just slightly exposed above his pants in the first moments of the film—it is a witty, deliberate choice) and some viewers may find the climax to be a bit silly and illogical. So what. By the time you get to it, the story has worked up so much good will as entertainment, it hardly matters. The film is not a masterpiece, but it is darn good fun.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The color transfer looks good. Fleshtones are accurate and hues are reasonably bright. Darker sequences have a noticeable grain, but the image is sharp and the sunny chase sequences look terrific. There is a super Roy Budd jazz score that is well supported by the solid monophonic audio track. There are optional English subtitles, a trailer, a very nice 40-minute collection of retrospective interviews with various members of the cast and crew recalling different, detailed aspects of the production (the British crewmembers were a bit bent out of shape by the availability of real guns in Louisiana), and an excellent 17-minute deconstruction of Budd's music in the film, particularly how it supplements the squealing wheels and so on during the chase sequence, enhancing the excitement. There is also a 30-minute interview with associate producer Gavik Losey, who shares all sorts of terrific war stories about shooting the film, working with the local Louisiana unions (everything was fine so long as someone's kid got hired by the production) and working with the local law enforcement to stage the car chases (he claims that one cop told him not to worry if any African-Americans accidentally got run over during the shoot, they would take care of it).

If you enjoyed the movie, then definitely settle back in an easy chair and put on the wonderful 24-minute featurette from Scout Tafoya that examines the film in the context of spy thrillers and MacLean movies from the Sixties and Seventies. There are oodles of terrific film clips, looking at

everything from ***Dr. No*** to ***Ice Station Zebra***, as well as a satisfying breakdown of MacLean's primary themes and plot devices (and how, unfortunately, so many film adaptations of his novels end with talky, uncinematic final scenes).

Finally, cult film expert Howard S. Berger supplies an absolutely loving commentary track, filling in details on the careers of the cast and crew members, but always in the context of the film's own strengths and what they bring to it. He also deftly deconstructs the narrative and suggests that it can be seen as a metaphor for filmmaking, with Newman's character acting as a rogue 'director' who is upsetting the designs that Vernon's character is attempting to execute.

ThankYOH

Something immensely relaxing occurs when you settle back with a comedy that you have seen many, many times before. You may not laugh all that often, but you are at peace with the clowns on the screen performing their humor and you probably do pick up an innuendo or a moment that you don't have memorized and chuckle to yourself, if not aloud. It is also advantageous when the transfer of the movie you are watching is absolutely gorgeous.

Turner Entertainment Co. and Warner Bros. have released a fantastic *WB Warner Archive Collection* Blu-ray of the 1937 MGM Marx Bros. feature, ***A Day at the Races*** (UPC#810134949072, \$22). Directed by Sam Wood and running a longish 111 minutes, the film may have been infected by MGM bloat, but at its heart, it is still as freewheeling and riotously amusing as any of the Groucho, Chico and Harpo Marx collaborations. This is the one taking place in a cash-strapped sanatorium run by Maureen O'Sullivan, who brings in a veterinarian played by Groucho because he has been romancing a wealthy patient, played by steadfast Groucho foil Margaret Dumont (trying her best not to crack a smile), who may be able to keep the place afloat. Harpo is a jockey at a nearby racetrack and Allan Jones owns a horse and is in love with O'Sullivan's character. Hence, doctor jokes ("Either he's dead or my watch has stopped."), racetrack jokes ("Not so loud. I don't want it to get around that I haven't got a breeder's guide.") and jokes that become ingrained as part of your own annoying repartee ("Thank you." "ThankYOH"). Familiarity also allows you to be more patient with the musical interludes, which are impressively staged if you also like that stuff. The action climaxes with a madcap horse race.

The squared full screen black-and-white picture is sharp and spotless from beginning to end, a substantial improvement over the DVD (Jul 05). Contrasts are finely detailed and the image is so clear that you can readily make out Esther Muir's liberated cleavage at 1:09:04. The consistency of quality is so pleasurable that it leaves a smile on your face even before Chico shares the first gag (standing next to an empty courtesy bus—"Free bus to the sanitarium. Just got room for a few more."), and from that point forward, it is nothing but smiles and happiness not just from the comedy, but from how wonderfully and definitively the comedy has been preserved.

The monophonic sound is solid and clear, and there are optional English subtitles. The special features have been carried over from the DVD, including a trailer; a sporadic but informative commentary from Marx Bros. expert Glenn Mitchell; the MGM black-and-white Robert Benchley short, *A Night at the Movies*, running 10 minutes, about the frustrations of trying to watch a movie in a crowded theater; two black-and-white 8-minute MGM Captain and the Kids cartoons, *Old Smokey* from 1938, about an aging fire horse, and *Mama's New Hat* from 1934, about a horse trying to get his hat back after the kids steal it; the classic 7-minute 1940 MGM Hanna Barbera color cartoon, *Gallop'n' Gals*, about racehorses who allow their femininity to interfere with the race; a 28-minute retrospective documentary; a 3-minute audio-only deleted song with Jones (set to clips and photos from the film); a 13-minute *Leo Is on the Air* audio-only radio promotion for the film; and a fantastic 3-minute audio-only clip that wasn't on the DVD of Groucho singing a song about his character, Dr. Hackenbush, that was a little too much like his introductory songs in other films (but is still a great gem, all things considered, "With the possible exception of your mother, a doctor is a man's best friend...").

Another Damiani masterpiece

The more we see of Damiano Damiani's films, many of which have never found their way outside of Italy before now (or at least not across the Atlantic), the more astounded we are at how good they are, despite their variety, and particularly how each and every one has an incisive political message hiding beneath the sheath of its drama. His excellent 1978 geopolitical hostage thriller, **Goodbye & Amen**, has been released on Blu-ray by Radiance (UPC#760137142799, \$40). Tony Musante is an American CIA chief stationed in Rome whose top secret operation is compromised when someone affiliated with the embassy shoots two people from the roof of a hotel and then takes another couple hostage in one of the upper rooms. Claudia Cardinale is one of the hostages, and John Forsythe is the American Ambassador. Wolfgang Soldati, Renzo Palmer and John Steiner are also featured. Carefully laced with an intelligent humor, the narrative is very clever and the film is expertly directed, combining the inherent entertainment of a suspense thriller with an enhanced political drama involving power and corruption, woven almost offhandedly with touches of romance. Everything is a deception.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1, and the color transfer is terrific, with bright, fresh hues and accurate fleshtones, readily abetting the enlivened glimpses of male and female nudity. The disc has two versions to choose from, and this involves a major decision on the part of the viewer. There is a 110-minute Italian version with optional English subtitles with audio that is clear and solidly presented, and there is a 102-minute English version, which comes with a warning about its audio quality being much noisier and slightly muffled. Nevertheless, the English track not only has Musante, Cardinale and, most especially, Forsythe doing their own dialog, but there is also an important story point involving regional American accents that is lost in the Italian dub. Hence, although it is sonically inferior and a little bit shorter, we would heartily recommend the English presentation.

Editor Antonio Siciliano talks for 39 minutes in a very nice interview about his career and working with Damiani (he points out that he had to flip one shot because Damiani wasn't paying attention to the crossover, so Musante's mole ends up on the wrong side of his face—but nobody notices), and Soldati talks for a pleasant 24 minutes about working on the film (he doesn't think Damiani gave him enough direction) and about how he loves seeking out the special local dishes whenever he shoots away from the studio.

Finally, Seventies film experts Nathaniel Thompson and Howard S. Berger provide a highly rewarding commentary track, discussing the careers of the cast and the crew (not by citing IMDB titles, but by waxing lyrically about their talents and personas—on Forsythe: "He is another one of these guys who I think just has integrity. He's not one of these people who was ever in a situation to just take something for purely, cynically 'the money.' There had to be some other reason for it. I think he does another great layer to the morality of this film, the ethics. He just does it so perfectly here, you're questioning why he's doing certain things.," and don't miss their sweet, nostalgic and very acidic reminiscences of *Bachelor Father*), taking note of how the hero's plans match those of a movie director confronting his latest project (an analogy Berger also makes in his commentary on **Fear Is the Key**—see page 1), and analyzing the film's many inspired artistic components, such as Damiani's extensive use of mirrors when characters are being duplicitous. "This can't be a movie that is uninteresting to its creators. You really get lost in it after a while. It is a movie that bears great benefit from multiple viewings."

Criterion does a Texas two-step in 4K

A Texas quilt wrapped around a murder mystery, John Sayles' 1996 **Lone Star** is an engrossing and satisfying motion picture with an apparently unending topicality, given the border town location where it is set. Chris Cooper stars as the town's sheriff, piecing together stories from the past after a skeleton is found in the desert with a badge and a bullet. The film is built partially with flashbacks, when the father of Cooper's character, played by Matthew McConaughey, was a deputy at the time of the killing and Kris Kristofferson was his boss. The film also looks at the town's Hispanic community, its much smaller black presence and the personnel at the local Army base. Elizabeth Peña is a widowed schoolteacher who knew Cooper's character as a teenager and is open to rekindling their friendship. The film weaves all of its components together in such a way that the crime is used to dissect the town's past and present social dynamics. Almost everything that happens can also be looked upon as representing one or another aspect of Texas itself—its history and the perspectives of its people—brought to the contradiction represented by the film's many-tiered title, that no one person's actions are independent of others for very long. Shot at Eagle Pass in Texas, it is the one Sayles film that we wish could have a sequel, to see how the present day border 'crisis' is reflected in the characters and their children (indeed, while the film's primary plot threads are sewn together beautifully, the secondary stories are left somewhat open).

Clifton James, Ron Canada, Joe Morton and Miriam Colón costar, all with vividly realized moments and personalities, and Frances McDormand has a single weakly written and overacted scene. The way in which the characters gradually cross paths in both the backstory and the present story makes you want to dive right back into the beginning of the 135-minute film after it is over. To that end, Castle Rock Entertainment and The Criterion Collection have released the ideal way to savor the film, a two-platter 4K UHD Blu-ray (UPC#715515291316, \$50). Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, the image transfer is impeccable and finely detailed. The two-channel DTS sound has a wonderful dimensionality, clear separation

effects and smoothly delivered tones. There are optional English subtitles. It seems to happen sometimes, although not disastrously in this case, but Criterion's standard Blu-ray presentation has slightly brighter hues than the 4K presentation. The 4K image is crisper and conveys a more solid presence, but the colors look a little nicer on the standard Blu-ray, and that appeal can seep into a viewer's response to the story. The sound on the 4K presentation has a slightly more authoritative presence. The bottom line is that either version is fully acceptable and perhaps gives the viewer an added impetus to watch the film again. Both versions look better detailed than Warner DVD we reviewed in Apr 00 (when we enjoyed McDormand much more than we did this time out). The standard Blu-ray also comes with a trailer, a very good 18-minute interview with cinematographer Stuart Dryburgh talking about Sayles and the various choices they made (and how the more complicated shots were executed), and a marvelous 38-minute interview with Sayles discussing the film's structure, the casting (McConaughey, who has very little dialog, was still relatively unknown when Sayles grabbed him), the dynamics of individual scenes, the border, race, independent film and America, then and now.

McDormand has a much better written and better performed role in Joel Coen's Texas-based 1984 **Blood Simple**, which has also been released in a two-platter 4K UHD Blu-ray by Criterion (UPC#715515291217, \$50). Dan Hedaya is a tavern owner who has an investigator played by M. Emmet Walsh trail his wife, played by McDormand, and a bartender, played by John Getz. What follows has no concern for politics or community, just people who want to kill one another caught in a tense comedy of misunderstandings and presumptions, wonderfully lathered with a Texas flavor. We reviewed Criterion's standard Blu-ray in Oct 16 and that is the second platter (with different platter art) included on the 4K release along with the 4K platter. Again, the 4K presentation has more subdued hues, this time markedly so, and while the 4K version is still fully entertaining and engaging, the color transfer on the standard Blu-ray, which was the version overseen by cinematographer Barry Sonnenfeld, has greater color detail and is more appealing when one toggles between the two of them. Since the film's narrative hinges on constricted viewpoints, the nature of each image is vital to the subliminal appeal of the entertainment and in this instance, the greater bandwidth provided by the 4K format does not improve that dynamic. There seems to be no distinct difference in the 5.1-channel DTS sound, which has a marvelous directional mix on both presentations. Both platters have optional English subtitles. The standard Blu-ray comes with three trailers (selling the film's suspense thrills), a 70-minute interview with Sonnenfeld and Joel and producer Ethan Coen, another 35-minute talk with the Coens and author Dave Eggers, a 25-minute interview with McDormand, a wonderful 17-minute interview with Walsh, and a 25-minute interview with composer Carter Burwell and sound editor Skip Lievsay.

Sirk nostalgia

Not a musical by any definition, Douglas Sirk's 1952 Universal production, **Has Anybody Seen My Gal**, released by Universal and Kino Lorber Incorporated as a *KL Studio Classics* Blu-ray (UPC#738329265281, \$25), is a lovely, delightful, multi-layered romantic comedy. The film is intentionally nostalgic, set in the Twenties but also looking back with longing onto the previous century. Charles Coburn is a wealthy curmudgeon who has never married. He travels to the town where he was raised with the intention of scoping out a family he wants to leave his money to—the immediate descendants of a woman, now passed away, who chose the other guy, thus sending Coburn's character off to earn his fortune. The woman's daughter has teenaged children of her own, and one, played by Piper Laurie, is in love with an employee in her father's drugstore, played by Rock Hudson, although her mother is trying to nudge her in the direction of a wealthier suitor. Coburn's character weasels his way into the household as a boarder and takes everything in. There are songs that were hits in the Twenties popping up on the soundtrack and the characters even join in to sing along now and then, but only for a few moments. Although the slang and manners of the Twenties are emphasized, the film is not **Good News**. It is also incomplete, as there are fragments of the setup near the end to have the characters recognize the true identity of Coburn's character, but instead, he walks off in anonymity after solving the crisis he caused by giving them a brief taste of upper class living, leaving the film with an 89-minute running time.

William Reynolds, Lynn Bari and Gigi Perreau co-star, and be prepared to slam on the Pause button and replay the moment several times—James Dean has couple of lines in a very brief close-up. But that just certifies how magical the film truly is. Sirk would return to capturing the mood of a small New England town (and exploring similar themes) with **All That Heaven Allows**, but the whiffs of it that he creates on Universal's backlog with the lovely squared, full screen Technicolor cinematography make every

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scene-establishing shot a transcendent moment of nostalgic longing (culminating in the film's last act, with Christmas season decorations). Regardless of how the disc jacket has buried his name, it is Coburn's film, and under Sirk's guiding hand, his character's machinations are spellbinding daydreams, reinforced by the pre-Depression, pre-War setting and what are actually penetrating ruminations upon character and fate hidden beneath the ditties and distractions of the popularized past.

The picture quality is often pristine, and at the weakest, it is a little soft now and then, although not enough to spoil the overall sense that a gemstone is in hand. The monophonic sound is fine and there are optional English subtitles, a trailer and a wonderful 33-minute intercut retrospective interview with Laurie and with Perreau from 2008 that also works out to be a very nice appreciation of the film as a whole (although they have markedly different opinions about Sirk). Before she passed away, Laurie also sat with film historian Lee Gambin (or, at least, shared the mic) for a terrific commentary track, where she goes into more detail about her problems with Sirk, reaffirms what Perreau had said in the interview about Coburn's roving hands, and otherwise talks all about her career, her co-stars and what she recalls of the film.

The many talents of Fred Astaire

Even when Fred Astaire plays an unappealing character, that lack of appeal does not extend to his dancing, which is always divine and mesmerizing perfection. Astaire stars with Betty Hutton in a 1950 Paramount color feature, **Let's Dance**, released by Paramount and Kino Lorber Incorporated as a *KL Studio Classics* Blu-ray (UPC#738329265649, \$25). Hutton is a war widow with a young son and Astaire is her former performance partner, who has always wanted to be with her but is too self-centered and distracted by hair-brained financial schemes to secure her affections. They meet in New York after the war and he gets her a job at the nightclub where he is working. She is desperate to maintain custody of her son, much to the chagrin of the boy's wealthy grandmother. Directed by Norman McLeod, the film runs 112 minutes and has an enjoyable supporting cast, including Barton MacLane, Roland Young, Ruth Warwick, Lucile Watson and George Zucco. Astaire's character is irritating and you have little sympathy for him, even though he often means well and he does wise up at the end. Whenever he and Hutton do one of their numbers, however, and when he stops to 'daydream' an imaginary dance, you put the irritation on hold. Every movement of every muscle in his body becomes an expression of the music it is pretending to follow. There are no showy or really innovative efforts as there are in his other films—especially in the Fifties when he had to keep topping himself or retire to television—although there are certainly moves and ideas he never used before or afterward. Nevertheless, both alone and with Hutton, he has more than enough numbers to justify the film, and it isn't just his feet or the tilt of his body. There is precision in his hands, his arms, his head and the symmetry or counterpoint he elicits from his partners, and the preservation on cinema of Astaire's dancing is quite simply the magnificence of the utilization of the human body as an artform, rescued from the ephemera.

The full screen picture looks gorgeous. There are a couple of brief lines and speckles, but they are fleeting. Flesh tones are rich, colors are bright and some of the stage numbers that have chorus dancers have carefully balanced hues, as well. The monophonic sound is fine, and there are optional English subtitles.

Although he spends a chunk of time talking about the Astaire and Ginger Rogers partnership, film historian Lee Gambin supplies a very rewarding commentary track (well, even those insights are rewarding), going over the artistry of the cast (but very little about the crew), discussing the film's production history and placing the film in the context of film musicals in general. "The Thirties were bombarded with those wonderful, wonderful backstage musicals, which were gritty and hard films, and dealt with the artistic integrity and disillusionment of the industry itself. By the time you get to Fifties musicals, they're very thematic based and very much about showmanship and show business, and as far as spectacle goes, they were very showy and glossy and gorgeous, especially MGM product. But Paramount and Warners and other studios really sort of shoehorned in a lot of real hard and thematic stuff that was really much about character and character displacement and struggle, and this film's a perfect example of it." Gambin deconstructs Astaire's talents not just as a dancer and a deceptively relaxed singer, but as a comedian. "When you watch Fred Astaire through a lot of the films—not all, but a lot—when he stops dancing, when he's not dancing or singing, not doing his musical numbers, he sort of falls into being a natural comic. Comedy really comes easy for him, his stature, his body, his face, the way he looks, his demeanor. Also, the way he fits as a representative of culture in filmic lands, like he represents the huckster or the charlatan or the sort of upper class clown, or the sophisticate who can get his way, and you know, suave and maneuver his way, and get the women he wants, etc., but he's very funny, and he has a real sense of charm, and urbane sophistication that oozes this kind of hilarity." The commentary also gives you a chance to watch Astaire without the intrusion of the dialog and music, which accentuates the totality of his physical dexterity all the more.

The play's the thing

Kenneth Branagh's sweet 1995 comedy about a makeshift theatrical troupe preparing a production of *Hamlet* in an old church outside of London for the Christmas holiday, **A Midwinter's Tale**, has been released by Warner Bros. as a *WB Warner Archive Collection* Blu-ray (UPC#81013494-7474, \$22). Michael Maloney stars as an out-of-work actor who tries to drum up

some cash and pull himself out of depression by staging the show. Julia Sawalha, Richard Briers and Nicholas Farrell co-star, with Joan Collins playing the agent of Maloney's character and Sawalha's long-time **Absolutely Fabulous** costar, Jennifer Saunders, showing up in the last act for an amusing turn as a Hollywood producer. Indeed, it is the last act that delivers what the rest of the film has only been promising, both laugh aloud humor and touching emotional interactions, but it is well worth the movie's 99 minutes to reach that point since the preparations appear to include every backstage anecdote and apocryphal story ever shared among laboring thespians. Hence, the film is a loosely gathered collection of foibles and miscues that eventually coalesce into something much greater than their parts could ever promise, and Branagh appears to have gotten so juiced by his creation that the very next film he made was **Hamlet** for real (Oct 07).

The picture is in black and white, like a Woody Allen film, but the effect accentuates the humor by subduing the distractions, and it has been letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1, not the 1.85:1 listed on the back of the jacket. The image quality is sharp and flawless, encouraging the viewer to take the film seriously. The DTS stereo sound is generally centered, but seems to have just enough dimensionality to give the movie's atmosphere and score an ethereal presence. There are optional English subtitles, and a trailer.

It is a dark and stormy night in a decaying Venetian mansion where children once died a horrible death. Michelle Yeoh, in an immensely satisfying performance, plays a psychic who is invited to the mansion to speak to the spirit of another woman who plunged to her death from her room there, perhaps tormented by the spirits of the children. Branagh, in his third outing in the part, plays Agatha Christie's detective, Hercule Poirot, who is invited by a Christie-like author, played with wonderful precision by Tina Fey, to prove the psychic is a fraud. All of the elements, therefore, are in place for what is potentially, set on that single stormy night in which the waves outside are too dangerous for the police to come, and the phones are out, anyway (the film is set just shortly after World War II), an atmospheric delight, particularly after one of the participants in the séance is murdered, in Branagh's 2023 **A Haunting in Venice**, a 20th Century Studio release (UPC# 786936896527, \$30). If only Branagh were not such a mediocre director, the film would be magical, and at times it does come close. Bland as many of his visual choices are, he is at least competent enough to guide the performances and intelligent enough to understand what elements of the script are worth emphasizing. Running 103 minutes, the film is still reasonably entertaining—Christie's reliable plotting combined with the investment that went into the production designs are sufficient to see things through to the end—but sharp witted viewers will find something nagging at their little grey cells as they drift ethereally through the events on display. A tweak here, a tuck there and a cast more on par with Yeoh and Fey, and the movie could have been even more captivating and transporting than it is.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. Much of the film is set in semi-darkness, so there is some minor smearing from time to time, but for the most part, the image is detailed enough to soak up the lovely production designs. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has a few effective directional flourishes and sustains the stormy environment in a satisfying manner. There is an audio track that describes the action ("Lightning flashes, illuminating a girl's figure, floating behind Rowena."), alternate French and Spanish audio tracks and optional English, French and Spanish subtitles.

Happy Easter!

Kevin Reynolds' far-flung 1994 adventure and ecological allegory, **Rapa-Nui** has been released on Blu-ray by Warner Bros. as a *WB Warner Archive Collection* title (UPC#810134945845, \$22—the hyphen does not appear on the film's title card, but it is everywhere on the disc jacket and menu). The movie may have been a predictable financial flop, but it is an amazing piece of filmmaking and well worth the money lost, particularly now that viewers can absorb its technical proficiencies at leisure. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and accompanied by a 5.1-channel DTS audio track with a rich bass, an enveloping dimensionality and many nice directional effects, Reynolds rather amazingly shot the film on location on Easter Island, creating a plausible story for why the island lost all of its trees but gained a collection of enormous and enigmatic stone heads. Reynolds shows how the heads were sculpted and how the trees were destroyed, utilizing a narrative that has strong similarities to Michael Powell's **The Edge of the World** (Dec 23), about two men in love with the same woman living on a island of diminishing resources, and participating in a race that involves scaling a perilously high cliff to determine who will stay and who will go. (The race is also, as we pointed out in our far less kind LD review in Mar 05, 'an honest-to-goodness Easter egg hunt.') Jason Scott Lee and Esai Morales star, with Sandrine Holt. Running a sensible 107 minutes, the film is a fine mixture of scientific exposition, all sorts of action, National Geographic-worthy toplessness (and not a single one of the scores of extras has a tan line) and plain old Saturday afternoon escapism. The picture is sharp and the colors are accurate, with only a sequence involving an iceberg belying ever so slightly the inclusion of special effects. The film is a thrill not just for its story, but for the fact that Reynolds actually had the gumption to make it. There are optional English subtitles and a trailer.

Arnold's final feature

Many international co-productions depicting tales of intrigue with all-star casts came out in the Seventies, and most of them were readily disappointing, with dialog that sounded like the script had undergone too many translations on its way to the camera. The direction was usually pedestrian and no matter how much one strained oneself to enjoy the features, which always looked fantastically promising in the marketing artwork, they usually turned out too flat and too pedestrian to be worthwhile. Thus, we were substantially surprised at how much we enjoyed watching the 1976 international co-production shot in Zurich, **The Swiss Conspiracy**, a Film Masters and MVD Visual *Special Edition* (UPC#760137142256, \$25). Of course, it is a rather silly film, but it stays true to what it wants to accomplish, which is something many of these features were unable to achieve.

One advantage the 88-minute film has is that it was directed by Jack Arnold (it was his final feature), a highly competent craftsman who gets the most out of every inexpensive action sequence, shuts the actors down in a scene before they run out of steam, and manages to keep the locations fresh every moment of the way. David Janssen plays a private investigator hired by a Swiss bank to bust a blackmail scheme threatening to reveal the identities of several clients. Now even though Janssen sits in the office of the president of the bank with his shirt unbuttoned halfway down to show off his chest, he has a much livelier presence than he normally does in feature films (he was one of those actors whose screen persona was far more compelling, usually, in episodic television), so that with his bronze décolletage and his absolutely wild, double-curved salt-and-pepper sideburns, you can't take your eyes off of him. And an actress who usually melts into the furniture on the screen, Senta Berger, is ideally cast as his romantic interest, one of the blackmail victims (both characters drive Ferraris, too). Dressed in soft, elegant clothing that smoothly underscores her complexion, Berger is given just enough attention on the screen to be appealing without becoming boring. And then everywhere you look in downtown Zurich, there's another movie star, including Ray Milland, John Saxon, John Ireland, Elke Sommer and a couple of German character actors who will look very familiar as soon as you see them. The action scenes are simple—a few car chases, a couple of gun fights, etc.—but Arnold stages them efficiently and knows how to sustain the excitement. The story has an interesting twist to it, so that if you just sit back, follow Janssen along and trust the filmmakers, you'll have a good time and will not be let down when it is time to wrap up the narrative.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The color transfer looks beautiful, which helps immensely when it comes to Berger's scenes. The monophonic sound is strong and smooth. While Klaus Doldinger's musical score is somewhat bogged down in its era, it still has a few moments that transcend the trappings of time. There are optional English subtitles, two trailers and 43 minutes of terrific appraisals of Arnold's career, including clips from a number of films and a look at a very promising adaptation of *The Lost World* that was ultimately cancelled due to ill health.

Film enthusiasts Daniel R. Budnick and Rob Kelly provide a limited but entertaining commentary track, going over the film's reasonably complicated plot, providing thumbnail profiles of the cast and Arnold, and even sharing licentious passages from the film's novelization. For all the times they appear to have seen the film, however, they fail to pick up on an important story point that is explained right near the beginning when they claim to not understand why hitmen are trying to assassinate Janssen's character when Saxon's character clearly tells Janssen's character that the hitmen will be after him and why.

Another Lubitsch spectacle

Best known for his romantic comedies after sound came to motion pictures, Ernst Lubitsch established himself in the silent era as the grand overseer of enormous historical extravaganzas. We reviewed several of these epics in May 23 and another, his 1919 **Madame Dubarry**, has now been released on Blu-ray by F.W. Murnau Murnau Stiftung and Kino Lorber as a *Kino Classics The Ernst Lubitsch Collection* title (UPC#738329265564, \$30). Pola Negri plays a seamstress who sleeps her way up the ladder to become the mistress of the French king, played by Emil Jannings, only to lose her head to the French Revolution. Running 114 minutes, the film spends most of its time exploring the characters (Jannings' performance has an appreciable range) and advancing their positions, with the impressive cast of extras held for the final scenes. Lubitsch stages those final scenes extremely well—he was superbly skilled at composing grand moments on the screen—and draws appealing performances from the cast members as the lightly comical romance (the heart of Negri's character belongs to a soldier whose career advances parallel to hers) gradually gives way to tragedy. The film is still rather dry compared to Lubitsch's other spectacles (and Negri seems somewhat constrained, as well), but as a component in a wider view of the director's work, it is a welcome and worthwhile feature.

The full screen picture is tinted. Only the shots of the starving peasants are in pure black and white, heightening the emotional effect of cutting to them. The image is generally in decent shape for its age, with minimal evidence of wear. There are dual intertitles in French and German, translated with optional English subtitled. Beware: While Negri's breast is covered on the jacket art—based upon the original promotional art—it is exposed in that same art on the menu screen, although no such moment

actually appears in the film itself. Lubitsch expert Joseph McBride supplies an informative commentary track, even though he has covered much of the same topic in previous talks. He discusses the careers of Lubitsch, Negri, Jannings and several other cast and crew members, goes over the realities of the historical figures that Lubitsch is depicting, points out that while the chronology of events may have been compressed and altered, the costumes and props are quite accurate, and he delivers a viable analysis of Lubitsch's artistry. He explores the arguments for and against Lubitsch's work that have been published in the past, laments how rapidly Lubitsch's masterpieces have disappeared from the academic canons of cinema, and notes that the career of Cecil B. DeMille went from making romantic comedies and dramas to staging large scale epic films, while Lubitsch followed a diametrically opposite path.

Another Noir collection

Three more squared, full screen black-and-white Universal and Paramount genre features have been gathered on the latest Blu-ray installment of the marvelous Universal Kino-Lorber *KL Studio Classics* Blu-ray collection, **Film Noir The Dark Side of Cinema XVI** (UPC#738329263843, \$50). All three films are from the Forties and very early Fifties, and all three have solid, clear monophonic audio tracks, accompanied by optional English subtitles.

Although the Internet is not aware of it, the source of the popular 'Leopard Eating People's Faces Party' meme just has to be the wonderful hour-long murder mystery film inspired by the Edgar Allan Poe short story, *The Mystery of Marie Roget*, a 1942 Universal production directed by Phil Rosen. Set in Nineteenth Century Paris, Patrick Knowles stars as Poe's medical detective Dr. Paul Dupin, Lloyd Corrigan is his flustered sidekick, Nell O'Day is a damsel in distress and Maria Montez is her scheming sister, who wants her inheritance. Maria Ouspenskaya is their grandmother, who has a pet leopard, and when one of the girls goes missing, the body of a woman of similar build is found with her face torn off by what appears to have been claws. Yeah, that darn Production Code won't let the filmmakers go into any more detail, but you can kind of put two and two together after the 61-minute film is over, particularly since a second woman is found having undergone the same horrific demise. The film is great fun and sustains its suspense up until its final moments. Montez is a blast, one can never get enough of Ouspenskaya, and Knowles is suitably quick-witted and inscrutable as the hero, although he does have the bad habit of only telling Corrigan's character things the audience needs to know, withholding pertinent details for dramatic effect, as it were.

The picture has a few minor speckles here and there, but otherwise looks quite nice, with sharp details. The sound seems to be out of synch at times, but only by a couple of frames. Along with a trailer, there are two commentary tracks. One track features film historian Tom Weaver, who does his usual combination of his own insights and background information with recordings from other experts and participants, and re-enacted interviews with participants who have since passed away. One brief segment summarizing Montez's life and careers is more succinct and complete than anything Kino came up with for its box of Montez features (Sep 22). Weaver also goes into great detail about America's panic after Pearl Harbor, which is when production on the film began, and about the two sources of the Poe story—the unidentified corpse of a woman in Paris that caused a press sensation, and the death of a cigar store clerk in New York that caused the press there to have similar conceptions. The true stories behind both tales are fascinating. On the second track, film enthusiasts Kim Newman and Stephen Jones provide even more background on the death the cigar store clerk, while also looking at the dynamics behind Universal's half-hearted attempt to develop a detective series with Knowles and Corrigan. They delve into the backgrounds of the cast, talk about Universal's business strategies in the day, and go over the actual dynamics of the drama, all with their usual entertaining, conversational banter.

Alan Ladd is a reporter who bends over a corpse before the police get there and pockets the dead girl's little black book in the engaging 1949 Paramount production, *Chicago Deadline*, directed by Lewis Allen. For 25 minutes, the film is spellbinding as Ladd's character, feeding information to the City Desk as he goes, contacts the various numbers in the book and tries to find out who the girl was and how she ended up where she ended up. At that point, however, he meets the girl's brother, played by Arthur Kennedy, and the flashbacks kick in, with the corpse coming to life in the form of Donna Reed. It doesn't stop the movie dead, but it does downshift everything, since it is only after Ladd's character can fill in those pieces that he can start doing his thing again, stirring up trouble with mobsters, important bankers, prizefighters and other concerned parties. Running 86 minutes, the story has a bit of feeling and a nice swath of crime film settings, and thanks to Ladd, it doesn't completely lose the momentum it has when it first comes out of the gate, which is, as we have said the past, why the **Dark Side of Cinema** collections are so worthwhile. The film isn't perfect, but it would be a shame to miss it.

June Havoc and Irene Hervey co-star, making you wish you could be in Ladd's shoes. The picture is a little old and a little soft, but there is nothing significantly wrong with it. Along with a trailer, there is an excellent commentary track by film expert Alan K. Rode, going into detail about the film's production, and providing an extensive background on Ladd and the other cast and crew members.

Boxing films were among the very first hits at nickelodeons, but they have become what one might think of as the 'forgotten genre.' Every time a new, well made boxing movie comes out, it is a hit, so to speak, but it never seems to inspire imitators, so you don't see too many of them any more. Back in the Forties and Fifties, boxing movies were more prolific, spawned by the popularity of boxing on the new nickelodeon, television. Universal and Kino smartly marketed three boxing movies by gathering them in **Film Noir The Dark Side of Cinema X** (Dec 22), because by the time a viewer would notice that most of films had nothing to do with crime, they were too entertained by the boxing narratives to complain. Another terrific boxing feature has been slipped into **XVI**, the 1951 *Iron Man*, and once again, it is doubtful anybody is going to complain about the bait and switch. Jeff Chandler is a rugged Pennsylvania coal miner who discovers he can make more money from boxing, attracting big crowds who despise him—but still come to see his fights—because he 'fights dirty,' essentially pounding each opponent until he has to be pulled off. Stephen McNally is his even less ethical brother and manager, and Evelyn Keyes is his hometown girl, who wants him to make a big score and then be done with it. Rock Hudson is his best friend, Jim Backus is a reporter following his advancement and James Arness, who was not genetically designed for coal mining, is a spiteful co-worker who sparks his first match. Directed by Joseph Pevney, the film's star power and boxing action make it inherently entertaining, particularly since the romantic component is also a part of the 82-minute drama. Aided by the story's specific and masterful ambiguities, while the ending is certainly predictable, you genuinely would not mind if either fighter won the climactic championship match, even if the crowd there has a different opinion.

The full screen picture has sharply defined contrasts and generally looks quite nice, although there is minor speckling throughout much of the program. Film historian Gary Gerani supplies a good commentary track. He has seen the film a number of times, and so he understands its in and outs, and how the vague backstories affect the actions of the characters. He provides viable profiles of the cast and crew, talks about Universal's other boxing movies (this was a key film that started the immediate trend, as well as raising Hudson's prominence to a significant new level) and goes over the William R. Burnett novel upon which the film was based and the previous films that had been adapted from it. He also cannot resist pointing out that the nicknames for Chandler and Hudson's characters in the film are 'Coke' and 'Speed.'

Post-war adventure

Set immediately after World War II, Rod Taylor is a former bomber pilot trying to get a cargo plane business going in Northern Africa and France (without leaving the Universal lot) in Joseph Sargent's 1968 tale of intrigue and romance, **The Hell with Heroes**, a Universal Kino Lorber Incorporated *KL Studio Classics* Blu-ray (UPC#738329265304, \$25). Harry Guardino is a black marketer forcing Taylor's character to work for him, and Claudia Cardinale, with bad war memories, lives with Guardino's character but takes a fancy to Taylor's character. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, the last two reels look fantastic, more like high definition video than film, at least during the indoor scenes, and for the most part the transfer looks terrific, although some passages are a bit lighter and softer than others. The monophonic sound is also quite strong, and sports a terrific Quincy Jones musical score. As for the 102-minute feature, it will be an acquired taste. It does have a spirit of adventure. We have a soft spot for Taylor, too, but frankly the film might have been better if he and Guardino had switched roles. Guardino is loose and engaging, while Taylor is constrained to the point that no matter how good her performance is, it is hard to see what Cardinale's character fancies in him. Peter Deuel, William Marshall and Kevin McCarthy co-star.

Along with optional English subtitles and a trailer, there is a commentary track by WWII movie experts Steve Mitchell and Steven Jay Rubin, a conversation in which they speak primarily about the cast members and Sargent ("One of the things that is noticeably interesting that Sargent does as a director is he's doing everything he can to take advantage of the widescreen aspect ratio. In this scene, just with some kind of deft and quiet staging, he is showing that these guys won't ever be close to one another, not as friends, not as business partners or co-workers. Even though Taylor's character is a guy who wants to do what he wants to do, there is something kind of morally wrong with Guardino's character's obsessive lust for money."). Their enthusiasm for films from the era and their knowledge of those films adds to the quality of the talk. While they shortchange Guardino a little—mistakenly suggesting that a more obviously typecast actor such as John Cassavetes would have been better in the role—and they never mention the film's obvious debts to **The Third Man**, they generally enhance one's appreciation particularly of Taylor, the quality of Universal's factory efforts (you do believe the locations) and the arc that World War II movies were undergoing at the time.

Visiting Alaska

Set in Alaska in the Twenties, which would make it reasonably unique so far a Hollywood feature is concerned, the 1954 Paramount adventure film, **Alaska Seas**, a Paramount Kino Lorber Incorporated *KL Studio Classics* Blu-ray (UPC#738329265656, \$25), is about rivalries among salmon fishermen, which lead to a deadly conflict. Half of the film's appeal is its terrific cast, which includes Brian Keith, Robert Ryan, Gene Barry and Jan Sterling (whose waist is frightfully thin). The stars did not go along and there are quite a few awkward looking rear projection shots, but the filmmakers did do a decent amount of location shooting, conveying the majestic atmosphere

that the wilderness of Alaska can impart both on and off the water. Keith's character and Ryan's character are seeking the hand of Sterling's character, but that just acerbates their competitive conflicts. Keith is the 'good' fisherman, working with others to form a co-operative and negotiate from a stronger position with the canning factories. Barry is the bad guy, trying to steal the salmon (which are held in large nets offshore and then periodically gathered) and undercut the co-operative's power. Ryan's character has an immature streak that causes him to disrupt whatever organized efforts Keith's character attempts, and eventually sides with Barry's character. The first half of the 77-minute film engages the viewer with its fresh scenery, intriguing depictions of how salmon fishing is conducted and the movie star showcasing, while the second half has a lot of marvelous 'rough and tumble' action that builds to a suitable climax. It is just different enough from all other movies of its era to be worthwhile.

The black-and-white picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. Although a large line ran down the middle of a dramatic scene at one point, otherwise the picture is very clean and the image is sharp. The monophonic sound is okay and there are optional English subtitles. Film experts David Del Valle and Stan Shaffer supply an adequate commentary track. Their talk is riddled with minor errors and half errors (*Outcast of the Islands* was directed by Carol Reed, not David Lean; Sam Peckinpah didn't just direct a couple of episodes of **The Westerner**, he created the entire series—and it wasn't called 'The Westerners'; there are plenty of similar lapses) and they are focused mostly on Ryan and the other major cast members, talking about the story only as it relates to a previous film adaptation and not discussing the movie's physical production much at all. They do convey a decent appreciation of what Ryan, Keith and Sterling bring to the film (Barry, not so much—they don't like his off-screen persona) and they justify an appreciation of the film despite its offbeat subject matter. "I do think that if you stay with this movie, it's very entertaining, and the acting is great."

Hold that tiger

Shot on a soundstage India and a California backlot, **Man-Eater of Kumaon** is a 1948 Paramount adventure tale released by Universal, Paramount and Kino Lorber Incorporated as a *KL Studio Classics* Blu-ray (UPC#738329265632, \$25). Wendell Corey is a hunter who wounds a tiger in Northern India, causing it to prey on villagers instead of game, so that Corey's character feels obliged to find and finish off the creature after several farmers are killed. Sabu plays a prominent villager and Joanne Page is the villager's wife. Directed by Byron Haskin and coming across as a primitive version of **The Ghost and the Darkness**, the full screen black-and-white feature is a viable blend of drama and jungle adventure, and because of the clearly conflicted psychological trauma that Corey's character undergoes, it is not entirely out of date when it comes to animal rights or Western imperialism. Running 79 minutes, the film is a little slow paced, but it has a nice atmosphere and thanks to the solid monophonic sound, the guttural tiger noises touch a primal nerve.

The picture is sharp, with crisp contrasts, although the source material is visited from time to time by scratches, speckles and other markings. There are optional English subtitles. Film expert David Del Valle and man-eating tiger expert Dan Marino supply a great commentary track, going over the biography of adventure writer Jim Corbett whose works inspired the film, talking about man-eating tigers (it only happens when something upsets the tiger's natural environment or abilities), and thoroughly discussing the backgrounds of the cast, the crew and the film's structure (it was not a hit and Corey was not leading man material, or so they say).

Suffer the children

A lengthy procedural about a Homeland Security agent played by Jim Caviezel who takes a leave from his job to help find an abducted girl in South America after he rescues the girl's brother at the border as part of his duties, **Sound of Freedom**, has been released by Angel Studios (UPC#0313-98342380, \$20). Running 130 minutes (although the primary story is over before 2 hours pass), the drama is surprisingly flaccid, with limited passages of suspense and a lack of intensity in its momentum. While the film is based upon actual events, details in key scenes seem to gloss over the investigative process. Either that, or Caviezel's character is up against some very stupid villains, which is not entirely out of the realm of possibility since they are child traffickers, after all, but it leaves the viewer less engaged in the story and the outcome. Sensing the film's inherent weaknesses, Caviezel even appears during the closing credits to plead with viewers to tell their friends about the film, which was generally released 'under the radar,' as they say—a ploy that appears to have worked, since the movie ended up being a big hit. Sometimes such films are successful because audiences catch onto something that critics have missed, but other times it is just very smart, elaborate marketing, and that is the case here.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The picture transfer is quite good, with minimal distortion in the darker sequences. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound is also well presented, with a strong dimensionality. There is an alternate Spanish audio track, optional English and Spanish subtitles (the disc does not default to automatically providing subtitles for the extensive Spanish dialog without subtitles for the English dialog, and you have to manually step through the options to reach that choice), and a trailer.

Female superheroes

The two inspired 1993 Hong Kong female superhero films, The Heroic Trio/Executioners, have been released as a three-platter 4K UHD Blu-ray by The Criterion Collection (UPC#715515292412, \$60). The two films, directed by Johnny To with the martial arts sequences directed by Siu-Tung Ching, appear together on the 4K platter but are separated onto two standard Blu-ray platters. For both films, the picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1, and both have the original monophonic Cantonese audio track, a monophonic English track and a 5.1-channel DTS Cantonese track. There are optional English subtitles. The monophonic Cantonese track is the default selection, but on the 4K platter, if you select one of the other audio options for one film, that becomes the default for the other film, as well.

Future Oscar winner Michelle Yeoh stars with Maggie Cheung (riding a motorcycle) and Anita Mui as three dazzling fighters who end up facing off against an evil demon that has kidnapped a number of babies for dark purposes in **Heroic Trio**. Damian Lau is a cop that Mui's character is married to, although he is, at least for a while, unaware of her alternate identity, and Anthony Wong is one of the demon's minions, who doesn't seem to mind when his body parts are sliced off. While age and the 4K delivery make some of the wirework easy to spot, the 88-minute feature is still invigorating entertainment with wonderfully acrobatic fight scenes that are enhanced by the overturning of genre traditions. There had been plenty of female martial arts stars up to that point, but their number was still a drop in the bucket compared to the plethora of male stars, and for a movie to gather three of them together as the center of attention was, at the time, a unique thrill in and of itself. While the narrative is about the frantic effort to save the babies, it is also about the three heroes finding one another and bonding to defeat the villain. The effects (Yeoh's character has a invisibility cloak) are basic, but plentiful, and while Lau's character is serious and competent, and there is a fair amount of humor in the other male characters to offset the drama, the primary focus is always on the women and their mastery of their surroundings, a concept that is still relatively unique in Asian or Western action cinema.

The three actresses play the same three characters in **Executioners**, but this time there is no outright supernatural component, although the story is set in an apocalyptic future where villains have irradiated the city's water supply and attempt to stage a coup. Lau and Wong also return. Once again, the heroines are at odds with one another at first, but eventually team up to save the day. There is no invisibility cloak this time, darn it, and less humor (and Cheung's character seems to have a more constricted skill set), but the plot is more complex and the action scenes are more elaborate and balletic. Running 97 minutes, the film is darker, but it is still an energetic and fairly satisfying effort made all the more engaging by its unique casting.

Both films have clearly been transferred from decent source material, but are at the mercy of the original, budget-conscious cinematography. The standard Blu-ray versions look just as good as the 4K presentations, except that in darker sequences, there can be some smearing on the former that is avoided on the latter. We reviewed DVDs in Jan 98 and Apr 98, and the BD presentations are consistently smoother and better detailed. Overall, the image is usually crisp, and colors are fresh. The 5.1 mix on **Heroic Trio** is fairly basic, giving the music a mild dimensionality and throwing in a couple of separation effects, but keeping most of the audio centered. The sound on **Executioners** is more advanced, widening the presence of the music and adding more aggression to the separations. Again, the original budget constraints prevent the films from really blasting away, but to their credit, the 5.1 mixes don't go overboard in compensation, as has been known to happen with other Asian features. There is also one other anomaly on the 4K platter. When playback on **Executioners** is halted and then restarted, the disc first brings up **Heroic Trio**, and only when the disc menu is accessed and **Executioners** is selected again does it start up at the point where it had been left before.

Along with a trailer, each standard BD platter comes with a single special feature. On **Heroic Trio**, there is an excellent 18-minute analysis of the two films from feminist film critic Samm Deighan detailing the contributions of each artist who worked on the film, and on **Executioners**, Wong sits for a fun 7-minute interview (the movies were two of eighteen films he was in in 1993) about shooting the fight scenes and his other experiences making the films.

Ursula major

Ursula Andress has a stunning screen presence in Fernando di Leo's **Loaded Guns** (*Colpo in canna*), a Rare Cinema Art Vision and Kino Lorber Blu-ray (UPC#738329265250, \$30), and that is even before she takes her clothing off. Her name appears quite deservedly above the title, as she plays a stewardess who becomes embroiled in a mob war during a stopover in Naples. Woody Strode has second billing, but you only see him for a few minutes near the beginning and pretty much forget that he is there until he shows up at the end. The 1975 film is vaguely comical, but it is better described as spirited, full of rousing car chases and elaborate fistfights. Andress is allowed to command the screen, which may give hints to the main plot twist that eventually arises, but not before the story has had a chance to play out for a while. Her blend of innocence and authority is intriguing, and the intelligence she projects, combined with her fabulous wardrobe (although in one scene set in a disco where you know because of what leads up to it that she has no underwear beneath the flimsy dress she is wearing, you wonder

where the heck she stuffed the \$10,000 a mobster handed her before she goes out on the dance floor), makes her the ideal guide to carry the viewer through the story's comings and goings, and past the more comically designed supporting characters. The film runs 96 minutes and she has no nude scenes during the first half hour, but even then she is riveting every moment she is on the screen. What follows in the next half hour is enough to fill a year's worth of Playboy spreads, and yet the nudity is always in service of the narrative and ratchets up the value of the program from 'curiosity' to 'must have,' even for the most casual of fans. That the final half-hour then devolves into silly fistfights and car chases hardly matters.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. Colors always look fresh and fleshstones are accurate. Sometimes the image is very sharp, but more often it is soft and blurry, as if the conceptual cinematography had gotten out of hand, although there is an apparent reason for that which we will get to in a moment. There is both an English track and an Italian track with optional English subtitles. The dubbing is adequate, but the Italian track flows better. The monophonic sound is reasonably clear, and there is a wonderfully jaunty Luis Bacalov score. A 20-minute retrospective documentary has been included, in which pretty much everyone recalls the intentionally comical film being a disaster. We might have concurred, but then the knives come out for Andress. "She was already an Ursula Andress in decline. You couldn't film her without putting several gauzes over the lens. She was over the hill. She had cellulite, crow's feet, wrinkles and hours of make up. Ursula Andress was a bit of disaster, really." Well, that explains the blurry images, but the net result is that she still looks fantastic, and delivers a performance fully in keeping with the spirit of the film.

Italian film expert Rachael Nisbet supplies a fair and thoughtful commentary track, going over the history of Di Leo's career and Andress' career, talking about the other members of the cast and crew, and deconstructing the film's pluses and minuses. "Though the film may be viewed as somewhat of a failed experiment, it undoubtedly harbors the potential [for] some more compelling and engaging cinematic experience. Within a specific set piece, there is much to appreciate, even if it occasionally feels a bit drawn out."

Street friendship

Simple, straightforward and engrossing, a teenage girl and a young boy from Africa, both street smart, try to get by as immigrants in Belgium in **Tori and Lokita**, a Sideshow, Janus Films and The Criterion Channel Blu-ray (UPC#715515290111, \$30). The 2022 feature was directed by Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne and has a sad conclusion, but the trade off is how vividly the characters are presented, so that you not only get to know them, you enjoy their company. They live in an impressively organized juvenile shelter, attending school and working whenever they can, and earning more money on the side by doing chores for drug dealers. Running 89 minutes, the narrative tracks their efforts to obtain enough money to better their lives while continually reinforcing and even rediscovering the random bond that is not only keeping them together, but enabling both of them to grow. Joely Mbundu and Pablo Schils star, although you wouldn't know it from the massive credit block on the back of the jacket, which lists all of the producers, contributing production companies and primary crewmembers without so much as a hint of the cast.

The disc does not restart where it left off if playback is terminated. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The image is sharp and immediate, and the lens choices always keep you close to the hearts of the characters. The 5.1-channel DTS sound has a basic dimensionality and is reasonably clear. The film is in French with optional English subtitles, and comes with a trailer and a 24-minute interview with the Dardenne brothers (on a per capita basis, Belgium has more dual director siblings than any other nation) about how they came up with the idea for the film, how it relates to their previous works and the works of other filmmakers, and the process they went through casting the movie and working with the two stars.

Greenaway on Blu-ray

An acquired taste, the films of Peter Greenaway can be highly daunting, and very taxing on the intellect, especially during the first viewing. It is often with repetition, however, that a viewer can claw through the cinematic obfuscations he has placed within his dramas and begin to savor the brilliant dynamics at work, both as cinema and as drama, and with the Blu-ray format, that journey can be especially rewarding.

The basic narrative of Greenaway's amusing 1988 film about a family of women who murder their husbands, **Drowning by Numbers**, is easy enough to follow, but the decorations surrounding the narrative are highly eccentric and will seem downright baffling—or absolutely delightful—depending upon how accepting one is of Greenaway's challenges and gamesmanship. For one thing, Greenaway has placed the Arabic numerals from one to one hundred sequentially within the film as it progresses. Sometimes the numbers are easy to spot. Sometimes they are not, and once in a while, Greenaway will tease the viewer by showing an advanced number and then filling in the numbers behind it that you thought you'd missed, before showing it again. Other games, and obsessive-compulsive activities, are both described by the characters (and an occasional voiceover narrator) and depicted with their participation. Greenaway has a passion for classical painting, so that images from such paintings are also integrated with the film's staging or informing the background action—notably Pieter Bruegel's 1560 canvas, 'Children's Games,' which Greenaway actively integrates with his own staging on several occasions.

Joan Plowright, Juliet Stevenson and Joely Richardson play the trio who eventually become so fed up with the men in their lives that dunking them becomes a welcome alternative to tolerating their presence. It helps that they are friends with a coroner, played by Bernard Hill, and can manipulate his affections to aid in their avoidance of responsibility for their actions, at least for a while. There is also a young boy, played by Jason Edwards, whose eccentric hobbies and activities often serve as counterpoint to the adventures of the adults.

Released on a welcome two-platter 4K Blu-ray by Severin Films (UPC#760137121466, \$40), the intensely slick and glossy image afforded by the 4K playback is ideal for catching numbers in the shadows or numbers that are otherwise not obviously front and center. As a drama, or even a satirical farce, the film's appeal would be relatively limited, but it is Greenaway's masterful command of the film's visual aspects and its pacing that make it so captivating, and all the more with the 4K delivery. A standard Blu-ray is also included in the set and is available separately from Severin (UPC#760137125723, \$30) as well, and there is no denying that the film is still a delight with the clarity that the standard BD has to offer. However, when we went back and forth between them, our heart perked up every time we brought up the 4K version, because the added detail and purity of the presentation were just too engaging to be ignored. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1.

The stereo sound has a basic dimensionality and is not aggressively mixed, although the sound effect design is masterful (there are gurgles all over the place). Nevertheless, the cleanliness of its delivery is fully enrapturing. Michael Nyman's musical score is similar to the work he has done for all of Greenaway's films, transitioning into classical works from Mozart and others, and then back to his own compositions in a way that keeps a viewer intrigued with what is happening on the screen. Again, there is not that much difference between the standard BD's audio and the audio on the 4K version, but one's subliminal response will couple with the imagery.

The 4K platter comes with optional English subtitles, a trailer and a commentary by Greenaway. He says a little bit about making the film and talks about his collaborators both in front of and behind the camera, but spends most of his time explaining the story, pointing out the visual references to paintings and other sources, and occasionally identifying a number as it flits by.

The Blu-ray platter has those features and also comes with a good 14-minute introduction by Greenaway that focuses on the influences and construction of the film's ideas rather than the literal plot that he pays so much attention to on his commentary, and includes some stimulating thoughts about the very nature of motion pictures; a nice 10-minute interview with Hill talking about how he measured his performance and adjusted to the disparate ages of each of his co-stars, and he also talks about some of the hidden number games in the film that not even Greenaway discusses (his character's room contained a hundred objects that start, as his character's name does, with the letter, 'M'); an excellent 27-minute promotional featurette from 1988 that plays like one of Greenaway's short films (see below) and deconstructs many of the film's idiosyncrasies (such as the repetition of situations in threes), thus becoming a 'key' to understanding what Greenaway is up to; and a further 5-minute deconstruction (via text cards) of drawings Greenaway made in preparation for the film.

Greenaway's debut feature film, his brilliant 1982 costume drama, **The Draughtsman's Contract**, has been released on Blu-ray by Zeitgeist Films and Kino Lorber (UPC#738329262662, \$30). Set right before the turn of the Seventeenth Century into the Eighteenth Century, when aristocratic dress was at its most absurd, Anthony Huggins plays the title character, who is hired by an aristocrat's wife, played by Janet Suzman, to make several drawings of her husband's estate, which she wishes to present as a present. In some ways advancing like **Blow-Up**, the drawings begin to include clues that even Huggins' character fails to notice at first, which end up pointing to a murder. The camera is rock solid at all times, without intercutting, although the film does advance from one angle to the next within a scene (the editing just never returns to a previous angle), giving the movie itself the sort of stately and formal sense of presentation one associates with the times (with its bawdy underplay, of course). It takes a couple of viewings—or Greenaway's handy 10-minute introduction and his informative commentary—to get the characters straight and understand the betrayals that are occurring behind the scenes, but the film's unique style and subject matter are engrossing from the very start (the artist's approach to his executing his drawings has a filmmaking-like manner) and become more and more captivating with every viewing.

We reviewed Kino's DVD in Mar 08. Since the film is only lit with available light, there are very few scenes, even outdoors, that are not substantially grainy, but that said, the image is very sharp and colors are brighter and richer than they were on the DVD. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. The monophonic sound is also stronger than it was on the DVD. All of the DVD's special features are carried over. Along with the commentary and the introduction, there are 10 minutes of interesting deleted scenes, a good 10-minute collection of behind-the-scenes footage, and a rewarding 7-minute interview with Nyman.

Included as well are four short films that originally appeared on the Zeitgeist DVD release, **Greenaway The Early Films** (Apr 06), the 1969 black-and-white *Intervals*, a 6-minute depiction of Venice in the present day with an alphabet recited on the audio track in Italian; the amusing 1974 *Windows*, a 4-minute montage of windows in faded color with voiceover narration describing the dangers of windows; the 1976 *Dear Phone*, running 17 minutes, that mixes a color montage of phone booths with shots of writings on paper as a story that has something to do with telephones is recited on the audio track; and the 11-minute 1978 *Water Wrackets* that features shots of

standing and running water in natural settings, again in somewhat strained colors, as a voiceover narrator drones on with a seemingly nonsensical history of the locations.

Greenaway's elegant 1985 comedy, **A Zed & Two Noughts**, which has also been released on a two-platter Blu-ray by Zeitgeist and Kino, **A Zed & Two Noughts and The Falls** (UPC#738329262655, \$30), is extremely well composed and often quite witty, but there is no avoiding its utter obnoxiousness. Two relatively identical brothers who work in a zoo have to cope with the deaths of their wives in a freak accident involving a swan flying through a car windshield. Their mother, who survived the same accident, eventually loses both of her legs, but holds court first in her hospital room and then in a stylish bedroom as the brothers not only visit her, but start doing her bidding, including fathering another child. There are a couple of other characters hovering around, and one of the brothers enjoys taking time-lapse films of dead animals as the corpses rot.

From a technical perspective, the film is exquisitely decorated, framed and lit, making it an ideal program to share on Blu-ray. The presentation is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. While the audio track is centered—and can be fairly annoying, as the characters themselves even complain to each other about the irritating music playing on an LP—the detailed mix is also enhanced by the clarity that the BD's audio enables. We reviewed a DVD in Mar 08, which also looked and sounded decent but does not impart the stability or arresting glossiness that the BD can convey.

Running 117 minutes, the film has an air of fun to it, cutting to zoo animals whenever things need to pick up a bit, and pushing this and that esoteric absurdity. The problem is that the characters take their surroundings so seriously the film appears to present an air of sophistication that is in direct opposition to what is actually happening, giving it a snobbish tone that most viewers will readily dismiss. Even Greenaway, in his excellent commentary, admits that the film took too many wrong turns on its way to completion. The commentary is carried over from the DVD, along with a 6-minute introduction by Greenaway, a trailer and a complete presentation of the time-lapse decay segments, which run a total of 5 minutes. Also featured are a pair of excellent color short films that appeared on **Greenaway The Early Films**, *H Is for House* from 1976 and *A Walk through H* from 1978. The two films are unrelated. *H Is for House* runs 9 minutes and features static shots inside and outside of a house in the country as voices, including that of children, discuss the alphabet and other topics. While the images feel like home movies, the piece is earnestly composed and conveys an escapist atmosphere (it also, in its shots of the house, presages **The Draughtsman's Contract**; in some ways, it serves as a cornerstone for nearly every subsequent Greenaway film). The poetically composed *A Walk through H* runs 42 minutes and is ostensibly an examination of small abstract prints at an exhibition, which a narrator claims are maps charting a journey that he has taken. The images are also intercut with footage of different birds in their habitats. As absurd as the narration becomes, the film remains quite captivating for its inventiveness and dry humor.

The second platter contains another film from the **Early Films** collection, *The Falls*, which runs a daunting 195 minutes. In many ways an expansion of *A Walk through H*, the 1980 production also presents a steadily progressive set of vignettes (ninety-two in all) that advance gobbledygook on the voiceover narration (featuring a number of different speakers) while images, many (but not all) of them archival, which may or may not relate to the narration, also appear. And there are innumerable intricate and obscure references to birds, as well. Under Greenaway's assured hand, it is mesmerizing—sleep inducing, perhaps, but still mesmerizing. The pieces have a poetic spirit that encourages a viewer to let them just flow past, however nonsensical or abstract they may seem. As for the narration, it is like Monty Python without the clowns. Indeed, where the attempts at humor in **A Zed & Two Noughts** can sometimes appear to be straining for a gag, the comedy in *The Falls* is so consistently dry and uninking it is glorious. Although there is never a joke that is funny enough to generate laughter, the film scores an epic number of grins and near-chuckles, in all likelihood a world's record for a single film.

The presentation is in full screen format and while there are occasional scratches in the staged sequences, the colors look very fresh and the presentation is indeed an improvement over the DVD. Even though this should be a film where the quality of the presentation is mostly irrelevant, we were surprised by how much more riveting it became with the brighter hues and sharper details that the BD enables. The monophonic sound has a natural roughness to it that matches the quality of the images but does not undercut the effectiveness of Nyman's musical score. In what must have been a daunting assignment for the writer, there are optional English subtitles. A humorless 2-minute introduction by Greenaway is also included, explaining the ostensible purpose of the film.

Finally, another masterwork by Greenaway is included, as well, *Vertical Features Remake*, running 44 minutes. While it purports to be about the reconstruction of a film made by a fictional filmmaker, and in that guise is about the study of landscaping design, it is also a brilliant deconstruction of how films work, in that the filmmaker's raw footage is reconstructed four different times into four different films, thus exploring the developing process of film language. Linking back (like everything else) to *H Is for House*, it is a brilliant work, and definitive proof that Greenaway is a taste worth acquiring. The full screen picture is in excellent condition and is accompanied by a 3-minute Greenaway introduction, in which he teases the viewer with a potential follow-up feature.

And inside the actual coffin...

A bearded, unbowed undertaker with fingernails that would make Howard Hughes jealous bullies the inhabitants of a small Brazilian town in José Mojica Marins' 1964 *At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul* (*A Meia Noite Levarei Sua Alma*), the first of ten Brazilian films (all but the final one in a squared full screen format), in Brazilian Portuguese with optional English subtitles, that Arrow Video has gathered on six Blu-ray platters and collectively titled, **Inside the Mind of Coffin Joe** (UPC#760137139171, \$140). Marins also stars, playing the titular undertaker, who seems to be able to get away with whatever tickles his fancy, whether it is slicing the fingers off a rival, drowning a woman who cannot conceive his baby, tying up another woman and then letting a deadly spider crawl across her face and otherwise creating mayhem and gore to further his own interests. The story in *At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul* is pretty much limited his seeking a woman who will live long enough to bear him children. The black-and-white film is cheaply staged—as the characters walk through the pathways of their community, they are forever passing the same small set of bushes—but the gore looks great, the dialog is so lyrical that it is worth suppressing the subtitles (which don't tell you much you haven't already figured out, anyway) to savor, and Marins, playing the title character, takes a Richard III delight in the trouble he causes everyone. Running 82 minutes, the film is episodic, but so hoary and in your face that you wish it would go on and on. Hence, the other films in the set.

Along with a pair of trailers, there is a 12-minute introduction to the character and many of the films in the set, in English, and a 65-minute overview of Marins' entire cinematic career up to 2001 when the piece was shot, including footage of Marins appearing at festivals and enjoying his worldwide fame. Since he was always investing the money he made in one film to make the next one, fame was about the only thing he was left with when it was all over. Based in Sao Paulo (he is sort of like an American regional filmmaker), he was nuts about filmmaking his entire life and a 1952 silent short that he put together featuring people in Arabian outfits, *Bloody Kingdom*, running 9 minutes, demonstrating his enthusiasm for torture and flamboyant theatricality, is included, accompanied by his commentary.

Excerpts or fragments from two more films Marins made are also offered in the supplement. Both pieces are transferred from decrepit source materials, but you still get the gist of what they are about and how industrious Marins' filmmaking techniques could be. *Adventurers Fate* (*A Sina Do Aventureiro*), from 1958, a western that appears to have a similar story to *At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul* transports the bullying in a western setting. Running 13 minutes, what you can make out of the action scenes appears to be effectively if inexpensively staged. It seems promising, but the real revelation is the 16 minutes of the 1963 *My Destiny in Your Hands* (*Meu Destino Em Tuas Mãos*), which uses the bullying in a domestic drama situation and, despite some inventive animated opening titles, remains serious, to the point where it has masterpiece potential. An alcoholic father terrorizes his son, who runs away, an act that sobers the father up but leaves emotional scars, which almost lead to tragedy. From what can be seen, it is a penetrating, spiritually uplifting and thrilling work of cinema. At the very least, even in its truncated form, it is a more satisfying program than any of the other films in the set.

Marins also supplies a commentary for *At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul* that was recorded for DVD before he passed away, as he regales his interviewers with stories about the slapdash manner in which he labored for two weeks to put the film together. Seeing all of the tortures the crew went through, the story of the film's production would probably make a good movie itself. Although you cannot trust everything he says, we fully believe him when he explains that he originally intended the film to be fodder for midnight screenings, which is why he used *'Midnight'* in the film's title. He details what is happening in the narrative while also talking about the efforts he underwent to achieve each scene. "Convincing the actress [to accept having a spider placed upon her face], I guess it wasn't easy, because she was exposed and she's also tied up. To avoid her jumping at the last minute, I was prepared to improvise. If she jumped up, I would put my hand on her and choke her. But she managed to hold on, despite her fears."

And at that point, we were more than ready to dive into the next two black-and-white Coffin Joe movies on the next platter, *This Night I'll Possess Your Corpse* (*Esta Noite Encarnarei no Teu Cadáver*) from 1967 and *The Strange World of Coffin Joe* (*O Estranho Mundo de Zé do Caixão*) from 1968. *This Night I'll Possess Your Corpse* opens with a title card explaining that it is starting right where *At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul* ended, and indeed it does, with a larger budget and a nicer looking picture (the transfer also looks terrific, with smooth details and minimal wear). It is also, as a conceptualization of a sequel, superb. The direction is not as 'raw' because Marins can afford a regular film crew and a larger cast, but the spirit of the first film certainly lives on. While his character is not as much of a bully this time out, he is more of a scheming sadist, who still wants to make a woman pregnant with his child and goes about a convoluted scheme to find one who is isn't afraid of his peculiarities. As the murders mount, the townspeople become more suspicious and more vindictive. He does find a suitable mate, and then there is an amazing sequence, a 'nightmare,' presented in color (!) where he visits Hell, which looks very reminiscent of the spaceship tunnels in *Invaders from Mars*, but with naked people being tortured at every turn. What the 109-minute film manages to do is take the essence of the first film's appeal and expand it—the only thing that cannot be expanded is the first movie's sense of improvised discovery—to offer not just more horror and gore, but a greater understanding of the underlying psychological conflicts and a more complex exploration of the film's spiritual intricacies (Marins' character is defiantly atheistic). Marins provides another commentary, again mixing his explanation of the narrative with his many stories about the mishaps and problems that occurred during the shoot. One key actress kept on running off with each hot guy she met—one time they couldn't find her for several days—until the producer pretended to propose to her and only broke it off when shooting was completed ("He saved the day getting her to stick around.").

The Strange World of Coffin Joe is an 81-minute anthology film with three separate stories. In the first and best one, a group of young men invade the home of an elderly dollmaker, only to have the tables turned upon them. The middle segment has no dialog and thus becomes an interesting cinematic exercise, about a balloon street vendor who starts following a woman after she drops a shoebox, and he continues to follow her when she is murdered, given rites at a funeral, and laid to rest in a crypt. It's a bit kinky, but is a good demonstration of Marins flexing his directorial skills. The final segment has him in his Coffin Joe makeup again, although much better dressed and playing a 'professor,' who 'proves' that love does not exist by torturing a loving couple until the agony becomes so intense that one betrays the other. The piece is loaded with gore and essentially delivers what fans of the first two features would want to experience, while at the same time widening the conceptual parameters so that he could continue to cash in with future films. The black-and-white picture is in reasonably good condition, with minimal wear and relatively sharp contrasts. There is also a minute-long additional ending imposed by the censors because everyone still alive in the movie looked too happy feasting on corpses in the initial ending. Both the film and the alternate ending have another commentary, with Marins explaining how the movie was conceived—he apparently wasn't going to direct all three episodes at first, but that was how it ultimately worked out—and sharing the nitty gritty about the production challenges in each segment.

Also featured on the platter is a cute 17-minute segment about TV horror hosts and how Marins' shtick was similar (he actually got gigs doing the same thing as his career advanced), while not only drawing parallels, but exploring the social dynamics behind the format; and an 87-minute overview of Marins' life and career in English that does a good job in placing Marins' advances in gore cinema in place and time compared to other gore features (e.g., Marins was shooting *At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul* at the same time Herschell Gordon Lewis was making *Blood Feast*).

Although it is a single film, the 93-minute *The Awakening of the Beast* (*O Despertar da Besta*) from 1970 also has several distinctive segments, perhaps influenced by the structure of **2001: A Space Odyssey**, and is a rewarding intellectual turning point in the collection. The mostly black-and-white film begins by advancing a series of vaguely softcore vignettes with an edge, built around the use of illicit drugs. The vignettes are intercut with a doctor, played by Sérgio Hingst, who is soliciting the stories as part of research he is doing on drug addiction. Next, Marins turns the film onto himself, replaying a TV program where the social value of his films and his antics are judged by a panel. After that, Hingst's character interviews Marins, and then returns to his research, gathering four of the characters from the vignettes. They attend a discotheque, a stage program based upon one of Marins' films, and a screening of *This Night I'll Possess Your Corpse*. The doctor subsequently injects the characters with LSD, and the film switches to color as if it were entering 'Jupiter and Beyond,' and intercuts each character's 'trip,' obviously influenced by the Coffin Joe milieu, to create an extended but totally wild finale, jumping back at the very end for its own black-and-white epilog. Basically, the film is set up like the classic drugsploitation films of the Forties and Fifties, except that since there is no authoritarian guiding its morals, it can twist and turn any way Marins feels like twisting and turning it. The result is a fairly impressive adaptation of exploitation components to create a genuine sociological treatise on the effects of drug use. The black-and-white portion of the film is in reasonably good shape, with minimal wear, and the color portions look terrific. A 4-minute alternate opening credit sequence is included using the film's initial Brazilian title, *O Ritual dos Sádicos*. Another Marins commentary is also featured, in which he explains that the film was suppressed at the time of its release by the government (who didn't want people to know about drugs) and only gained recognition as one of his best films decades later. He also gives another blow-by-blow about the actual production experiences (one extra had to go to the hospital after Marins accidentally stepped on his nether regions; in another incident, a cop mistook his fingernails for a gun), offers enlightening contextual details (the footage of Marins 'on trial' on TV actually happened) and offers his insight to the narrative and his artistic approaches. "For anyone who uses drugs or is an alcoholic, who sees this whole world in color, they know that when they go back to normal, the world is black and white again."

A year after Allen Funt did *What Do You Say to a Naked Lady?* Marins has a naked man walking about the streets of Sao Paulo in his 1971 *The End of Man* (*Finis Hominis*). He gets about as much as he can from the stunt, and then the man is dressed and becomes Marins in his Coffin Joe get up, only this time he performs miracles, with the 79-minute feature sort of evoking incidents from *The New Testament*. The film is less violent than most of its predecessors while still indulging in Seventies nudity with great vigor, and it is reasonably appealing. Again, it has a kind of psychedelic atmosphere, and while the narrative is episodic, the story has a cute punchline that justifies much of what occurs. On the whole, it is one of the stronger films in the group. The film has black-and-white sequences, but more of it is in color, and either way, the transfer looks terrific. The image is sharp and hues are bright and fresh. Marins describes the production in the commentary (he explains how he pulled off a scene on his very limited budget that has hundreds of extras) and also talks about the narrative (the *New Testament* references are intentional), explaining that the film was ahead of its time—it met with too much political resistance then, but now has the advantage of being an interesting and different addition to his filmography.

Along with trailers for both films, there is a touching 18-minute appreciation of Marins' drive and artistry and an 18-minute summary of the ostensible misogyny in the Coffin Joe films and how Marins, from time to time, subverts it.

A direct sequel to *The End of Man*, the 1972 *When the Gods Fall Asleep* (*Quando os Deuses Adormecem*) picks up exactly where the previous film ended. Running 77 minutes, it is episodic, with connective sequences, but in each episode, Marins' character appears at the end to straighten everything out. In the first episode, two street gangs rumble over an infidelity. The second episode depicts the celebration of a black mass, with the apparent feasting on live chickens. The third episode, which makes the best use of the color footage, is set in a gypsy camp, where several infidelities lead to deadly fights. The final segment is set in a nightclub with rooms available for sex. It is a busy night, however, and the rooms are over booked, leading to kind of a riot. The black mass thing is a little dull, and each episode is padded, but the film is an effective elaboration upon its predecessor and reasonably enjoyable. Another mix of black-and-white and color, much of the color footage has thin white vertical lines running through it and overall the image is a bit softer than the previous film, but the colors are again bright and fresh, and like we said, the gypsy thing gives **Gypsy Woman** a run for its money when it comes to the costumes and décor.

Directed by Marcelo Mott (although Marins had plenty of input), Marins' character is literally resurrected at the start of the 79-minute *The Strange Hostel of Naked Pleasures* (*A Estranha Hospedaria dos Prazeres*) from 1976, although once that sequence and the opening credits are out of the way, there is only an hour left for the movie itself, in which the Coffin Joe character is the manager of a hotel on a dark and stormy night. He is expecting a number of guests, who show up like clockwork, while unexpected guests are sent away. There is a couple who go to one room and make love, a group of men who go to another room to play cards, another group of men who go to a room to divvy out the goods they stole in a jewelry store robbery, another couple who are in a room arguing over the woman's pregnancy, and a couple dozen motorcycle gang members who go into a large room to party, clothing coming off every which way. What the film is actually about is readily apparent and is revealed substantially before the end. Character development is minimal, and scenes always seem to extend well after their essence is communicated, but the film is another viable headtrip that gets off on Marins' posing, the nudity and the allure of the supernatural. The entire film is in color. There is no overt damage to the image and hues are bright, with accurate fleshtones, although the image is soft at times. There is a lot of public domain classical music on the soundtrack.

Along with a trailer for *Hostel*, there is a 26-minute analysis of Marins' films in regard to their surreal elements and various Surreal artistic movements; a 14-minute rumination upon the Coffin Joe character's deranged mania and the horrors depicted in the films; an 11-minute interview with collaborator Dennison Ramalho about how he met and befriended Marins and the projects they worked on together; a 14-minute examination of the recurring themes in the films (such as eye gougings); a 15-minute Brazilian piece on Marins attending the Sundance Film Festival in 2001 (noting the festival's connection with Robert Redford, he talks about *Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head*, never mentioning that he used the song in two of his films; he is also impressed by snow—"It leaves white drops and I am in black."); and an amusing 10-minute American color short film (letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1) from 2008, *The Blind Date of Coffin Joe*, in which someone dressed in the Coffin Joe outfit tries to go on a date with a woman he meets on the Internet (he speaks Portuguese, while the woman speaks English), but it doesn't go well.

A short story stretched into an 83-minute film, *Hellish Flesh* (*Inferno Carnal*) from 1977 is otherwise an effective erotic thriller with a twist at the end that is predictable if you pay close attention to the shadows, but is otherwise quite satisfying. Marins plays a different character this time, a professor of some sort, but he still as the eyebrows, the beard and the fingernails. His character's wife and her lover scheme to kill him so they can take his money, but the effort is not entirely successful. Rather than take immediate revenge, however, he plays a very long game, continuing to support his wife while she gallivants about with the lover until time takes its course and she returns to him. The transfer is gorgeous—the professor does a lot of work with colored liquid in beakers and the cinematography savors every bubble—and the image is sharp and clean, with accurate fleshtones. The bland public domain music continues, but in one nightclub scene, there is a band dressed like KISS performing *Goin' Out of My Head*. Go figure.

Marins has two roles in the 1978 *Hallucinations of a Deranged Mind* (*Delírios de um Anormal*), playing both Coffin Joe and himself. A man has hallucinations—which come in the form of extensive outtakes from the other movies—and believes that Coffin Joe wants to take possession of his wife. His wife pleads with a group of psychiatrists to help him, and they in turn go to Marins, who agrees to participate in the cure. Using the outtakes, the 83-minute film gets to replay every hoary sequence, every great piece of gore and blood, and lots of nudity from the other movies, as well as all of the other crazy stuff, and it is that content that takes up most of the film's running time, although the narrative effectively integrates it with the fresh material. Marins and editor Nilcemar Leyarte collaborate on the commentary track, explaining how the film was constructed and how speedily they were able to put it together. Marins also describes an inspired promotional stunt he used for the film as he traveled from city to city, until other distributors and theaters found a way to sabotage it.

Along with trailers for both films, there is a very good 31-minute appreciation of Marins' entire filmography (he is compared to Jess Franco) in the context of Brazilian cinema as a whole in the Sixties and Seventies; and Kat Ellinger provides her insights upon Marins' artistry in a 16-minute piece, particularly as it reflects Gothic traditions and Nietzschean philosophies.

Zooming ahead several decades, in 2008 a matured Marins returned to make *Embodiment of Evil* (*Encarnação do Demônio*) with modern cinematography, some impressive special effects (black-and-white people walk within the color) and great, punchy 5.1-channel DTS sound. Running 93 minutes (albeit with 7 minutes of end credits) on the final platter, the narrative may have

plenty of folderol, but for once it is not padded or stuffed with redundancies. The Coffin Joe character is released from incarceration and proceeds to gather a cabal of worshippers, hoping to impregnate one of them in order to continue his line. In the meantime, his disciples maim and kill both people who oppose his efforts and random strangers who happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. For those who are enamored with torture porn, the film is a true classic, and its blend of gore (there appear to be shots of people actually getting their lips threaded and similar sorts of piercing and sadomasochistic penetration, including a sequence that out-does **A Man Called Horse**), copious blood letting, nudity, horrors (a woman has her face shoved into a bucket of roaches), imaginative set designs and other indulgences create a true pinnacle to the Blu-ray set. In other words, if you aren't sick of the films entirely by the time you reach it, you'll probably enjoy it thoroughly. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1, the image transfer is solid, clear and effectively detailed. Marins does another commentary, but he is less energetic than on the other commentary tracks, as collaborators Paulo Sacramento and Ramalho provide more background information about the film's staging and story. They accomplished the striking black-and-white effects by painting the characters in a single 'blue screen' style color and then changing the contours of the characters to black and white.

Included on the platter as well are a trailer; Marins giving a 2-minute presentation of storyboards used for the film; a 2-minute examination of the visual effects used in the film with Marins; 14 minutes of boisterous footage from an American festival screening of the film (Marins comes on stage in a coffin, led by women in black leather bikinis); 45 minutes of good behind-the-scenes footage ("The workshop was really great. A lot of lessons on respiration, on shaking, on the use of the eyes. I imagined there was going to be a lot of screaming, but I was wrong, it was all about the eyes, not about the screaming."); 12 minutes of intriguing deleted scenes (including a shot of a man really pushing scissors up his nose) with informative introductions by Marins about why the footage had to go; a 37-minute interview with Ramalho speaking specifically about the creation of *Embodiment of Evil*, explaining how it in part was an answer to the censorship Marins had encountered making his previous films and sharing many specific details about the production; and finally, there is an 85-minute podcast conversation with Ramalho, who talks extensively about his time with Marins, and the political and social climate in Brazil, while sharing memorabilia and personal snapshots (he also gets emotional talking about Marins' later years), including video footage from Marins' funeral with, yes, footage of the deceased filmmaker in his coffin—something we guarantee no other collector's edition of any other filmmaker has ever included.

Laughter in the face of death

A Seattle psychiatrist allowed his daughter to film his retirement and descent into Alzheimer's in the heartwarming and life affirming 2020 Netflix documentary, **Dick Johnson Is Dead**, which has been released on Blu-ray by The Criterion Collection (UPC#715515267816, \$40). Johnson becomes a genuine movie star in the film as his daughter, Kirsten Johnson, captures everything with a keen sense of humor and openness. They actually stage several 'fake' deaths, with stuntmen, blood packs and the works, and then record themselves staging them, they hold a make-believe funeral, and they also have a marvelous, kitschy depiction of Johnson in heaven, which they shot on a soundstage and again, shoot themselves shooting it. The widowed Johnson (his wife had also succumbed to Alzheimer's) is affable and trusting, willing to go along with whatever his daughter wants, answering every question and going on every adventure. He eventually moves to live with his daughter in New York City as his short-term memory begins a noticeable decline that is generally not in evidence during most of the 91-minute feature. The most important thing to note about the movie is that Kirsten Johnson, inspired by her father on every level, achieves a perfect, welcoming tone that invites every viewer to discard any inhibitions and embrace what the movie has to offer. Sure, it is joyful and touching, but even more importantly, the movie has a great sense of humor, as does everyone involved in its creation.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1. The color transfer is solid and clear, and the 5.1-channel DTS sound has a functional dimensionality. There is an audio track that describes the action ("Dick strolls down a sidewalk toward a corner where a construction worker carries a plank with nails sticking out of one end. As the worker turns, the end of the plank hits Dick. He grabs his neck and blood spurts out as he leans against the mailbox.") and optional English subtitles. Two conversational interviews with Kirsten Johnson—who had previously made the compelling autobiographical documentary compilation, *Cameraperson* (Jun 17)—and others (including Michael Moore), running a total of 48 minutes, discuss the conception of the film and how it was executed, providing a number of insights not only to the movie itself, but to the documentary process. Along with a trailer, there is also an excellent 26-minute interview with sound designer Pete Horner who explains, with examples from the film, the art and techniques of putting sound onto a movie and particularly onto this documentary.

Finally, Kirsten Johnson also supplies an excellent commentary track with editor Nels Bangerter and sound recordist Judy Karp, as they reminisce about the shoot, reveal the various cheats and talk about the stress and the serendipity that the project created. The father was in fact further along in his illness than the movie makes you believe, and it continued to progress, of course, as they staged their make-believe scenes, in which one of the primary challenges was maintaining focus. "Dementia is like an actor who does many takes," she explains, but hitting marks was an insurmountable challenge. "I think I knew that I needed to laugh moving forward and I was trying to figure out how and I was sort of in denial about what was already happening to my father. I was in denial that dementia was coming for him. The primary source of this film is need. I needed to not lose my father in the same way I had lost my mother. I needed to laugh about it. And I needed the presence of friends who were willing to try to make something with me, and they all did."

Roddenberry pilot

Brent Spiner's character on **Star Trek The Next Generation** was preceded and anticipated by a 1974 Gene Roddenberry pilot that did not lead to a series (although it would have been incredible if it had, with the right science-fiction writers behind it) but was broadcast on NBC as a Universal telefilm, **The Questor Tapes**, released by Universal and Kino Lorber Incorporated as a *KL Studio Classics* title (UPC#738329265106, \$25). Set in the present day and initially in California, Robert Foxworth plays an android developed by a consortium led by John Vernon, with Mike Farrell as the gifted engineer who puts the robot together, following partially damaged instructions left by the enigmatic scientist who originally designed it, and then disappeared. When Foxworth's character achieves sentience, he and Farrell's character escape the lab to search for the original scientist, with Vernon's character leading the chase to find them and haul them back in. Dana Wynter has an appealing part as a British aristocrat who helps the two heroes and gives them leads to locate the other scientist. **Star Trek** alumni Majel Barrett and Walter Koenig have bit parts, as does Lew Ayres. Running 100 minutes, the show is a reasonably entertaining science-fiction thriller, capturing the essence of the dynamics between man and machine that Spiner's journey would later elaborate upon (the performances also seem like they were just getting warmed up, but had plenty of room for meaningful growth). Although the story is complete—they find the scientist and get their basic questions answered—it is clear that many more penetrating and stimulating ideas and concepts could have been explored in an equally entertaining manner. Since that was not to be, however, the show, which was nicely directed by Richard A. Colla (he always fills the backgrounds of scenes with activity so that the presentation rarely has a canned TV feel to it), stands on its own as one of Roddenberry's better pilots, a worthwhile blend of thought and action.

The full screen color picture has some fleeting wear, but is generally in very nice condition, with bright hues and accurate fleshtones, and there are some great, classic special effects by Albert Whitlock. The musical score, by Gil Mellé, is exceptionally abstract and highly pleasing, encouraging one to raise the volume on the nicely delivered monophonic audio track. There are optional English subtitles and two trailers. Roddenberry expert Gary Gerani provides a satisfying commentary. He does reiterate the action on the screen here and there, but only as a jumping off point to note how it relates to other Roddenberry efforts, as well as other tales about androids from the Sixties and Seventies. He provides backgrounds for the cast and the crew, reads excerpts from the show's novelization (written by D.C. Fontana) and shares an admiration for the show's themes and intricacies.

Succession succeeds

Never overstaying its welcome, the outstanding television drama is wrapped up with the Warner Bros. HBO release, **Succession The Fourth and Final Season** (UPC#883929813407, \$25). Originally broadcast in 2023, the story finally lives up to its title, as expected. If you are at all interested in the show then you probably already know this, but a well established character dies in one of the episodes. What you may not know is that it is one of the most incredible episodes we have ever seen in any television series ever. Using the show's handheld, documentary-style mise en scene, the episode is an amazing depiction of how people cope with death and grief in a pressured environment, as the emotions of each character swing wildly at first, and then gradually continue to swing but in a calmer and calmer fashion. It is a riveting drama that could not have been achieved without the previous three seasons and episodes in the fourth season that thoroughly establish the psychologies of the characters which could then be stripped away. It is also hysterically funny.

Brian Cox plays the patriarch and head of an enormous communications and entertainment conglomerate. All of the cast members, including Jeremy Strong, Sarah Snook, Nicholas Braun and Matthew Macfadyen, have their moments, but Kieran Culkin, who deservedly won an Emmy, stands out for his profane comments in reaction to the other characters. His timing is amazing. We went back at one point to re-run one of his funniest lines in slow motion. He doesn't just spit the line out. He waits for his character to absorb what the other character has said and then to come up with an exquisite response. In real time it happens in the blink of an eye, but when you step through it, it is a true performance, which is why you end up laughing until your stomach hurts at everything he has to say. Alexander Skarsgård is also featured, coming in as a competing financier.

The program is loaded with marvelous cultural references that don't talk down to you—one character insists on doing *Famous Blue Raincoat* in a karaoke bar—and ironic glimpses of how miserable the gilded lives of the rich and famous can be at times. For all of the convoluted boardroom power plots, however, the story really comes down to what almost any really good story comes down to, and that is the inability of a person to get past the emotional sleights that person experienced as a child, and the complex set of armor and glitches that build up in that person over the course of time to compensate. Not only is that dynamic present in each of the primary characters in the show, but it is brilliantly integrated, again and again, with the plot turns, which, by extension and the show's obvious parallels to reality, imply that the fate of America and the entire world are at the mercy of those very same quirks.

The program runs through ten episodes on three platters for 651 minutes, and each platter has a 'Play All' option. The chapter encoding brings you reliably past the opening credits. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and an accommodation for 16:9 enhancement. The color transfer is fine, as the film's faux makeshift look never impinges on the stability

and consistency of its lighting. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has a good surround mix and a reasonable amount of power. There are optional English subtitles, 48 minutes of brief promotional featurettes for the episodes and 23 minutes of promotional featurettes about the characters, which enable the viewer to relive specific highlights in the performances all over again.

To imitate one of the latter show's high-charged barrages of recherché cultural similes, if **Succession** is The Beatles, then **Billions** is Creedence Clearwater Revival. The series is great, sure, but it's not on the same level of great. Nevertheless, the Showtime Entertainment release, **Billions The Final Season** (UPC#191329258101, \$34), is a dazzling, densely layered tale of triple and quadruple crosses dissecting corporate and political power in an immensely entertaining manner. Like **Succession**, the program also stages scenes in actual fancy New York restaurants and lets you savor the dishes they serve, from afar (OMG—Beef Wellington, but with waffles!), and provides various peeks at how the fabulously wealthy live when they aren't busy making more money. We reviewed **Season Six** in Dec 22, which had implanted Corey Stoll as the wealthy head of a New York investment and trading firm, taking Damien Lewis' place from the previous seasons. Lewis did not appear in **Season Six** but does show up in several episodes across final season, as the instigator who is setting several of the trusted associates to Stoll's character against him. Maggie Siff, Asia Kate Dillon and David Constable co-star, with Paul Giamatti as a district attorney bent on preventing Stoll's character from running for the presidency of the United States. If this all sounds a little far fetched, well, it is drawn a tiny bit from current events, but more importantly, it sets the stage for an absolutely wonderful dance of intrigue and multi-dimensional betrayals among dazzlingly sharp characters embodied by very talented performers who are, by now, extremely comfortable in their parts. The final episodes are the glorious pinnacle of spiraling battles of finance and false loyalties, and make a worthy conclusion to what is, in essence, a very entertaining daydream series about money, luxury and power.

Twelve episodes are spread across four platters and run a total of 674 minutes. Each platter has a 'Play All' option. If you need to get caught up before starting the final series, in addition to the recap at the beginning of each episode, the first platter also contains a 4-minute summary of what went on in all of the previous seasons. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1. The image transfer looks great, and the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has a lovely dimensionality and plenty of power. There are optional English subtitles. An 8-minute promotional featurette for earlier seasons also appears on the first platter.

Fun couples

Jessica Chastain plays Tammy Wynette and Michael Shannon plays George Jones in the excellent six-part telefilm, **George & Tammy**, an MTV Entertainment Studios Showtime two-platter release (UPC#810134942271, \$26). Both performances are outstanding, and the 2022-2023 show does not skimp on the music, so the combination of its dual or even quadruple star power (two movie stars playing two country music legends) and the general country-western milieu are irresistible. As for the narrative, it is sort of a **Star Is Born** that goes a step further, with the heroine succumbing to a psychological corrosion just a couple of beats behind her partner. When they first met, Chastain's character was an up and coming singer who was still struggling, while Jones was at the initial pinnacle of his stardom. He recognized her talent as readily as he desired her, and their collaboration not only shot her into a perhaps higher stardom, but brought a second life to his own. The pressures of success, however, exacerbated by existing physical conditions, caused each one to turn to self medication, and the inevitable nibbles of destruction ensue. Still, the ups and downs of their lives make for a terrific drama, and combined with the hit music and the wonderful performances (Shannon ages his character masterfully) make every moment of the program engaging.

Running a total of 310 minutes, the show is based upon a memoir written by their only shared child, Georgette Jones, who also served as producer, and so there are subjective perspectives to such incidents as the over-doses Chastain's character experienced, but on the whole the program probably conveys an accurate, insider's look at what life in a country-western superstar household is like, on both the good days and the bad days. Steve Zahn and Walton Goggins co-star.

Each platter has a 'Play All' option. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The color transfer looks great and the image is smooth and detailed. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound delivers the songs with a full dimensionality and clarity. There is no captioning. 13 minutes of nice interviews with the cast members are also included.

The amazing thing about the eight-part miniseries from 2022, **Pam & Tommy**, a two-platter Lionsgate release (UPC#031398335580, \$15), is how equally sympathetic each and every character is. Running 337 minutes, the series depicts the marriage of TV star Pamela Anderson to rock star Tommy Lee of Mötley Crüe in the mid-Nineties, and how the notorious sex tape that they made for their own private edification came into the public domain. Lily James plays Anderson, Sebastian Stan plays Lee and Seth Rogen plays Rand Gauthier, the disgruntled carpenter who lifted the tape. Taylor Schilling, Nick Offerman, Andrew Dice Clay and Adam Ray are also featured. The narrative was compiled from a number of sources and therefore a number of points of view, so that every character has flaws or even does bad

things (James' character is essentially the most innocent of the figures), but the show is comprehensive enough to explain the logic behind each person's actions, so that even when one of them does something bad, you still can sympathize with where they are coming from. Hence, the show is probably a very accurate depiction of what actually went down, even if places and people are altered here and there. At the same time, it is constantly amusing, riotously funny at times, and offers a fascinating and engaging look not just at the lives of the people involved, but the atmosphere of the era in which they lived and crossed paths.

Each platter has a 'Play All' option. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2:1. The color transfer looks fine and the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound provides an adequate dimensionality to the music and background noises. There are optional English and Spanish subtitles.

Sanditon wrap up

The final wrap up of the Jane Austen spin-off, Sanditon Season Three, has been released as a *Masterpiece* title by PBS Video (UPC#841887-047135, \$35). Basically, the creators took what had been the sketch of a new novel Austin was working on when she passed away and, riding on the crest of *Bridgerton*, created a viable supplement for those who want more and more of the multi-racial erotic costume romance formula. The first season (Apr 21) having been a success, the creators dove into *Season Two* (Jul 22), cutting back substantially on the eroticism but leaving all of the other factors in place. It ended on a cliffhanger, and *Season Three* is essentially a six-episode wrap-up to *Season Two* and the series as a whole. Every episode has more than enough romantic hooks to keep the viewer wanting more, and the finale satiates every anticipation. Rose Williams plays the central heroine, who was about to marry the wrong guy at the end of *Season Two* and gets pulled back into town at the start of *Season Three* before tying the knot (whew!). The leaders of the town plan on demolishing a poorer section to build a large hotel, and a woman who had to fight for her inheritance in the previous season discovers that her challenges are not over. With the exception of an occasional passage of dialog, Austen is long forgotten, but the formula that she helped concoct is in full force and the show, as a whole, is a welcome addition to a somewhat limited (but ever-growing) genre.

Three 54-minute episodes appear on each of two platters, and there is no 'Play All' option. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2:1, and the presentation is fresh and slick. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has a modest dimensionality, and there are optional English subtitles.

Hotel drama

Most TV hotel dramas have generally nice characters with one or two villains to keep the narrative churning. The mix in the British Granada TV series released by Acorn Media as The Grand Complete Collection (UPC#054961807192, \$60) is rather the opposite. There are a couple of nice characters and everybody else is nasty or backbiting or otherwise wicked and underhanded. It makes for some terrific drama, as each episode has a fairly powerful emotional conflict, including suicide, rape, and even murder. Set shortly after the end of World War I in Manchester, Michael Siberry is the hotel's manager, Julia St John is his wife, and Mark McGann is his brother, the two brothers entering into a partnership at the show's beginning to keep the hotel running. McGann's character also lusts after St. John's character, who is frustrated by Siberry's character's focus on the hotel. Stephen Moyer, who would go on to become the hottie vampire in *True Blood*, plays the manager's son, somewhat lost after returning from the war. Usually, the hotel workers in such shows are there for romance and comical relief, and to a certain extent they are, but many of them are very nasty and ignorantly selfish, too. The mix works well and the drama is consistently engaging.

The eight 1997 episodes that comprise the first season appear on the first two platters, while the remaining three platters hold the ten 1998 episodes that comprise the second and final season. Moyer is replaced in the second season by Ifan Meredith, but the character also changes, becoming somewhat wussier than they way Moyer presented him. Despite the alteration, however, the drama remains entertaining, combining the romances and the problems of the hotel's staff with the individual experiences of various guests, although the focus of the story is increasingly shifted to the staff as the episodes advance. Frank Finley appears in a couple of episodes. The second season also sports an increased budget, creating more flexibility with the locations. The dramas become more powerful and more compelling as the show builds to the story's finale. The sixth episode in the second season, in fact, is outstanding, and can be fully rewarding when seen independently of the others, as it is about one of the members of the hotel staff visiting his father and explaining why he has quit, as the events are then presented in flashback. The twist at the end is so emotionally powerful, that one episode is worth the price of the entire collection.

Each episode runs 51 minutes and there is no 'Play All' option, although if you let the episode play through the end credits, the next one starts (chapter skipping messes things up). The full screen picture has a fairly good color transfer, with accurate fleshtones and sharp details. The monophonic sound is fine and there is no captioning. Cast filmographies and a minute-long montage of promotional photos are included on the final platter.

DVD News

CRITERION CORNER: One of this year's Oscar nominees for Best Picture, Justine Triet's *Anatomy of a Fall*, is being released by The Criterion Collection with deleted and alternate scenes with commentary by Triet; an interview with Triet; audition footage with Milo Machado Graner and Antoine Reinartz; and rehearsal footage with Graner and Sandra Huller. The great Senegalese director will receive his due with **Three Revolutionary Films by Ousmane Sembène**, featuring *Xala*, *Emittai*, and *Ceddo*, and will include a conversation between Mahen Bonetti, founder and executive director of the African Film Festival, and film writer Amy Sall and *The Making of Ceddo*, a 1981 documentary by Paulin Soumanou Vieyra. Michael Powell's notorious *Peeping Tom* is being released in 4K format with two audio commentaries, one featuring film scholar Laura Mulvey and one featuring film historian Ian Christie; an introduction by Martin Scorsese; an interview with Thelma Schoonmaker; a documentary about the film's history featuring interviews with Schoonmaker, Scorsese, and actor Carl Boehm; a documentary about screenwriter Leo Marks; and a program on the film's restoration. **A Story of Floating Weeds/Floating Weeds Two Films by Yasujiro Ozu** will feature a commentary for *A Story of Floating Weeds* by Japanese-film historian Donald Richie and for *Floating Weeds* by Roger Ebert. Karyn Kusama's *Girlfight* will have a commentary featuring Kusama and interviews with Kusama, editor Plummy Tucker, and composer Theodore Shapiro.

NEW IN BLU: The following titles were recently issued on Blu-ray— Acid Bath Productions V.12, Karate Ghost 1&2, Mind Melters V.23, Mind Melters V.24, Mind Melters V.25, Mind Melters V.26, Mind Melters V.27, Mind Melters V.28, Mind Melters V.29, Mind Melters V.30, Mind Melters V.31, Sexy Time 8, Slash Mates V.4 (Acid Bath); South of Sanity (All Channel); Fear the Walking Dead The Final Season, V/H/S 85, The Walking Dead Daryl Dixon Season 1 (AMD); Cracking Up (Art); Bulletproof Jesus The Director's Cut (Bayview); Blonde Death (Bleeding Skull); Cherubhead, The Exchange, Flunk Season 1, Flunk Season 2, Flunk Season 3, Hang on to Your Hangers-On, Lockdown Lovers, The Lonely Spirits Variety Hour, The Lonesome Room, The Sleepover, What Goes Around (Bounty); The Marvels, Next Goal Wins (Buena Vista); Bom Loser (Burning Bulb); One Man (Canadian); Candy Land (Candy); Divinity, Gay USA Snapshot of 1970s LGBT Resistance, The Horrible Dr. Hitchcock, The Strangler, Sexmission, Twilight (CAV); Funeral Home, Tenacious D in the Pick of Destiny, The Terminal Man (Cinedigm); The Secret Cities of Mark Kistler (Corgan); The Burned Over District (Cosmic); Afire, Eric Rohmer's Tales of the Four Seasons, Nothing but a Man, The Roaring Twenties (Criterion); The Tune (Deaf Crocodile); Waitress The Musical (Decal); Never Surrender A Galaxy Quest Documentary (ETR); Sex & Broadcasting A Film about WFMU (Factory 25); The Early Films of Asghar Farhadi Dancing in the Dust/Beautiful City (Film Movement); Voodoo Passion (Full Moon); The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz (Fun City); Cellphone, Darkgame, Eating You Alive, Green Ghost and the Masters of the Stone, Lady Buds, Language Arts, Last Words, Later Days, The Laureate, Lee Fields Faithful Man, Man of God, Marcus, The Master Chef Part 1, The Other Me, Séance Games Metaxu (Gravitas); Luanmancer (Indie Rights); Cleaners (Kani); Alaska Seas, The Big Country, Blood on the Sun, Burnt Offerings, Cinema's First Nasty Women, Drifter, Film Noir The Dark Side of Cinema XVII, Godard Cinema and Trailer of a Film That Will Never Exist: Phony Wars, The Golden Coach, Jeanne Moreau Filmmaker Lumiere/The Adolescent/Lillian Gish, King A Filmed Record Montgomery to Memphis, La Syndicaliste, Let's Dance, Leviathan, Madame Dubarry, Man-Eater of Kumaon, Monk Season 4, OSS 117 Five Film Collection, The Road to Shame, Sophie Scholl The Final Days (Kino); Dream Scenario, The Hunger Games The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes, The Night They Came Home, Priscilla (Lionsgate); The Stones & Brian Jones (Magnolia); Doomed Megalopolis (Media Blasters); Anaconda, Hollow Man, I Know What You Did Last Summer, Walk Hard The Dewey Cox Story (Mill Creek); Allonsanfàn, The Black Mass, Black Tight Killers, The Dead One, Fear Is the Key, Goodbye & Amen, Hayseed, The Lukas Moodysson Collection, Mean Guns, Slashing The Final Beginning, Raiders of the Living Dead, The Shaolin Plot, The Sting of Death, The Swiss Conspiracy, The Unscarred, The Warriors (MVD); Faster, Gomer Pyle USMC Complete Series (Paramount); Boystown Complete Series, Some Kind of Wonderful (Reidling); Hypnotic (Relativity); The Three Musketeers Part I D'Artagnan (Samuel Goldwyn); Age of Demons (Saturn's Core); The Groom Wore Spurs, Zedd True Colors (Shoreline); The Luzhyn Defence (Sony); Escobar The Cursed Legacy (Syndicado); Migration, Ticket to Paradise (Universal); Miranda's Victim (Vertical); The Good the Bad and Huckleberry Hound, The Jetsons Meet the Flintstones, Orphan Black Complete Series, Planet Earth III, Rockin' with Judy Jetson, Scooby-Doo and the Ghoul School, Scooby-Doo and the Reluctant Werewolf, Scooby-Doo Meets the Boo Brothers, Smallville The Complete Series, Top Cat and the Beverly Hills Cats, Wonka, Yogi and the Invasion of the Space Bears, Yogi Bear and the Magical Flight of the Spruce Goose, Yogi's Great Escape, You Are Stronger Than You Think with Joel Osteen (Warner); A Creature Was Stirring, Dr. Cheon and the Lost Talisman, The Moon (Well Go); Dogs Don't Wear Pants (Yellow Veil); Beyond the Legend Bigfoot Gone Wild, Bigfoot beyond the Legend, Spoonful of Poison (Zapruderfix)

NEW IN 4K: The following titles were recently released in 4K format— The Marvels, Next Goal Wins (Buena Vista); BloodRayne, The Horrible Dr. Hitchcock, Southern Comfort (CAV); Darkman, Willy's Wonderland (Cinedigm); Little Darlings (Cinematographe); The Heroic Trio/Executioners, McCabe and Mrs. Miller, The Roaring Twenties (Criterion); Fear and Desire, Gunfight at the O.K. Corral, The Last Castle, Leviathan (Kino); The Hunger Games The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes (Lionsgate); Beverly Hills Cop III, Footloose, King Kong, Primal Fear (Paramount); Paprika (Sony); Harriet, Kung Fu Panda, Migration, Ticket to Paradise (Universal); Contagious, Planet Earth III, Wonka (Warner)

An index to the reviews contained in this issue

Table with 4 columns listing various DVD titles and their corresponding review page numbers. Includes titles like 'BDs (A Estranha Hospedaria dos Prazeres)', 'The Draughtsman's Contract', 'Mind (The Mystery of Marie Roget)', and 'Tori and Lokita'.

Current Attractions

The following titles recently appeared for the first time. Includes titles like 'Abernance (Freestyle)', 'Acid Bath Productions V.12 (Acid Bath)', 'Action (Leomark)', etc.

Continuation of the 'Current Attractions' list. Includes titles like 'Dogs Don't Wear Pants (Yellow Veil)', 'Earthquake! (Alpha)', 'Earworm (Gravitas)', etc.

Continuation of the 'Current Attractions' list. Includes titles like 'Sendro (Leomark)', 'Sexy S.W.A.T. Team (Kino)', 'Sight Seers Season 1 (Dreamscape)', etc.

Continuation of the 'Current Attractions' list. Includes titles like 'Meet John Doe (From Criterion)', 'All the Beauty and the Bloodshed (The Runner)', etc.

Continuation of the 'Current Attractions' list. Includes titles like 'Gospel (Dr. Tony Fauci)', 'Nazi Town USA (Craig before the Creek)', etc.

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