

Gallactica continues

There is a wonderful moment at about the halfway point of the three-platter Universal release, **Battlestar Gallactica Season 2.0** (UPC#025-192937521, \$50), when the heroes first uncover the site where their ancestors once gathered, and clever viewers will find themselves raising their hands like school children, bursting to tell the characters the answer, 'I know how to find Earth! I know how to find Earth!' The heroes figure it out for themselves soon enough, but before they can grab a Mapquest printout and be on their way, another ship of humans pops up and soon they are in conflict not only with the bad guys but with one another. No one ever could have predicted how entertaining and intelligent the re-imagined science-fiction series has turned out to be. It has all the action and racy romance you want from such a program, but it is also very clever in its twisted take on our own reality—the villains are monotheistic and the heroes are not—and continuously builds upon its ironies and substitutions (a nonsense word is used for cursing, but it is also a term applied by the characters to lovemaking) to create a highly stimulating and thought-provoking fantasy. Edward James Olmos and Mary McDonnell star as the sometimes oppositional leaders of what appears to be the last of the human race, an armada of spacecraft traveling through the galaxy in search of what some believe to be a mythical home, called Earth. The bad guys are a race of robots and an advanced line of androids (often duplicate copies—there are only 'twelve' models—which gives the actors a chance to really stretch their performance muscles) that were originally created by humans but have since claimed their own independence and are attempting to destroy what remains of their former masters.

Universal has split the show's second season, originally broadcast in 2005 and 2006, into two releases, with the 2006 episodes presented in **Battlestar Gallactica Season 2.5** (UPC#025192983320, \$50). Although **Season 2.0** ends, inevitably, on the first half of a cliffhanger (the only episode from its collection broadcast in 2006), **Season 2.5** replays a version of that episode that is 13 minutes longer than the one in **Season 2.0**, before presenting its conclusion and moving on to the rest of the season. It isn't until **Season 2.5** that the show slows down from its continuing narrative to do several relatively free-standing episodes, but the pause is only temporary as it then gears up again for its unusual finale, another terrific cliffhanger, where time has advanced substantially, the heroes have settled on a planet still far away from Earth, and an armada of bad guys has arrived.

Each release is presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The color transfer is generally workable and sometimes looks terrific, but there are instances where the limitations of television come into play and you can see the grain or the matte lines and what have you. Generally, the image is sharp and does not distract from the entertainment. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound is usually held to basics, but here and there an extra effort is made, bringing a little more zing to the action scenes. Most of the episodes run 43 minutes and all come with optional English and Spanish subtitles. Each release is spread to three platters. **Season 2.0** holds ten episodes and **Season 2.5** holds eleven episodes, including the repeat. Almost every episode in both collections is accompanied by 'podcast' commentaries that were originally broadcast on the Internet, to be coordinated with the initial network presentations of the episodes (the extended opening episode on **Season 2.5** has a standard commentary track). The commentaries are consistently outstanding, as the focus by the various filmmakers who participate is to explain the thought process behind each story or filmmaking decision. Because it is about the process more than the result, it never becomes tiresome, and creates a stimulating invitation to revisit every episode.

Season 2.0 also features 56 minutes of deleted scenes, many of which embellish the characters and their backstories. **Season 2.5** has 41 minutes of deleted scenes, 27 minutes of behind-the-scenes featurettes, and a minute-long montage of the various closing logo gags.

Grindhouse masterpiece

An Italian exploitation film that is too unique and amazing to have been buried in the middle of a triple feature, the 1985 **White Slave**, also known as *Schiave Bianche: Violenze in Amazzonia*, has been issued by Bloody Earth Films as part of **White Slave Collection** (UPC#878746000994, \$15). The DVD is not captioned.

The opening film in the group, running 69 minutes, is a 1954 travelog that was marketed as an exploitation title, *Naked Amazon*. Shot in Brazil, it is a typical but engaging documentary depicting the nightlife of Rio de Janeiro, the mechanics of cattle ranching, and the logistics of traveling into the jungle. There are interludes with various wild animals—a snake gives the group some trouble, as do a jaguar and whatever they call those crocodiles that live in the Amazon—and a female is part of the group, which increases the sense of vulnerability the film attempts to convey and adds to its dynamics effectively. They also visit an indigenous tribe and do not bother to force clothing on them for the cameras, enabling the distributor to market the film in ways that National Geographic could only dream of. The full screen picture has very faded colors and plenty of wear, but is workable. The narration is in English and the monophonic sound is adequate.

The final movie, *Sacrifice of the White Goddess*, from 1995, is a complete waste of time. Shot on videotape, the 69-minute feature looks and feels like a porn film, with ultra-wooden performances to match, except that

there is barely more than a little topless footage here and there. Badly yellowed, the full screen picture may be sharper, but it is hardly better looking than it is on the other films, and the sound, although stronger, still seems muffled. The story is hardly worth discussing, but initially lifts dialog and scenes from *Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, applying them to contemporary college girls, who journey into the Mexican jungle in search of stinking gold. The one survivor, however, is captured by a bizarre tribe, who feed her psychedelics and then worship her as a goddess, the end.

Directed by 'Roy Garrett,' the 89-minute **White Slave** is about another blonde who is captured and indoctrinated by indigenous natives, but what is amazing about the production is that the filmmakers used a real blonde and apparently some real indigenous natives (as extras, at least), to shoot the film. Hence, the natives, many of whom look like they had never appeared in any movie before, are raping and otherwise abusing this gorgeous European chick, who overacts just enough to make the film seem like giddy fun without disrupting its vestiges of believability. She is also topless for almost the entire second half of the film. Beyond the white slavery concept, there is a real plot, as well—the story is being told in flashback (she eventually falls in love with one of the natives, but tragedy ensues)—and plenty of nice cutaways to jungle animals and other exotic footage. As the tale progresses, it gets nuttier and nuttier (she steals the heads of her parents from the natives' trophy display to give them a proper burial), but every plot turn, and even every cut, just become more and more engaging in a guilty pleasure sort of way. The concept of the 'grindhouse' movie has lately been popularized, but where most grindhouse films are too flawed to entertain on more than a sporadic or scene-specific level, this one is everything you hope it could be, from start to finish, a true grindhouse masterpiece. The colors on the full screen picture are a little faded, but workable. The image is a bit smeary, but not to the point of distraction, and the monophonic sound is subdued but coherent.

Life, a movie

An outstanding 78-minute montage film that evokes the arc and experiences of human life, **Body Song**, is available from Eclectic DVD (UPC#022891205494, \$20). The film's musical score, by John Greenwood of Radiohead, does not have the symphonic breadth that such a work really requires, but that is the film's only shortcoming, and it is not a major flaw. The music is fine, it's just a little dull and uninspired in spots. Compiled in 2002, however, entirely from archival footage, the film itself is not only riveting, but deeply moving, as it so thoroughly encompasses the nature of existence that it quickly becomes a starting point of thought, rather than the endpoint that most visual entertainment serves as. The film is also quite graphic, with hardcore images of sex and violence mixed in with the rest, which is why it has not been as widely disseminated as other films of this nature, but that is part of what makes it unique, as it is free of the euphemisms most films must resort to as they strive to convey the meanings of humanity. The shots are drawn from around the world and across more than a century of film. Following a discernible but not strict chronology of age experience, it depicts joys and sorrows, pleasures and pains, the monotony and the excitement, and the mysteries and the simple practicalities of being alive.

The full screen picture varies in quality from clip to clip, but the best-looking segments suggest that the transfer is accurate. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has workable dimensionality, although the bass is a little light. There is a commentary by Greenwood, prompted by an unidentified interviewer, but it focuses exclusively on the score except to reference once in a while what the score is meant to evoke from the images, and there are lengthy gaps in the talk. There is a 7-minute collection of minute-long promo interviews with the director, Simon Pummell, who fills in his background and says a little bit about how he put the film together; a 7-minute short film by Pummell from 2000 entitled *Blinded by the Light*, which ruminates upon perception and the senses from the perspective of a blind man; and a better minute-long film, entitled *How Long Is a Minute*, which explores a viewer's perception of time.

Happy times

An interesting documentary about marijuana use around the world is paired with a typical drug exploitation concoction on the celebratory Sixties double bill from Chiller Theatre and Something Weird Video, **The Acid Eaters/Weed** (UPC#014381359527, \$20). The 1971 *Weed* runs 97 minutes and includes footage of marijuana being harvested on a large scale in Mexico, an interview with a law enforcement official as he strolls through a field of it in the U.S., a look at an evidence holding area and incinerator, a visit to Vietnam and interviews with American soldiers there, visits to other Asian locales, a dissection of a legal case brought against a buyer in America, and other interviews with law enforcement officials, scientists, and enthusiasts. Although the purpose of the program is to explore the general culture of marijuana and not to draw any conclusions, it is by default a worthwhile look at social attitudes in an era that has now past, but continues to resonate in part because of the lingering popularity of the substance the film is indulging.

The 62-minute *Acid Eaters*, from 1968, uses faux New Wave techniques, such as jump cuts and abstract inserts, to color what is otherwise a template piece about nude sunbathing and romantic rivalries among bikers. There is an element of absurdist humor in the program (the heroes meet the devil) that gives it a basic appeal, and nominally, the narrative is advanced because of the use of LSD, but its priorities are with the flesh and not the