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Friday the 4K

The 2009 **Friday the 13th** is not a remake but a sequel to the first film and perhaps the second one. The Paramount and New Line feature has been upgraded to a 4K Blu-ray on two platters by Warner Bros. and Arrow Video (UPC#760137160076, \$50), and as a result, it is the ideal slasher film if you want to have just one in your collection, or to get your friends to jump out of their pants during an evening of frights. Set in the woods surrounding the beyond-cellphone-service lake where the original mayhem began, a group of college students looking to camp out and do naughty things meet appropriate ends with a great deal of screaming and gore. And the 97-minute film goes on from there. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, the image is already slick and crisp because the film has a decent budget—the overabundant production designs are also quite engaging—but the 4K delivery makes the precision of the colors and details all the better, adding directly to the film's atmosphere and excitement. The 5.1-channel DTS sound also packs a terrific punch, enhancing every brief moment that is already designed to scare the bejeezus out of the viewer. With the history of slasher movies guiding every choice the director, Marcus Nispel, makes, the film does not try to upend expectations. Instead, the goal is simply to massage them in an efficient and relentless manner. Constructed with a reliable pace, the killer keeps coming, the kids, when they aren't naked, keep screaming and running the wrong way, or stopping when they ought to keep on running, and blood flies everywhere all at once. If that is what you are looking for, that is what the movie delivers.

The second platter contains a 106-minute version of the film, also presented in 4K, which includes a more leisurely and satisfying coda. Otherwise, one major but redundant sequence, which has a few jumps but no gore, accounts for most of the differences between the two presentations. In this case, the original streamlined feature is better. Otherwise, the picture and sound quality are the same.

Both presentations have optional English subtitles. There is a 29-minute interview with director Nispel going over his approach to the dynamics of the series and the problems he encountered during the production (they had to reshoot quite a bit of footage when it turned out an actress, who was then replaced by another actress, wouldn't do the required nudity—he almost persuaded her, but then something happened that had her screaming and running off the set to her agent); a good 37-minute discussion with writers Mark Swift and Damian Shannon about the film, the crew and how their ideas came to fruition; an excellent 23-minute interview with cinematographer Daniel Pearl talking about the technical aspects of the shoot and sharing anecdotes about his career; an excellent 18-minute appreciation of the film and its remake status; a rewarding 43-minute collection of interviews with the cast and crew during the shoot, behind-the-scene footage, and text cards with trivia about the film and the series; a great 23-minute production featurette focusing specifically on the best kill scenes; a more basic but still enjoyable 11-minute promotional featurette using some of the same material; 35 minutes of thorough and informative cast and crew interviews, and behind-the-scenes footage, again with some repetition of footage from the other supplements; a really fun 12-minute promotional featurette depicting the cast and crew members sharing their own stories about first seeing a **Friday the 13th** film; 8 minutes of enjoyable deleted and alternate scenes that include a prominently placed calendar bearing the titular date; two trailers; fifteen TV commercials (the film initially came out on a **Friday the 13th** in February, so some of the witty spots tie it into Valentine's Day); and a small collection of nice promotional still photos.

Although the interview gave you everything you really needed, Nispel also supplies a good commentary track, describing the production and also discussing the nature of the series and what he wanted to accomplish. He had previous worked on a **Texas Chainsaw Massacre** remake and shot the **Friday the 13th** in Texas to take advantage of his familiarity with the production environment. "One thing you find in Texas a lot is abandoned structures." Much of the film is set in a fancy summer home in the woods, and Nispel let his family stay in it during the production. "It was very, very strange to see your kids vacationing in something that we created a bloodbath in."

He also goes into the reasons that the film is in one way quite predictable even if, in other ways, it is not. "You see the structure is always the same. They venture away from the main group. They go to different places. Similar things happen in all of them. The little false scares. We're building tension. There are a couple of misdirects. There's sex and booze to distract them. So, it's kind of like a ritual that people engage on. You might look at it and say, 'Oh, it's always the same, you know, there's never something new. There's a ritual. Oh, Black guy dies first. Oh, this guy saves the day.' All these tropes that you come to expect. The question is how do you arrange or re-arrange the furniture to keep it somewhat surprising, or you deal with certain expectations, thinking that things would start in a particular way and then the unexpected happens, so you kind of manipulate people by screwing around with their expectations." BTW, this time the Black guy doesn't die first.

Swift and Shannon provide a second commentary, which generally avoids what they covered in their interview, stepping through the decisions that were made, going over what was in the script and what got added, discussing the longer version (they miss the more lyrical conclusion), celebrating the many tropes and references that they included in the script, and lamenting that their follow up script never got made. "It came close a couple times." "All the kills were bigger and more elaborate." "That would have been 'Part Thirteen,' right?" "It would be going to be the thirteenth. It's amazing that, like, the curse of this franchise we couldn't get to 'Thirteen.' The fact that **Halloween** got to thirteen before us really bothers me."

The second platter has just one supplement, an excellent commentary track by horror film enthusiasts Alexandra Heller-Nicholas and Josh Nelson. They rarely reference a specific scene in the film as it plays, and they don't mention the added footage, but they do provide a comprehensive and fascinating critical analysis of the movie, the series and the entire genre, enthusiastically pointing out the ways that the film embraces the joys of its predecessors. Along with including some wonderful, obscure trivia (there is a direct character link to one of the **Transformers** movies), they place the film in the history of horror movies, pointing out several allusions to **Psycho**, and they discuss the various studies that have grown around the popularity of slasher films, such as the 'final girl' theory (the commonalities that most survivors in the films possess) and the similarities in the film to good old fashioned campfire stories. "In a way, complaining about remakes and remake culture, while I understand it from a certain point of view, to dismiss them on the basis that they are remakes shows a lack of understanding about the cyclical nature of horror films, and also the pleasures that come with genre cinema in terms of repetition, telling a story over and over again. One of the things that stood out to me in rewatching the **Friday the 13th** franchise was that keen sense of repetition. One of the things that really stood out about **Friday the 13th** was the sense that it almost adopts the 'singular tale,' the campfire, the folk tale, the urban legend, and that each film is almost like a restaging, a retreading, a retelling, of that tale, with variation, which, in a way, is the pleasure of genre cinema."

Monster trucks

The final act of George Miller's 148-minute **Furiosa A Mad Max Saga**, a Warner Bros. SDS Studio Distribution Services **4K UltraHD** Blu-ray (UPC#883929818174, \$50), runs about 10 minutes, before the start of the 11-minute credit scroll, and could be performed on the bare stage of a community theater. It consists of two people—the heroine, played by Anya Taylor-Joy, and the film's primary villain, played by Chris Hemsworth—alone in the desert, talking to one another. The philosophical value of their conversation will be up to the individual viewer, but it is a challenging way to conclude what is otherwise an impressively excessive action extravaganza, and was surely one of the factors in its boxoffice disappointment. Why not wait and just watch the movie on home video, where you can play and replay the good parts and ignore the rest?

Trucks (Continued)

While the general chronology of events in Miller's **Mad Max** movies are irrelevant beyond their depiction of the gradual deterioration of human civilization, **Furiosa**, technically, depicts the events that led into **Mad Max Fury Road** (Sep 15), and quite likely, by the end of the film, there is a strong desire to dive directly into the latter. In that context, the ending of **Furiosa** just becomes a pause in the action. Set in a post-apocalyptic landscape and shot quite impressively in the Australian desert, Taylor-Joy's character is raised in a relative utopian oasis, and it becomes the goal of her life to return there after she is abducted. Her skills and intelligence allow her to escape the fate awaiting most kidnapped women and she finds herself amid a war between two groups who might be boiled down to an irrepressible force versus an immovable object—a large group of motorcycle nomads laying siege to an even larger group maintaining a fortress in a tall, isolated mesa. There are other groups and fortresses in play, one surrounded by a moat that controls the gasoline and another nestled in some sort of quarry that has access to innumerable weapons. The action comes not just from the attacks on the fortresses, but, as in the other **Mad Max** movies, the attacks on the armored caravans attempting to trade goods by running from one fortress to the other and back. In 4K, these battles and attacks are especially thrilling because even though they are augmented with computer effects, sometimes obvious even in brevity, it is clear that much of the staging is quite real, with big-wheeled monster trucks, larger eighteen-wheelers, motorcycles, and everything in between, including kite contraptions, all subject to crashes and explosions at a moment's notice. The sharp precision of the image and the consistency of the dusty desert colors remove any subliminal impediment from the viewer's observation of the action. With enough plot to keep one interested in the primary characters, that is all that is necessary to remain engaged in the glorious mayhem, whether or not the story is sufficient to justify the concluding dramatic interlude.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The Dolby Atmos sound is superb, delivering quality separation and directional effects from every angle. There is an audio track that describes the action in American ("The tow truck heads directly toward a mountain range, as the bikers flock beside and behind it. The big wheel truck pulls right up a steep slope, but the few bikes following it that try can't make the climb and drop onto their sides or tumble backwards."), another that describes it in British ("Dementus and his men arrive at the escarpment. Dementus puts his foot down and drives the monster truck up the extremely steep slope. Some of the bikers try to do the same but the combination of steep gradient and loose surface proves too much for them, and they fall back."), alternate French, Spanish and Italian audio tracks and 8 subtitling options including English. At one point during the 103 minutes of excellent production featurettes, the camera lingers on a marking board where the requirements for storytelling have been spelled out, and one of those requirements reads, "Character is in the perception of the receiver through the medium of empathy." Ultimately, the film's shortcomings may just come down to Miller's failure to make Hemsworth's character interesting enough, and Hemsworth's failure to sell what was there to the viewer. You see them later in the featurettes delicately circling around the development of his character and can read, from the iceberg-like nature of such featurettes, that they had some problems at nailing down how his character should comport himself. They never really pulled it off, but, as the featurettes re-emphasize, the stunts are so grand—they are thrilling even as you watch them being made in pieces with wires and blue screens—that the story's shortcomings barely matter.

War comes to the USA

A glorification of reporters and news photographers, **Civil War** is a road movie set in an abstract, apocalyptic version of America—think **Walking Dead** without zombies—as four journalists attempt to drive from New York to Washington D.C. via Pittsburgh and West Virginia. In accordance with the road movie format, there are different vignettes along the way, most depicting the effects of war upon the American landscape—think Ukraine, only in your own backyard—anchored by the gradual embellishment of the personalities of the four protagonists. Kirsten Dunst, in an impressive star turn as a famous photojournalist, is the only big name in the cast, which also features Wagner Maura, Cailee Spaeny and Stephen McKinley. There are plenty of action scenes, though none are particularly elaborate until the film's finale—and enough tension, suspense and drama to sustain a basic entertainment through the film's 109-minute running time. While always maintaining a plausible deniability, the 2024 film, directed by Alex Garland, does indeed take potshots at the political climate in which it was conceived. In fact, the film's most potent political statement could well be the 'heroic' detachment with which the journalists view the events surrounding them, their neutrality somehow taken for granted by virtually everyone they meet. That almost seems like more of a fantasy than parts of America fighting against each other.

The film has been released on a two-platter Blu-ray & DVD by Lionsgate (UPC#031398343875, \$40) and is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1. The color transfer looks fine, with the DVD looking almost as crisp as the BD. The Dolby Atmos sound on the BD, however, is fantastic, with many terrific directional effects and plenty of blast power, and the DVD's 5.1-channel Dolby Digital track, while decent, cannot match it. There is an alternate audio track that describes the action ("A soldier carries a rocket launcher to the front of the battle. He exchanges shouts with another soldier, and crouches and aims. A rocket pops from the launcher, ignites and streaks into the corner of the Memorial. A tremendous explosion tears apart the

colonnade. An attack helicopter flies over head through the smoke billowing from the Memorial. It weaves over the Reflecting Pool and banks left in front of the Washington Monument.") and an audio track in Spanish, along with optional English and Spanish subtitles. Along with a trailer, both platters have 57 minutes of promotional featurettes that contain some interesting behind-the-scenes footage, particularly involving the film's stunts.

Touching party

A lovely and moving 96-minute Mexican film about a family birthday party for a dying man, **Tótem**, has been released on Blu-ray by Janus Films, Sideshow and The Criterion Channel (UPC#715515302319, \$30). The film's dramatic verisimilitude is tantamount to a documentary. At least that is how it feels, as it is centered on the man's pre-adolescent daughter, who knows that he is dying and is doing her best to cope with it, as is the rest of his family. Presented in a squared, full screen format (the image transfer is impeccable), the camera angles are tight, hugging the characters and catching no more than glimpses of what is going on around them, but by the time the film is halfway through and the party actually starts, you feel like you belong there with them. It is the clarity of the characterizations combined with the simple curiosity of what will occur next that keeps the viewer locked onto every frame of the film from beginning to end. Additionally, the 5.1-channel DTS sound mix is outstanding, particularly the surround effects. There is actually a bang on a door within the film's first few minutes that will make you jump out of your seat because it sounds so real, and throughout the film the vividness of the sound effects are yet another reason why you feel you are living within the movie instead of watching it. As for the performances, like we said, it is hard to believe that the movie is a drama and not a documentary. Mateo García Elizondo, who plays the father, appear genuinely wracked with a physical ailment that has wasted away part of his body, and Naima Senties, who plays the young girl, is constantly in the moment with her eyes. The 2023 production is in Spanish with optional English subtitles, and comes with a trailer and a good 16-minute interview with director Lila Avilés, although she makes it sound like the film was a lot more easy to make than most filmmakers would believe.

Marvelous Mastermind

A late entry in the classic martial arts features from Shaw Bros., the 1979 **To Kill a Mastermind**, released on Blu-ray by Celestial Pictures and 88 Films (UPC#760137158646, \$35), is nevertheless a marvelous action feature, with a plot that calls to mind the cliffhanger serials of Republic Pictures. A group of eight villains receive their instructions from a mysterious 'mastermind,' but one of the villains is apparently a good guy, and the 99-minute feature becomes a contest between the other good guys and the bad guys to set ambushes with false information and knock off the villains until they flush out the head honcho. Some of the villains wear cool masks, like Mexican wrestlers (or, you keep expecting them to break out in *Rock and Roll All Nite*). The sets are beautiful and the picture transfer, letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, is as fresh as can be. The fighting is constant and imaginative, sometimes shifting into slow motion, with the villains having swords and other weapons hidden all over their outfits for emergencies. It is difficult to say if a frame or two has been removed from some of the gore shots or if that was how the original film was edited, but there is still plenty of blood. With a plot that is at the same time complicated and very easy to follow, flurries of action interspersed with lovely close-ups of the cast members, and wonderfully colorful and evocative sets, the film, directed by Sun Chung, is virtually impossible to dislike. The image is sharp and spotless and the monophonic sound is reasonably clear. The film is in Mandarin and comes with optional English subtitles, along with a nice-looking 40-second montage of promotional stills.

Another Damiano Damiani masterpiece, and more

We have been continually astonished to discover the amazing range and depth of exceptional films made by Italian director Damiano Damiani and how he ought to be considered one of Italy's greatest directors, right up there with Federico Fellini and Sergio Leone. We have long been familiar with Damiani's **A Bullet for the General** (Jul 12), which is one of the greatest Spaghetti westerns, and later we discovered the mob thriller, **How to Kill a Judge** (Nov 09), which quickly entered our list of favorite films of all time. **How to Kill a Judge** was also included on the three-platter set from Radiance Films entitled **Cosa Nostra** (Aug 23), along with another Mafioso masterpiece, **The Day of the Owl**, and a darned good prison drama, **The Case Is Closed, Forget It**. His brilliant supernatural thriller, **The Witch**, part of Arrow Video's **Gothic Fantastico: Four Italian Tales Of Terror** four-platter anthology (Nov 22), was a masterpiece, as well, and still another masterpiece, the incredible sniper thriller, **Goodbye & Amen**, was released by Radiance (Mar 24).

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Now Radiance has released yet another astounding Damiani crime film on Blu-ray, **A Man on His Knees** (UPC#760137161905, \$40), which we would rate as being nearly as good as **How to Kill a Judge**, and a great deal more humanistic. Indeed, the 1979 film, set in Palermo, actually calls to mind **The Bicycle Thieves** as much as it does a mob thriller. The performances in the film are uniformly excellent. Giuliano Gemma portrays a street vendor whose stand is unfortunately located near the scene of a high profile kidnapping. As the retributions for the kidnapping begin to accumulate, he discovers that he is on the list for assassination because the kidnappers had been among his daily customers. Eleonora Giorgi, who calls to mind Dominique Sanda, plays his sympathetic, cool-headed wife. Michele Placido, Ettore Manni, and Damiani regular Tano Cimarosa are also featured. To say much more about the plot of the 110-minute film would spoil the wonderful surprises the drama holds in store, but it is nevertheless a highly repeatable journey through desperation and necessity, as gripping as it is realistic. Most of Damiani's films have a strong political component. The politics in **A Man on His Knees** are at once less overt while at the same time are the most compelling of all—that the wealthy class will always dominate those in poverty, and any sort of attempt to obviate this imbalance ultimately changes nothing.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The color transfer is beautiful, despite its grain and urban tonality. One tense sequence momentarily has a distracting vertical line running through it, but otherwise the source material is free of damage. Giorgi's blue eyes are especially striking. The monophonic sound is clear and strong, aiding the impact of Franco Mannino's sparse but effective musical score. The film is in Italian with optional English subtitles and comes with a trailer; a good 24-minute summary of Damiani's career and the film's strengths; a very nice 9-minute interview with Gemma; a wonderful 9-minute interview with Cimarosa about the films he made with Damiani (it is an outdoor interview and the audio has some annoying buffeting); and an interesting 21-minute interview with assistant director Mino Giarda who talks about his collaborations with Damiani on a number of films.

The movie excited us so much that rather than waiting to see if they would eventually return on Blu-ray, we ran to obtain several DVD releases of other Damiani features.

Stunningly good, and entertaining as all hell, Damiani's 1970 **The Most Beautiful Wife**, a NoShame Entertainment release (UPC#882853003892), remains decades ahead of its time. The film is set in a rural Sicilian coastal city. Omella Muti, in her first screen role, is the young teenaged daughter of a sharecropper, wise beyond her years, and Alessio Orano is a wealthy Mafiosi, in his twenties, who is very smart in a lot of things but ultimately no match for her. They are initially attracted to one another and even become engaged, but the film is not a romance. Rather, it is explicitly and uniquely about the power struggle that ensues between them as they try to come to terms with the prospect of spending their lives bonded in holy matrimony (along with everything else, there is a scene with a priest offering his advice near the end that had us rolling on the floor in laughter).

While there are undoubtedly a group of Sixteenth Century poets who would disagree, it has been postulated that modern love was defined by motion pictures, and that it became a feedback loop. People learned how to fall in love from the movies, and then the movies, eager to please, showed more people falling in love that way. It is in defiance of this well imbedded pattern that **The Most Beautiful Wife** is so brilliantly conceived. Technically, it is inspired by a true story about a case of rape that overturned the conventions of Italian justice, but what Damiani actually created is a perfectly articulated metaphor for the realities of love. Running 109 minutes, and pitched to a beautiful and exciting Ennio Morricone musical score, the film is superbly staged, using the mafia environment—the older gangsters are temporarily out of commission and so Orano's character is running things—to sustain a crisp, energized blend of crime and suspense. The performances are gripping, and the stars are as appealing as they are believable. Superficially, the film is addressing the concerns of the 'MeToo' movement long before that movement came to fruition, but in fact it is deeper, richer and in all probability more prescient than even that measure. It is at once a movie you would want to share with your own teenaged children, and at the same time see something different in it yourself not only every time you watch it, but with every year of life experience that you accumulate.

Cimarosa appears in the film as the girl's father. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The initial reel may be a bit weaker, but for the most part, the color transfer looks very fresh and the picture is sharp and free of wear. In other words, the transfer does justice to the film. There is an English language track that works fine, but the cadence and tone of the Italian track is critical to the heart of the drama and is definitely preferable. The film opens with a minute-long introduction by Damiani, though even he doesn't seem to be entirely aware of the masterpiece he created. There are optional English subtitles, a trailer, and a good 46-minute collection of interviews with various members of the cast and the crew.

A really great film that is unfortunately a really terrible disc, **Confessions of a Police Captain**, from Filmrise (UPC#637801682236, \$20), stars Franco Nero as a "prosecutor" in Palermo (if you ever visit Palermo after seeing the film, you will not look at the office buildings there the same way you look at them in every other world city...) and Martin Balsam as a police captain. While they are ostensibly collaborating in their efforts to eliminate corruption, political influences cause them to take different paths and they end up opposing one another. Both actors give terrific performances and the film would be another outstanding examination of Sicilian politics by Damiani ("You two are on the same side. You, the police. Him, the gangster. And it's money that gives the orders."). However, not only is the 97-minute presentation intrusively cropped to be presented in a squared full screen format, but colors are very pale and the image often slips or otherwise exhibits uncorrected flaws from a bad videotape transfer. It's a shame, because the 1971 movie, presented in English (the

intricacies of the Italian justice system are also Anglicized for the film), deserves better. There is closed captioning, but no subtitles. The monophonic sound is adequate when it comes to conveying the nice Riz Ortolani musical score.

After a Gatling gun's worth of serious Spaghetti westerns shot up the Sixties, the genre finally began to run out of bullets and in the early Seventies, while not exclusively, it turned to humor to stretch out what ammunition it had left. Due to the accentuation of clowning and other tomfoolery, the films were, by and large, not as awesome as the standard Spaghetti action features, but some fans still responded to their quirky stories and clownish performances, even though comedy in one culture often has a difficult time amusing other cultures. The biggest and indeed founding star of the 'Spaghetti western comedy' was Terence Hill and in 1975, Damiani made a comedy western with Hill, shooting in America, Spain and Italy, **A Genius, Two Partners and a Dupe**, which is available from Wham!USA (UPC#018619960677, \$25). As one might expect, the story is disjointed and the performances are broad or otherwise unserious, but that said, the film does have several notable charms, not the least of which is the impressively composed cinematography. The widescreen framing, letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 without 16:9 enhancement, is almost always strikingly balanced and framed, so that regardless of what silliness is occurring on the screen, one can be captivated simply by where the characters are appearing in the relationship to their surroundings. In other words, even when Damiani is swilling in the dregs of cinema, his sense of style is refreshing enough to hold a viewer's attention and give the cast a chance to endear themselves.

Running 117 minutes, the plot is easy enough to follow after the first half hour or so sets up all of the characters and gets things moving. Hill and his compatriots, played by Robert Charlebois and the cute French actress, Miou-Miou, plan to rob money from an army fort by having Charlebois's character impersonate a colonel. In a nice surprise, Patrick McGoohan plays the fort's prissy major, who sees through the initial plot, but not the several layers of counterplots that some of the conspirators have concocted—not telling their ostensible partners until they have to. Klaus Kinski also appears in an early sequence, as a supposed quick shooter who is no match for Hill's seemingly magical gun skills. While off putting at first, once the story really gets underway, the slapstick, as it is advancing the plot, is less alienating, and once in a while, something is actually funny, even for viewers with refined tastes. Some of the stunts are invigorating and Hill, with his twinkle, is often difficult to resist. The film is definitely not for everyone, but it will appeal to more than just diehard fans.

The source material is uneven. Colors are okay some of the time, and blander or paler at other times. The image is always soft, but is at times even more blurry or otherwise mildly distorted. And there are speckles and scratches now and then. There is a Morricone musical score, but like the movie itself, it will definitely be an acquired taste, although we have to say that while we watched the movie this morning, and we're writing this review at night, the damned tune is still running through our noggin. Morricone also incorporates popular classical tropes, from Gioachino Rossini's theme to the **Lone Ranger**, to a J.S. Bach fugue, and he lampoons his own music for the **Dollars** films at another point. The film is presented in English. It is hard to tell if McGoohan dubbed his own voice or not. The dialog retains his unique cadence, but it seems too high pitched to actually be him. The same is true of Kinski. The disc has no captioning and comes with text profiles of Damiani and the cast.

We would be remiss if we did not include Damiani's only foray into Hollywood, the nasty 1982 horror feature produced by Dino De Laurentiis, **Amitville II: The Possession**, a two-sided DVD released by MGM Home Entertainment (UPC#027616909381). The film is as much a riff on **The Exorcist** as it is on the first **Amitville Horror** film. In the first two-thirds of the movie, a family with issues moves into the haunted house from the first movie and immediately sees their repressed emotions brought to the surface, from abusive behavior by the father (a nice turn by Burt Young), who has no compunction about hitting even the youngest kids, as well as smacking around his wife (another nice turn, by Rutanya Alda), to an incestuous relationship between the eldest brother and sister. The eldest brother eventually massacres the family, but that is because there is a demon inside of him, and in the final third of the 104-minute feature, a priest played by top-billed James Olson, combating elaborate makeup effects, attempts to rescue the boy's soul.

Up to a point, the film could just as easily be taking place in Italy instead of America, particularly during the family dinner scene, which is almost entirely an Italian spread, surrounding a nice slab of roast beef. While Olson's character does come into conflict with the church's authorities, who are more interested in protecting their reputation than in helping the boy, for the most part Damiani ignores his favorite political themes and concentrates on standard battles of spiritual power, delivering the script and its frights with a viable efficiency. His lack of restraint is often noticeable, allowing the characters to really go to town, even if it some of it appears to have been trimmed down during the editing—the actual massacre happens in flashes. Nevertheless, it is quite a gnarly little movie, particularly if you just take it for the Halloween treat it is designed to deliver.

The film is letterboxed on one side, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback, and is cropped in a squared full screen format on the other side, losing picture information on the sides of the image and gaining nothing on the top or the bottom in comparison to the letterboxed version. The cropped version is fairly pointless. On both, the color transfer is fresh and hues are solid, adding to the film's entertainment. There is an accomplished Lalo Schifrin musical score (even though he lifts from the opening of *Ride of the Valkyries* a couple of times), and generally, the monophonic sound is solidly delivered. There are optional English subtitles and a trailer.

The uniqueness of Japanese ghost stories

It has long been natural and even axiomatic to compare samurai films with westerns, forgetting that westerns are set in just a handful of decades during the birth of technology, while samurai films can take place several centuries earlier and anytime in between. The point is that while samurai films and westerns often have the same themes—which can usually be boiled down to individual men with limited resources fending for themselves against adversity—the cultural placement of these stories are strikingly dissimilar, even to the point of motion picture interpretations. No Japanese wide-screen samurai film consistently places the protagonist as a figure overwhelmed by a sweeping natural environment that underscores the creation of the Earth itself, and no widescreen western has ever been presented with intensely symmetrical image compositions that underscore the hierarchical social structure also being reinforced by the architecture of everything from the grandest castles to the crummiest shacks. And if you think that westerns are different from samurai films, wait till you get to ghost stories, which is ostensibly a genre that translates directly to American viewers but is instead even more alien than a Japanese freeway sign. It is because these films are so incredibly unique in comparison to what viewers are used to that they take on an attraction that is in effect separate from their content. The more movies in general that you have seen, the more a childlike glee comes to you as you watch Japanese ghost movies, because they are so different.

And just in time for Halloween, three wonderful Daiei Studio films of this ilk have been collected on a three-platter Blu-ray set by Radiance Films, **Daiei Gothic** (UPC#760137164609, \$80). All three films are in Japanese with optional English subtitles, and all three are letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, with reasonably clean monophonic audio tracks. All three come with trailers. On all three films, the color transfers are just plain gorgeous, with smooth fleshtones and intricately detailed hues. And thanks to the accuracy of the image transfer, the diaphanous fabric utilized within interiors in the place of walls, particularly around the bedrooms, in each of three movies, is given greater clarity and sharpness, so that the foreboding effect when a character is seen passing behind the fabric brings not just atmosphere to the films, but goosepimples to your arms.

A good hearted samurai played by Kazuo Hasegawa, struggling as an umbrella maker to maintain a home with his wife because he will not bribe or flatter lords in order to secure a retainer, attracts the attentions of the daughter of one such lord, who then enlists the samurai's unscrupulous companions to eliminate the wife in the very entertaining 1959 *The Ghost of Yotsuya*. The film's title card drips in blood, but most of the 83-minute film is about the gradual buildup to the tragedy, with the supernatural, and the gore, not appearing until the final act. Nevertheless, the film, directed by Kenji Misumi, is readily involving, with appealing characters and beautifully blended sets and locations, and it also makes exceptional use, from beginning to end, of rain, with the tactile splatters warning the viewer up, as it were, for more abstract terrors to come. Also featured is a 20-minute appreciation of the film and other adaptations of the story (another film from the same source tale, directed by Nobuo Nakagawa, also entered theaters on the same day—yes, the same day—with the same Japanese title, *Yotsuya Kaidan*, in 1959); and a 22-minute piece that delves further into the story serving as the basis for the film, and how adaptations have stretched from the stage to anime.

A lovely romance with (literally) haunting images, *The Snow Woman*, from 1968, is about a demon who falls in love with a sculptor and takes on a human form to be with him and bear his child. Running 80 minutes, there is a plot device involving an evil lord and a sculpture contest to move the story along, but what makes the film so captivating is its manifestation and exploration of the ethereal soul, and how love is a greater force than any evil. Directed by Tokuzō Tanaka, the blend of soundstage sets and locations is exquisite and the metaphorical power of every image (just as the sculptor is creating a representation of life and spirit from a tree trunk, so is the film doing the same in depicting the sculpting process) is both stimulating and compelling, while the beauty of the movie's images consistently reinforce the beauty of its emotional discoveries. There is a 16-minute analysis of the film's folktale themes and a fascinating 7-minute biography of the American immigrant author of the story the film is based upon, Lafcadio Hearn.

Even the plot lines in Satsuo Yamamoto's 1968 *The Bride from Hades* drift off into the netherworld, as the 89-minute film starts out being about one thing—the third son is being pressured by his wealthy family to marry the fiancée of his lately departed older brother—then changes into something else—the son teaches in an impoverished area of a small village and his goodness impresses two ghosts (a young courtesan and her maid, the latter acting more like her manager) so much that they want him to die and join them in the afterlife—before switching once more to the story's conclusion—the teacher's alcoholic helper and his wife scheme to get money from the ghosts in exchange for betraying him, but then let their greed get the best of them. Sure, on the one hand, the components of popular supernatural stories are all there—the ghosts move about like the heroine in Jean Cocteau's **Beauty and the Beast**, and fade in an out with the simplest of double exposures that hearken back to the experiments of Georges Méliès—and the film creates a readily intriguing conundrum—won't the teacher's existence actually be more rewarding if he dies than if he lives, even if his community loses in the process? The human nature the film depicts is universal, from avarice and stupidity to happiness and longing, but on the other hand, it is a very strange, very weird movie that will confound as many viewers as it beguiles, at least on this side of the Pacific. Cinematically, the movie has the elegant compositional formalities that have us drooling over any Japanese movie regardless of content, and the plain eeriness of the film had us spellbound, but it depicts an entirely different world and set of aesthetic values than what most viewers are accustomed to, so much so that some viewers will find it more strange than disturbing.

The film's sound mix is exceptional and well worth amplifying. There is an 18-minute appreciation of the film and its genre trappings. Japanese film expert Jasper Smart, provides a busy commentary track, going over the backgrounds of the cast and crew, and throwing in amusing asides now and then, and also talking about Japanese horror traditions. However, for the most part, the talk is rather dry, rarely delving much into the film itself, and will only be of interest to those who want to learn more about the Japanese film industry.

Japan's best known ghost movie, if you don't count **Throne of Blood**, is Kenji Mizoguchi's 1953 masterpiece, **Ugetsu**, which is available on Blu-ray from Criterion (UPC#715515198516, \$40). It is a great deal more complex and resonant than the **Daiei Gothic** films, even though it has some distinct parallels to *The Bride from Hades* (they had the same folktale source), and the ghosts within it are only part of its elaborate narrative, which follows the lives of two farmers (one also has a thriving pottery business) and their wives when a civil war disrupts their land. Running just 97 minutes, the Daiei production still manages to delve so richly into the fate of each character that it conveys the feel of a thick novel, but at the same time that it spins its detailed human stories, it also presents, quite compellingly, a clear allegory of Japan's wartime and post-war experience, with the ghosts representing the soul of Japan itself.

Machiko Kyo, Masayuki Mori, Kinuyo Tanaka and Sakae Ozawa star. The squared full screen black-and-white picture is in excellent condition, so that the fogbound and smoke-filled images remain stable enough to suggest the presence of the ethereal and not the damages of wear and limited production resources. Even when the fog clears, the image is never slick or glossy, but it is free of evident damage and consistently stable and solid. The monophonic sound is also relatively clean and stable. We reviewed Criterion's DVD in May 09, and in comparison the BD is much cleaner and sharper, and the sound is also fresher. The film is in Japanese with optional English subtitles. The DVD's special features have been carried over, including two trailers, 31 minutes of interviews with crewmembers from the film and a 14-minute assessment of the film's accomplishments, as well as an impressive 150-minute oral history of Mizoguchi's career, *Kenji Mizoguchi The Life of a Film Director*, shot by a Japanese crew in 1975, when many of Mizoguchi's collaborators were still around. The piece has just a handful of clips from his films, but includes a lot of archival photos as well as visits to the places where he lived and worked, and many, many interviews, including one with Tanaka, which breaks through the normal showbiz speak to genuinely ponder the nature and scope of her relationship with Mizoguchi.

Also carried over from the DVD is a commentary by Japanese film expert Tony Rayns. In marked contrast to Smart's commentary on *Bride from Hades*, Rayns delivers an outstanding commentary on **Ugetsu**, going over Mizoguchi's career but also exploring and illuminating every nook and cranny of the film itself. "This is a rather lavish recreation of a small town in the late Sixteenth Century. Again, very characteristic of Mizoguchi's very careful, almost obsessively detailed recreation of its historical past. As you can see, although this was not a huge budgeted film, he was able to command the resources of the Daiei Studio to produce a very large crowd of costumed extras. And these are not rhubarbing, vacuous extras, these are extras who have been very carefully directed and given very precise instructions as to how they are to behave, what they are to do, how they are to move, and so on. All them, you will notice, are also very individually costumed, all of which I think is testimony to Mizoguchi's determination to recreate a vanished, past era."

An anthology of ghost stories packed into a single film, Masaki Kobayashi's 1965 **Kwaidan**, is also available on Blu-ray from The Criterion Collection (UPC#7155-15158916, \$40). Running 183 minutes, the movie has four distinctively presented stories (all based upon tales collected by Hearn), all set in different places and eras, and has an Intermission between the middle two stories. In the first, a samurai regrets leaving his wife to marry another woman and advance his career, but when he returns to his previous home, she is there waiting for him, just as sweet as ever. In the second story, a woodcutter is rescued from a blizzard by a ghost who implores him not to tell how he survived (specifically, it is another adaptation of the same story that served as the source for *The Snow Woman*). He then meets and marries a woman who looks exactly like the ghost, and everything is fine until he decides to share his secret with her. In the third story, a blind monk is asked each night to recite an epic poem about a sea battle that occurred near the monastery, and the other monks panic when they realize that what he describes as a royal court where he is brought to perform is actually a decrepit graveyard. In the final tale, a samurai guarding a palace is confronted by an apparent phantom. In each story, an alternate interpretation to the supernatural—that the protagonist has gone mad—is readily apparent.

The film is an acquired taste and will not be appealing to impatient viewers. Kobayashi's approach to every story is methodical and deliberate. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.4:1, the image compositions and staging are consistently striking, and are enhanced further by the disc's lovely color transfer. Much of the settings are artificial in appearance, but Kobayashi freely cuts between artifice and actual locations or more realistically designed sets. As a result, however, each tale takes on an air of abstraction, which is furthered by Toru Takemitsu's distinctive minimalist musical score, and while there can seem to be a lot going on at times—there is even a depiction of the grand sea battle, and there are plenty of ghosts in the other stories—the film is clearly intended as a cerebral and not a visceral entertainment. In a direct comparison of how the *Snow Woman* story is told, the **Kwaidan** version is certainly captivating visually and has plenty of intrigue, but the Tokuzō Tanaka version is a true crowd pleaser—still evocative, but more viscerally and emotionally engaging.

The film is in Japanese with optional English subtitles. The monophonic audio is solid, adding greatly to the appeal of the score. While sounds are sparse in passages, there are never significantly distracting flaws to countermand the intentions of the silence. Criterion's DVD (Dec 00) ran 161 minutes, so the Blu-ray is a substantially new release, not only looking nicer and sharper, but adding more footage to each of the stories. There are three trailers; a great 15-minute interview with Kobayashi from 1993 talking about the financial struggle he endured to complete the film; an interesting 22-minute interview with assistant director Kiyoshi Ogasawara, who talks about how Kobayashi prepared his films and his work habits, and about restoring the 183-minute version of the film; and a good 17-minute profile of Hearn and his writings, which were often frowned upon by western critics ("This is just the story of folklore in the modern world. We're a lot more comfortable with cultural transmission, with the give and take. Kobayashi's **Kwaidan** [is] a sort of further translation back into Japanese.")

Japanese film expert Stephen Prince provides a very good commentary track, basically because he has breathing room to thoroughly break down the images and their meanings, while still finding room to go over Kobayashi's career and talk about other odds and ends, such as how the Japanese told time before clocks were introduced (there is a clock in the final film). He explains how the film's style is based upon Japanese scroll paintings, and he discusses the nature of Japanese 'horror.' "These are not horror stories in the modern or western sense, but instead are brief tales of odd events or encounters with ghosts or spirits. The stories mostly do not have a psychological focus, nor do they contain a moral lesson the way Noh drama does. Instead, the focus is on the strange or uncanny, and because the stories are not really about personality or morality, Kobayashi must move in a different direction here from where he usually has been as a dramatist, so he goes into aesthetic tradition and into an avant-garde approach to picture and sound, in order to evoke the uncanny."

Japanese series origin

Three Japanese crime films directed by Teruo Ishii, which contain the same characters played by the same stars, but are very different from each other, are combined on the two-platter Eureka! *The Masters of Cinema* Blu-ray, **Prison Walls: Abashiri Prison I-III** (UPC#760137152989, \$60). All three Toei films are in Japanese with optional English subtitles and are letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. All three have really nice, cool jazz musical scores (well, the same score, actually) that are effectively delivered on the solid monophonic audio tracks. All three are accompanied by trailers.

The 1965 *Abashiri Prison* begins with a batch of new inmates arriving at the northern prison, including the hero, a good-hearted, honorable criminal who has been ill treated by fate, played by Ken Takakura. The first part of the film establishes the various characters in the group (they sleep with more than a dozen to a cell) and depicts the daily life in the prison, which includes working on a logging operation, as some begin planning an escape. While the hero wants nothing to do with breaking out, he gets dragged along anyway, and in the final third of the film, which has several thrilling action sequences, he is chained to another prisoner and running away from the authorities in very heavy snow. The 91-minute film is wonderfully nuanced and admirably detailed, so that by the time the action gets into gear you have a rich appreciation of the personalities involved and what is really at stake. It is a tremendously enjoyable feature.

The black-and-white picture is in excellent condition and, as is so often the case with Japanese genre films, the cinematography is meticulously composed, adding to the movie's pleasures. Japanese film expert Tom Mes provides a basic but informative commentary track, speaking at length about the backgrounds and careers of the different members of the cast and the crew, and going over the basics of the film's production. Through the fortuitous timing of the marketplace and the talent, the movie would spawn more than a dozen sequels and remakes, all starring Takakura and hardly any having anything more to do with prisons, dovetailing instead onto the rise of Yakuza movies.

The second film on the platter, *Abashiri Prison II*, is in color and, as mentioned, has nothing whatsoever to do with being in prison. It is about the aftermath of a jewel robbery, with Takakura's character, out looking for a job after having served his sentence, coming into the possession of a gizmo holding some of the jewels. What is clever about the 1965 film is that other cast members from the first movie, all out of jail now, also show up as the 87-minute program progresses, often as a surprise. Hence, the film works best when watched immediately after the preceding feature. While the film has no sequence that is thrilling as one of the action scenes in the first movie—and, contrary to the impeccable logic of the first film's narrative, it has quite a few *deus ex machina* moments—one becomes so invested in the characters that so long as they are trying to survive and duck the mobsters who are chasing them, you are more than happy to savor the pleasures of the individual scenes and take in whatever the narrative has in store.

Shot on location, the colors look fine but the cinematography often has a grimy, realistic feel. Japanese film enthusiast Chris Poggiali supplies a commentary that is similarly thorough in comparison to Mes's talk, but tends a little more to digress into descriptions of other films. He speaks in detail about the initial releases of the films in the United States and points out that Ishii was inspired Stanley Kramer's *The Defiant Ones* for the first film. He also addresses how much of a loop fans were thrown for by the sequel, even though it was a success. "I don't understand the hate that this movie gets, I guess, going right from the first movie to this one, if you don't know that the three of these are very different movies."

The third film, *Abashiri Prison III*, also from 1965, is a yakuza drama about rival gangs looking to control the docks in a port city. Takakura's character is in effect the foreman for one of the gangs. While there are scuffles and quite a grand, final sword fight, the film foregoes the strong forward momentum of the first two features for the complexity of double-crosses and power plays. Again, characters from the first film show up at key moments, sometimes as a surprise, and while the specific character arcs for any of these people across the three films is rather dubious, it enhances the appeal of each movie individually because of the unique way in which casting is utilized to link the films together. Running 89 minutes, the film is fully entertaining, but neither sequel has the elegant design or crisp narrative precision that Ishii achieved with the first film. The presentation opens, incidentally, with a warning that a Japanese child actor appears in blackface, and the child—which we were startled to learn about halfway through the film is a little girl and not a little boy—is the key component of an important subplot. Given the movie's production context, the use of the actor is understandable even if the practice of blackface is just as understandably frowned upon today.

The colors look reasonably fresh, but the source material has a little more wear than the other two features. Asian film experts Mike Leeder and Arne Venema supply an engaging commentary discussion, going over the cast and crew, and sharing their reflections on all three films and the contributing talents, and explaining how the first film made Takakura, who had been working for a while, into a huge star.

Accompanying *III* on the second platter, there are two additional appreciations of the films, Ishii and Takakura. One, a conversation between Japanese film enthusiasts Jasper Sharp and Mark Schilling runs 29 minutes. Like Leeder and Venema, they have a relaxed and enthusiastic talk about the movies and Ishii's prolific career. At one point, they compare him to Albert Pyun and explain that he avoided physical burnout by adhering to the strictures of the Japanese production environment even though he would breathlessly speed through the making of each film. Asian film authority Tony Rayns gives a more formal overview of the films and the careers of Ishii and Takakura running 31 minutes, comparing Ishii's later sex films to the works of Ken Russell.

Martial arts sting

The story is fairly common, but there is much to admire about the 1976 Golden Harvest martial arts feature, **The Double Crossers**, a Fortune Star Eureka! Blu-ray release (UPC#760137158035, \$40). A gangster assassinates his former partner, and the partner's son, a cop, wants revenge. While the gangster targets the son for a hit, as well, the son makes arrangements with others to do the gangster in with a clever and satisfying scam involving an oilrig. Il-ryong Shin stars, with Sing Chan and Hsiung Chao. Sammo Hung also shows up in the final act, as a villain. Shot in Indonesia, the film, letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, looks much nicer than many Hong Kong features shot on location in that era. Once in a while an image is slightly out of focus, but otherwise the colors are clearly detailed and the lighting is uncompromised. It also helps that the transfer is lovely. Between the travelog settings, the nice-looking cast and the sunlit action, the presentation is highly appealing. Although the film is more story-oriented, there is still plenty of industrious action. The fights are rarely elaborate, but they are always energetic. While at one point a motorcycle goes flying over a car without any explanation as to how it achieved liftoff, you just kind of take things like that in your stride. A good guy throws dynamite at the bad guys who are chasing him several times, but they all know to jump and roll away each time, well before the dynamite explodes. There is also an attempt to kill the hero in an apartment from the street below, with a bazooka. Fun stuff.

The monophonic film is in Mandarin with optional English subtitles and runs 100 minutes. There is also an alternate English version that runs 98 minutes, re-ordering a couple of scenes and truncating the ending so that it will be even happier than it already is. The dubbing is workable, but there is no subtitling. On both tracks, the music is a little harsh, but tolerable if held to a reasonable volume. A trailer is included.

Asian film expert Frank Djeng provides a commentary track, going over the backgrounds of the cast and the crew, identifying the Hong Kong locations and providing a more generalized identification of the Malaysian locations. While there are brief gaps in his talk, he shares a well reasoned analysis of the film's strong points and its shortcomings. "This film doesn't really feel like a Hong Kong film. It feels more like something that would come out of Korea or Japan. It's just the way it's presented, the way the story is being told. And it's really because of how prominent crime films were at that time, particularly from Japan, all the yakuza films, so this film kind of follows that trend a little bit, with more focus on the plot of betrayal."

In contrast, Hong Kong film enthusiasts Mike Leeder and Arne Venema provide a breathless talk from beginning to end, becoming much more engaged in what is happening on the screen than Djeng, but still managing to fit in some backgrounds on the director, Chang-hwa Jeong, and the cast, deconstructing the fights, such as they are, and enthusiastically celebrating the film's quirks. Both commentaries point out that the film only had a brief run in Hong Kong and then basically disappeared (one of the reasons, probably, that it still looks so nice), so that it had not been widely disseminated before the Blu-ray appeared.

Kung fu horror comedy

Reminiscent in spirit of the wonderful Hollywood horror comedies from the Forties and Fifties—but with topless teases and kung fu—a delightfully witty 1979 Shaw Bros. production, **The Shadow Boxing**, has been released on Blu-ray by Celestial Pictures and 88 Films (UPC#760137158639, \$35). The hero is an apprentice to an undertaker, whose job is to transport corpses to their hometowns when they have died away from where they lived. To do this, he casts spells that animate the corpses, who then hop in unison as he 'herds' them through the countryside, until all have been dropped off at their appropriate resting spots. The undertaker accompanies him for a while, but then leaves him on his own to visit a casino. Yue Wong plays the apprentice, who is also skilled in a form of kung fu based upon the spells he casts over the corpses. Cecilia Wong plays his assistant, and Gordon Liu plays an escaped convict who pretends to be one of the bouncing corpses. The villains are after Liu's character.

Directed by Kar-leung Lau (listed on the jacket as Chia-Liang Liu), the 101-minute film is easy enough to follow, even when scenes have clearly been excised for time concerns, and is consistently amusing, punctuating its humor with elaborate fight sequences and scattered nudity. The premise is based upon actual folk tales, and simply by bringing them to life, as it were, the film's silliness is justified by the deconstruction of the concept it utilizes to set its narrative. Near the end, during the climactic fight, there is a lovely transition from a location to a soundstage set imitating that location. The film generates so much good will that you welcome the stagecraft, and even its resonate juxtaposition of 'life' and 'lifelessness,' rather than feeling compelled to dismiss the tacky artificiality of the shift. Like those Hollywood classics, the movie, in essence, can do no wrong.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The image transfer is consistently nice, with strong, solid hues and accurate fleshtones. The monophonic sound is solid and clear. The film is in Mandarin with optional English subtitles, and comes with a trailer.

African cinema

Three films that defined African-centric cinema, all from the hands, eyes and mind of the Senegalese film director, Ousmane Sembène, have been gathered in a definitive, must have three-platter Blu-ray set by The Criterion Collection, **Three Revolutionary Films by Ousmane Sembène** (UPC#715515295918, \$100). All three films are from the Seventies, after Sembène established his filmmaking credentials and essentially ‘hit his stride.’ The monophonic films are in French and the original languages of Senegal, Wolof and Diola, with optional English subtitles that do not differentiate between any of the dialects. As Sembène explains in one of the supplements, film comes closer than writing to replicating the African oral storytelling traditions. What he is seeking is a way through film to manifest that voice without compromising its accessibility.

The most accessible of the three films is his 1971 *Emitai*, set in the Forties, about the French military (represented primarily by two white officers) using local conscripts (who have, in essence, been shanghaied) to gather a ‘tax’ of rice harvests from a local village in order to feed the war effort. The two officers give the orders, the conscripts carry out the orders, and the villagers bicker with one another about how to respond. Running 101 minutes, the film brilliantly captures the locale and ambiance as it painfully works its way to the truth—whoever has the biggest weapons is the boss. For those who have never sampled an African film, the setting and tone will seem startling in how contrary it is to a big budget Hollywood production, but there is no ineptness in either the untrained performances or the low budget staging, and the film is both memorable and eye-opening.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. The color transfer is fresh, the image is sharp, there are no more than a handful of fleeting scratches or speckles. The sound recording is quite amazing, capturing the noises of the village in the background as it delivers the dialog with clarity. A very good 38-minute piece is included that goes over the impact of all three films, the multiple layers of meanings that each has in terms of African politics, human foibles and the soul of the continent, and how Sembène’s reputation has coalesced through the uniqueness (and variety) of the African voice.

As different a film as you will ever see, Sembène’s 1977 *Ceddo* is set in a small, remote village in the bush, depicting it as a microcosm for the politics of Africa and even the world. There are in effect three different factions in the village, the Muslims, who have a forceful imam and have allied themselves with the ‘king,’ the Catholics, who remain on the periphery along with the whites who run a trading post, and those who hold onto indigenous beliefs and are manipulated by both sides. The king’s daughter is kidnapped by someone from the latter category, and this sets off a larger power struggle that takes up the majority of the film’s 116-minute running time.

What is remarkable about the film is its direction. Even the films of Sembène usually have at least a few trappings of western cinema, whether it is in the shot compositions and editing, the structure of the storytelling, or some manner of content that cannot help but quote film history. *Ceddo*, on the other hand, feels entirely as if it had been made within the village it is depicting (with the exception of some plastic jars, the film appears to be set in the early Nineteenth Century), without outside references. By necessity, Sembène had to shoot some characters in isolation from the others and then pass off their interaction as if it was all taking place in the same scene (Sembène even manages to incorporate semi-documentary footage of a Catholic ritual conducted in Africa, deftly using this method), but this also gives the film a unique tone that is then combined with the amazing staging that appears to incorporate the entire village, or a good portion of it. The film will be challenging to viewers until the characters are sorted out. Events happen off screen, and no one or nothing is ever introduced, it is just a given that it exists. But the rewards of the film go beyond pigeonholing the movie in ‘African Studies.’ Instead, especially as part of the unique Blu-ray set, the movie expands the boundaries of entertainment you can have in your home, and the more often the movie is viewed, the more familiar the unfamiliar will become.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The picture is sharp, the colors are consistently fresh and the image is free of overt wear, although there is a lengthy passage near the beginning where the phantoms of lines and other markings are vaguely discernible. The volume and tone of the monophonic sound vary at times due to the nature of the original recordings, with ambient noise providing a minor irritation here and there, but the audio remains reasonably strong and the music is terrific, including some jazz pieces that are coming home to roost, so to speak. Also featured is a fantastic 27-minute production documentary that gives the viewer a valuable glimpse of what Sembène’s working methods were like, and what his intentions were. “You first create for yourself. If novice African moviemakers think that, in left or far left European salons they are received as a revolutionary, a messiah, they’re wrong. They have to fight among their people, make them understand the evolution of the society, but also that there is a decadent culture in Africa. Then, they belong to this place, so they must understand the culture of the past and the new culture which is emerging, because African capitals are a mix of new African cultures. The combination of this culture, whether it is a traditional or a classic culture, is the culture spread by modern media, which is new. So from that moment, if you don’t grasp these things, if you don’t understand these things, you can make movies, but only to satisfy the taste for exoticism or satisfy a minority of people who do not correspond to the reality of Africa today, who think about the Africa of the past but live as Europeans.”

Sembène’s bitter 1975 postcolonial satire, *Xala*, is about a businessman played by Thierno Leye, who has achieved a prominent position in his Chamber of Commerce through some crooked deals, and uses the money to take in a third wife. It all goes downhill from there, not the least of which being that on his wedding night, he is afflicted with ‘xala,’ which is Wolof for what we now know in America as erectile dysfunction. There is also a subplot about a group of beggars, some of whom are handicapped, that eventually ties into the main story, and another brief but very funny bit about a pickpocket who knows exactly what to do with his big score. The film runs 123

minutes and quite brilliantly paints a comprehensive portrait of post-colonial life, with many humorous components—the bickering between multiple wives is so dependably amusing it could easily be turned into a sitcom; there is an equal amount of humor in the efforts Leye’s character makes to cure his condition; and the stabs Sembène takes at the antics of politicians are like shooting fish in a barrel. That Sembène depicts the entire Senegalese society and government as appearing to be, on some level, dysfunctional, suggests that the Europeans not only left a horrendous mess behind that they did not even try to clean up before leaving, but that the imposition of progress is not a cure. It is just a way to hold a problem at bay until it can be passed along to someone else. European and, by extension, American society may be a bit slicker, but if you look past the gloss, the same greed and corruption are everywhere.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1, and the color transfer is excellent, with bright, crisp hues free of grain or wear. The monophonic sound is also in good condition, with clear, strong tones.

A straight and rather short line can be drawn between *Ceddo* and the big budget Sony Pictures Columbia TriStar production, **The Woman King**, but it only runs in one direction. Still, for a Hollywood production, the 2022 film is remarkable. Shot in Africa, not only does the melodramatic action film have an almost entirely black cast, but it is about an army of female warriors, personalizing them at the same time that it is glorifying their capabilities. It is not exactly the sort of thing that Hollywood normally invests in, but it is a perfect match to the equally glorious punchline in *Ceddo*, and, like *Ceddo*, holds a promise for a radically different perspective on the future of entertainment. Set in the early Nineteenth Century in Central Africa, a city nation—it is too large to call it a tribe—is feeling economic pressure from the inroads Europeans have made on the coast and the tribes who are working with them, trading slaves for goods. Viola Davis is the leader of the warriors—the nation also has a king (a rather thankless role played with an intelligent reserve by John Boyega) and male warriors, who at times collaborate with the female group in battle. Thuso Mbedu is a new recruit, who has a greater bond with Davis’s character than anyone realizes, and the film unfolds primarily through her eyes. Running 135 minutes, there are plenty of good action sequences (we would have preferred a touch more gore, but we aren’t the target audience), decent dramatic hooks to carry you through the narrative, and a wealth of images—particularly shots of the warriors in battle—that suggest a social metamorphosis extending well beyond Africa. Unlike *Ceddo*, the film does not broach the Muslim presence in the area, which was a historically complicating factor in the region, but its basic desire to replicate the resonate spirit of the era is both obvious and admirable. Directed by Gina Prince-Bythewood, the film, like Sembène’s movies, presents a fresh, valid, thoughtful, and in many ways monumental entertainment, significantly different in perspective and content than any movie to have come before it.

Released on DVD by Sony Pictures Home Entertainment (UPC#04339658-2187, \$20), the picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The picture is in excellent condition. It looks sharp and solid, and night scenes have plenty of clarity. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has a decent directional mix and a reasonable amount of power. There is an audio track that describes the action (“A man cuts the thick browed woman’s shoulder blade. She turns, flips him to the ground, then stabs him with her sharpened fingernails.”), alternate Spanish and Portuguese audio tracks, optional English, Spanish and Portuguese subtitles, 7 minutes of Mbedu’s very winning audition footage and 20 minutes of good promotional featurettes. Prince-Bythewood and editor Terilyn Shropshire provide a decent commentary track, stepping through their memories of the shoot and what they were aiming to achieve in each sequence. Shropshire is particularly good at describing how she broke down the battle scene into individual ‘stories’ and Prince-Bythewood talks about what the actors brought to their roles and how various decisions were altered as the shooting progressed.

Six films

The best way to watch the three-platter Criterion Collection release, **Small Axe Five Films by Steve McQueen** (UPC#715515283014, \$100), is to begin with the third platter, a supplemental sixth program that sets the context for the other five films. It is also worth the price of the disc all by itself. A three-part BBC documentary McQueen made in 2021 entitled *Uprising*, it is about racial conflicts in London’s West Indian community in the early Eighties that were sparked by a fire at a party where more than a dozen black teenagers were killed. Utterly engrossing from beginning to end, McQueen’s storytelling is superb, so that as he shifts from the details of the party itself to the social atmosphere in London at the time and even to examining the root causes created by the venereal nature of colonialism, you are held spellbound by the speakers, the film clips and the music (most of which, but not all, is reggae and all of which sounds fantastic on the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital audio track). The program runs a total of 186 minutes, presenting the build up to the fire in the first episode, the fire and its immediate aftermath in the second episode, and then the riots that it sparked a couple of months later in the final episode, consistently edited with an exceptional sense of how to keep the momentum of a story pulling a viewer forward from one point to the next. A cause for the fire could never be determined and McQueen knows this, but he presents it as a mystery anyway, so that each theory and each witness statement brings greater weight to the narrative as a whole. He managed to persuade many individuals involved in all aspects of the tragedy to sit and talk at length, from the victims and the mothers of victims to the politicians, rioters and witnesses not directly involved in what was happening. One of the most fascinating interviews is with a black policeman, who speaks about the night of the riot, as he heard racial taunts from his comrades when they were driving toward their assignment, but then had nothing but gratitude for how those same coworkers pulled him to safety in the face of a deadly mob.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1. The color transfer is excellent, and even the archival footage often looks surprisingly fresh. Unfortunately, since the program is technically a supplement, there are no optional subtitles.

The five 2020 telefilms that appear on the first two platters (each of which has optional English subtitles and a trailer) are dramas based mostly upon actual events from the same era and setting, exploring the East Indian London population in the Seventies. The opening piece, *Mangrove*, runs 133 minutes and is about an entrepreneur played by Shaun Parkes who tries to start a restaurant that serves Caribbean food. It quickly becomes a popular spot for the local inhabitants, but at the same time irritates the police for no particular reason beyond its cultural identification. The closings and harassment eventually lead to a protest, and the second half of the film is a courtroom drama as several members of the protest, including Parkes's character, are tried for instigating a riot. Taken at face value, the film, rather like the **Billy Jack** movies, presents the establishment villains—the police and the bureaucrats backing them—as irredeemably racist and evil. Indeed, the film has a sort of Sixties social drama vibe, as characters try to organize their community and raise public consciousness about the injustices being committed against them. This is partly remedied by the entertaining nature of the trial that takes up the second half of the movie, even though the proceedings are very much in keeping with the anarchic spirit that the Sixties fostered, and maintain the same rebellious tone. More importantly, with the truths of the documentary established, the characters, good and bad, seem less hackneyed and closer in spirit to genuine representations of those who were caught up in the conflict. In that McQueen also strives to capture the film's era (on a limited budget—his Londonscapes are obviously computer generated, but perfectly acceptable as quick orientations), the film is a celebration of the West Indian community and its validity as a legitimate and valuable component of the city as a whole. The performances are uniformly excellent (do actors have trouble sleeping when they play evil characters?) and while, as we said, the primary conflicts in the drama are not subtle (at another point, McQueen lifts camera setups from **To Kill a Mockingbird**), there is enough embellishment in the explorations of culture and history to sustain the entertainment.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The color transfer looks fresh and the image is sharp most of the time. The 5.1-channel DTS sound has a workable dimensionality, effectively designed separations and clear details. There is a 4-minute promotional featurette summarizing the film and an interesting 28-minute conversation with McQueen and film consultant Paul Gilroy about the entire series and what was socially unique about each program in the set.

The other film on the first platter, *Lovers Rock*, is essentially a musical, a 73-minute depiction of a Saturday night party that lasts well into the morning. Although clearly patterned on the party described in the documentary, the film does not, fortunately, conclude in a disaster or even a tragedy, but rather with a budding romance. Most of the film, however, is just the confusion of the party itself, with the deejays playing music that suggests the program is set sometime in the late Sixties. It is the music, accompanied by the random, rhythmic dancing, that holds one's attention. The film follows around a few of the partygoers, so that you begin to recognize their personalities, but the narrative is all very vague and as disorganized as the dance floor until, quite gradually and not until nearly the end, the two most sympathetic characters begin to attract more of the film's attention than the others. For anyone who grew up in London's West Indian neighborhoods in that era, or even those who grew up in the West Indies, the film in all likelihood delivers a dose of nostalgia as heavy and sweet as a toke on an enormous ganja stick. For everyone else, it is a visit to that world, which may seem inconsequential or of limited interest to all but the most patiently curious.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1. The color transfer is fine, although the darker corners of the party are intentionally unclear, and the lighting does lead to a soft image at times. The 5.1 DTS sound is the film's *raison d'être*, and the louder you set the volume, the deeper you will enter the film's world. Don't trust the optional subtitles to help you, however, as their focus is on replicating what the characters are saying, not translating it. Along with a quick 4-minute promotional featurette, there is a 26-minute audio-only conversation with McQueen and record producer Dennis Bovell, moderated by Michael Diamond of Beastie Boys. They talk about the music in all of the **Small Axe** films and how that music is reflective of the era (they also mention an interest rural West Indians had for American country music and how Charlie Pride was included in the *Lovers Rock* song selections).

One of the many fascinating components of the documentary was the footage featuring the black policeman, and the first film on the second platter, *Red White and Blue*, is a terrifically entertaining drama, set in the early Eighties, about a Jamaican who enters the London police force hoping that his efforts will help to change the culture of prejudice within the organization. Based upon another true story—played by John Boyega, the lead character, Leroy Logan, is listed in the credits as a consultant—the 84-minute film depicts his decision to join the force and incidents he encountered the first few years he was there. The narrative is engrossing from the very beginning—it is helpful that so much of the story concerns a single character—and there is more equivocation than in *Mangrove*. He does make a few friends, and he does enable some advances in community relations, but he also experiences disheartening setbacks that seem to overwhelm him. Although there is one fantastic jump-out-of-your-seat moment, the film is not an action film or a crime film, but it does navigate the same shoals, even though it has a different destination, and that is enough to keep a viewer fully engaged in the drama.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1, and the color transfer looks fine. Whenever there is music, the 5.1 DTS sound takes on a lovely dimensionality, but otherwise the mix stays mostly in the center. There is a good 5-minute promotional featurette.

Leaping to the other end of the spectrum, *Alex Wheatle* opens in a penitentiary, although most of the film is a flashback showing not so much how he ended up there, but what he was doing previously so that it can be better understood how his stay in prison turned his life around. Based once again on a true story—and this time, Wheatle, a successful novelist, is listed as a consultant—Sheyi Cole is a bitter and sullen

young man who arrives in London from an upbringing in orphanages. He gradually acclimates to the West Indian community, meeting other young people, buying and selling drugs, and trying to get a start as a deejay. It is the Seventies, and at one point, the characters even reference the fire having happened nearby, after which the movie stops and a poem is read in voiceover as archival photographs from the fire's aftermath are presented, before the movie proceeds again. Running 69 minutes, the film is another engaging portrait of another part of the community, validated by the veracity of its source and the compositional dexterity with which McQueen addresses it.

The picture is mostly letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2:1, although the photomontage shifts to 1.78:1. The color transfer looks fine. The 5.1 DTS sound is again embellished by the mostly reggae soundtrack, which has a lovely dimensionality. There is another good 5-minute promotional featurette that includes an interview with Wheatle.

The platter concludes with another 66-minute program that could seemingly go on much longer, *Education*, about a child in the early Seventies who is transferred to a warehousing 'special needs' school because of the problems he is having learning to read. The first part of the film tells the story from the boy's perspective, but it then shifts to his mother's point-of-view. Although different actors are cast and they are different characters, their similarities in appearance and in the film's designs to the beginnings of *Red, White and Blue* cannot be ignored. The film is another light-handed but still blistering examination of an institution that failed in its duties to the public, but these failures were likely systemic long before Britain experienced an influx of migrations from its former colonial holdings. Hence, McQueen's resolution—the child's reading skills improve when he attends a cooperative learning center on Saturday and is given a primer with stories about Africa—is a bit dubious, even though the film's overall dramatic impact is both uplifting and tear-inducing.

The Super 16mm picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. Despite the drabness of the settings, colors are bright and accurate, and the image is crisp. The 5.1 DTS sound is not as flamboyant as it is in some of the other programs, but retains an effective directional mix and solid, clear tones. A 5-minute promotional featurette accompanies the film.

The wrong man

We reviewed the exceptionally compelling 2019 Warner Bros. Blu-ray directed by Destin Daniel Cretton about injustice in the American South, **Just Mercy**, in May 20. Warner has now released a **4K UltraHD** Blu-ray (UPC#840418306161, \$25), but it really wasn't necessary since the film is already perfect. While the 4K image enables a viewer to become a bit more aware of the textures in the complexions of the actors, the standard Blu-ray already looked terrific, so any sort of grand improvement could not be implemented. Subliminally, however, the upgrade may indeed add to an appreciation of the feature. The film runs 137 minutes and could easily lose a half hour without harming the plot, but what would be harmed would be the overall emotional impact that the film creates by drawing out the hopelessness of the conflict, and with the 4K presentation, perhaps attentiveness during the film's most lyrical passages is aided by the enhanced magnetism the quality of the disc enables. Based upon a true story, Michael B. Jordan plays a Harvard graduated lawyer who eschews the material benefits that such an education would offer to set up shop in Alabama and help inmates on Death Row. Jamie Foxx, who is so good you forget he's a movie star, plays a self-employed tree remover convicted of a murder despite having had nothing to do with the crime whatsoever because the police were being pressured to close the case quickly. Not every movie is worth watching more than once, but the combination of the courtroom murder drama and the explication of judicial imbalance—in the South, yes, but still representative of America as a whole—mixed with the emotional journeys experienced by the film's characters creates a moving and even cathartic experience, and the 4K format is a welcome excuse to revisit the film again and again.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The 7.1-channel TrueHD Dolby sound has a full, solid dimensionality that is on par with the standard BD's Dolby Atmos track. While the audio is definitely worth amplifying, there are no showy effects that would enable a listener to differentiate the two discs. There are optional English subtitles. The 15 minutes of excellent deleted scenes and 18 minutes of decent promotional featurettes that appeared on the earlier BD have been carried over.

Blaxploitation classic

Scatman Crothers, wearing a hysterically amusing greased back toupee, plays the owner of a karate school being pressured to give up his property by the mob in the absolutely wonderful 1974 Warner Bros. blaxploitation film directed by Robert Clouse, **Black Belt Jones**, a Warner WB Archive Collection Blu-ray (UPC#8404-18309797, \$22). In a brilliant replication of about a hundred kung fu films, the mobsters initially visit the school and get beat up. They come back with stronger henchmen and beat up the students. So the best one of all, played by Jim Kelly of **Enter the Dragon** fame (also directed by Clouse), gets called in to set things straight. He is also some kind of secret agent, so he organizes a high tech raid on another mobster's headquarters to get the money being demanded. The grand final battle takes place at a car wash designed for garbage trucks, with suds eventually engulfing the fighters. Gloria Hendry is on hand to give as good as she gets, aiding Kelly's character in the concluding fight. The fight scenes are so laden with slow motion effects that Kelly's contorted expressions take on greater attention than his kicks. Yes, the 86-minute film is all over the place, and is too silly to take seriously, except that it is continually entertaining, so that it becomes an excellent example of why blaxploitation films can seem so ineptly put together and yet still be undeniably crowd pleasing. The crowd don't care so long as they are having fun.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The color transfer is fantastic, although the cinematography is rarely flattering. When the focus is sharp, the image is crisp as all get out, and hues are consistently accurate. The monophonic sound is solid. The musical score is so generic it is like the themes of every blaxploitation film ever made, crammed into one. There are optional English subtitles and a trailer.

Albert Brooks

Knowing he would always be cast as the second banana, Albert Brooks wrote and directed several comedies where he could also be top billed, and four of those movies have found their way into The Criterion Collection. All four releases have optional English subtitles on every platter, and all four are letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1.

Brooks plays a film director named 'Albert Brooks' in his first feature, the 1979 **Real Life**, which has been released as a two-platter 4K title (UPC# 715515300711, \$50), about an attempt to record a documentary depicting the daily life of a suburban American family. Charles Grodin co-stars as the veterinarian who has allowed the film team to invade his family's privacy 24/7. The director character also records his own interactions with the family, and it is all of these films, in an abstract, vaguely humorous and satirical meta manner, that comprise the 99-minute feature. The cameramen wear futuristic robot-looking helmets that function as their cameras, adding to the film's oddness and making its marketing even more bizarre. The film seeks to explore the combustible reaction that manifests when two very opposite poles—hyper Hollywood and banal ordinariness—are forced into sharing the same space. While some characters may act eccentrically, to the point of literal clownishness (Brooks' character dresses up in a clown costume at one point in an attempt to enliven the atmosphere), the actual humor is very subdued and dry. Casual viewers might be completely baffled by the film's premise and purpose (as an opening title card implies, it is a specific lampoon of the PBS documentary series, *An American Family*), but its eccentricity is enough to qualify the film as a unique cinematic experience regardless of whether the viewer finds the film amusing or just desperately strange.

The picture on the standard Blu-ray included in the set is preferable to the picture on the 4K platter. The 4K image is darker and paler, and while it may subdue the film's overt graininess in spots, the picture overall just underscores how depressing the film is between its occasional jokes, while the standard BD gives you a better chance of getting from one gag to the next. On both, the monophonic sound is solid and clear. The standard BD platter has a 30-minute interview with Brooks about making the film and a 15-minute interview with co-star Frances Lee McCain.

Real Life was not a 3D movie. However, as one more surreal gag, Brooks made a 3D trailer, which basically consists of him sitting at a desk, talking about the movie, and making 3D jokes. Presented in 3D on the standard BD platter, we just happened to have a pair of red/blue glasses sitting around from our recent review of **Bwana Devil** (Sep 24) and happily donned them to see if Brooks could actually deliver the goods. He could not. While the 3-minute piece is filled with potential dimensional effects, no concerted effort was made to shoot them properly, and so the actual 3D perspectives, while present, are vague and fleeting, even when he brings in a world-class paddleball player to seal the deal. The film begins where it left off if playback is terminated, but the special features do not.

Some people enjoy anxiety comedies, although we are not really sure why, except perhaps that such people are so motivated to alleviate whatever private suffering they themselves may have that laughing at the foibles of sad sack film characters is an adequate balm. Brooks starts with Julie Hagerty in his 1985 **Lost in America**, a single-platter Blu-ray (UPC#715515201315, \$40). They play a Los Angeles power couple who decide to cash in their savings and buy a mobile home, hoping to cruise across America in relative luxury. Needless to say, their plan does not last a day. The specifics of their downfall are a well-publicized and generally known turning point in the 91-minute feature, but we won't spoil things. Hagerty is perfectly cast, and her performance is outstanding, while Brooks' character is a bit of a blowhard, which is necessary to counterbalance the fragile sympathy for Hagerty's character, but still tiresome when he is on the screen alone. If you can make it through the low points that the characters experience—which is genuinely something that no other filmmaker ever attempted in quite the same way, at least in such a non-violent fashion—there is sort of a happy and necessarily upbeat conclusion. While the humor at times relies upon standard slapstick or Brooks' wellspring of snappy comebacks, the film's uneasy emotional tone can counteract or suppress any impulse to giggle or snicker, and whether the film's depths of frustration can be tolerated will be up to very individual tastes.

Garry Marshall has a nice supporting part. The image is soft, without the redeeming approaches to crispness that **Real Life** managed to achieve. While that is the nature of the cinematography, the haziness just adds to the film's alienating atmosphere. Colors do appear to be fresh and fleshtones are accurate, if pale. The monophonic sound is fine. Also featured is a 30-minute interview with Brooks talking about how he got started and including great clips from his early TV appearances and even a recording of the gags his father told at a Friar's Club meeting right before he sat down and died; a nice 11-minute interview with Hagerty about working on the film; a good 12-minute interview with Brooks' agent, Herb Nanas, about Nanas's own career, as well as how he helped Brooks get his career started and an analysis of Brooks' unique humor; a 15-minute interview with the unrelated James L. Brooks analyzing Albert's humor and career; and a trailer.

Brooks' maturation as a filmmaker is startling in his brilliant 1991 metaphysical romantic comedy, **Defending Your Life**, another single-platter Blu-ray (UPC#715515257015, \$40). Yes, there is a vague preponderance of negative Asian caricatures (including a monolog about flying to Hong Kong), but that is nearly the film's only flaw. It is unique, witty, well acted, impressively staged, intellectually stimulating, emotionally satisfying and never alienating. Brooks plays a successful Los Angeles advertising executive who is killed in a crash and awakens in a depiction of the afterlife as an adult resort, where souls are awaiting a determination of whether or not they should advance ethereally, and are otherwise, when not attending the trials that determine these judgments, on vacation. Not only is the setup clever and engaging, but it enables Brooks to incorporate everything from some very amusing moments of slapstick (presented as an evidentiary montage during his 'trial') to a sweet and affecting romance when his character meets another soul, played by Meryl Streep. As fresh and inspired as the film's narrative is, the story is solidly constructed, with intriguing supporting characters—both Rip Tom and Lee Grant deliver wonderful performances as the hero's

advocate and prosecutor—and deft pacing. Not only do the film's 111 minutes just zoom by (particularly in comparison to what are, ostensibly, the shorter two previous films), but you really wish it could have gone on even longer before arriving at its joyful conclusion.

While some darker corners are a bit blurry now and then, generally the picture is solid and, when it is grainy, it is still so clear that the grain does not dissolve the edges of objects as it does in **Lost in America**. Fleshtones are accurate and the film's colors are bright. The stereo sound has a mild dimensionality and is otherwise adequately delivered. Also featured is a trailer; a comprehensive 28-minute interview with Brooks—defending the film, as it were—as he works his way informatively through the film's creation and casting choices; a good 12-minute compilation of promotional interview clips with Brooks, Grant and Torn from 1991; and a viable 22-minute analysis by scholar Donna Bowman (perfectly named, as if her husband was one of the astronauts in 2001. . .) of the film's theological and philosophical foundations, especially in regard to the writings of Søren Kierkegaard. "When I look at this through an existentialist lens, it's almost a perfect Existentialist movie."

We got through the first 10 minutes of the two-platter 4K Blu-ray presentation of Brooks' 1996 **Mother** (UPC#715515300919, \$50) and we couldn't take it any more. It was just too dreary to continue. So we ejected the 4K platter, put in the standard Blu-ray platter, watched the rest of the film that way, and everything was fine. Once again, the 4K presentation was both darker and blander than the presentation on the standard platter, and whatever sharpness that was lost by the switch really didn't seem to matter. Basically, for daytime scenes that are set indoors, it looks like the characters have the house lights turned off for the 4K version and turned on for the standard BD. And the 104-minute film requires all the patience it can muster, for while the final act is absolutely wonderful, the viewer must tolerate the whininess of Brooks' character to get there. On 4K, that plus the awful fleshtones is just too much.

Brooks plays a science-fiction writer who has not had a successful book in a while and has just finalized his divorce. Deciding that a change of pace would be good for him, he packs up the few belongings his ex-wife didn't keep and moves in with his mother, beautifully enabled by Debbie Reynolds. While the film could easily fall into being another anxiety comedy, it does not. It really is, in contrast to Brooks' other films, a light drama with humor rather than vice-versa. What Brooks does quite brilliantly here is that sure, there are lots of films about adult sons reconciling emotionally and intellectually with their fathers, but a film that presents a mother as a genuine adult and explores her adult relationship with her son as the centrality of its purpose is quite a rarity. Reynolds is outstanding, bringing not only a lovely, warm humor to her part, but a meticulously genuine presence, being in, rather than reacting to, the world around her.

The stereo sound has a greater dimensionality than was present on **Defending Your Life**, and similarly detailed separations. The film has some cute music cues, including a reworking of *Mrs. Robinson*, with completely different lyrics, performed by sound-alike singers. The standard Blu-ray has a 26-minute talk by Brooks about the film, going over the different legendary actresses he interviewed for the role, describing how he worked with Reynolds and discussing what his own mother thought about the movie; a nice 12-minute interview with co-star Rob Morrow about his experience making the film; and two trailers, including one amusing piece where Brooks pretends to tell his own mother about the film. The film picks up where it left off when playback is terminated, but the special features do not.

Woody Allen

Woody Allen's sweet 1982 romantic farce, more **Smiles of a Summer Night** than Shakespeare, **A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy**, has been released on Blu-ray by Orion Pictures and MGM (UPC#840418301968, \$20). The bulk of the 82-minute feature has six characters, played by Jose Ferrer, Allen, Mia Farrow, Julie Hagerty, Mary Steenburgen and Tony Roberts, as three couples in 1910-ish who spend a day, evening and night (three acts) in an upstate summer house in New York. Farrow and Roberts feel miscast, but otherwise the film achieves a pleasant blend of humor, atmosphere and romance, augmented with a few memorable lines ("Sex alleviates tension, and love causes it.") and many enjoyable interludes.

To close out his wonderful **Perfect Days** (Aug 24), Wim Wenders explains that there is a unique Japanese word for the way that sunlight plays through the leaves of trees moved by a breeze, 'komorebi,' and there is a riveting moment within **A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy** where cinematographer Gordon Willis captures precisely that. Overall, the image may be a touch soft, but generally, colors rich and clear, and that one shot is so stunning it may be worth having the entire disc to savor. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1. The monophonic sound is fine, and there are optional English subtitles.

A wonderful black-and-white Allen movie that mixes Kafka, UFA and Allen's exquisite sense of humor, **Shadows and Fog**, is available as a 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment MGM Orion Blu-ray from Twilight Time (UPC#81-1956020871). Shot entirely at a film studio in New York City with fantastic production designs, Allen managed to corral seemingly every movie star passing through town to spend a day or two shooting on the set. The result is an utter joy, with each star performing a handful of lines in delightful precision and humor, including (deep breath) David Ogden Stiers, Madonna, Lily Tomlin, Jodie Foster, Kathy Bates, John C. Reilly, Philip Bosco, Josef Sommer, Kate Nelligan, Kurtwood Smith, Fred Gwynne, William H. Macy, Julie Kavner and Wallace Shawn (Peter Dinklage is in there, too, before he was famous), with more substantial appearances by Kenneth Mars, John Cusack and Donald Pleasence.

The action takes place on a single night in a fog bound European-styled town (with Kurt Weill's *Cannon Song* often playing on the soundtrack). Carlo Di Palma's underappreciated cinematography not only captures the lighting effects of older European black-and-white films, but even sustains a terrific sense of antiquity in the less evocative interior scenes—you never, ever feel like the movie has just had its colors turned off.

Allen stars as a clerk awakened from his sleep by a group of men who claim he is supposed to be part of a vigilante contingent on the lookout for a serial killer. When he dresses and goes out on the street, however, he can't find anyone, and then his path begins to parallel the killer's. Mia Farrow and John Malkovich are circus performers who are having relationship difficulties that cause Farrow's character to run away into town, where she meets Allen's character. Running 86 minutes (it appears that one or two scenes may have been trimmed down to keep the story moving), the 1991 film is near perfection for what it wants to accomplish in both atmosphere and satire, while also achieving the steady stream of real verbal gags that Allen had otherwise been steadily forsaking in favor of more generalized character explorations at that point in his career. The film is highly repeatable—it is, in fact, very hard for us to watch it and not want to restart it again immediately when it concludes—and an ideal home video indulgence to be revisited over and over.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1. The image does have some slight speckling in spots, which suggests that it could do with an upgrade since any impurity is distracting (although there are not enough impurities to suggest they might be on purpose—it would actually be great fun to see the film in a deliberately worn down print), but the basic picture is sharp, with well defined contrasts that are effectively served by the BD playback. The mono sound is also clear, and an alternate channel offers up just the music, which is a nice little treat. There are optional English subtitles and a trailer.

Our favorite Allen film is his audacious depiction of his own celebrity, **Stardust Memories**, which was also released as a Fox Twilight Time Blu-ray (UPC# 811956021564). It is daringly harsh in its ridicule of ordinary people, show business people, film enthusiasts, wealth and even his own persona. At one point, as part of an argument with an unstable girlfriend played by Charlotte Rampling, he is accused of being a pedophile, and rather than just letting it be a throwaway moment, he underscores it with a glimpse in the same shot of one of the enlarged newspaper clippings that serve as the godawful décor in his penthouse apartment, which also references a child molester. He gets away with it all by blending the film with a spot-on spoof of 8½, embracing his skills at generating intellectual one-liners, and giving his three co-stars (none of them regulars)—Rampling, Jessica Harper and Marie-Christine Barrault—an opportunity to deliver genuinely real and captivating performances amid the movie's meta-shifts and farcical introspection. In the primary narrative, Allen plays a successful director attending a festival in his honor at the New Jersey seaside. Running 89 minutes, it always seems fresh and enthusiastic, even after multiple viewings. Sewn together by Willis' magnificent black-and-white cinematography, the 1980 feature is visually thrilling, irrepressibly funny and timeless, unapologetically edgy.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The image is spotless and crisp, so that the accuracy of the BD's transcription adds to the film's incisive atmosphere. The monophonic sound is also sharp and clear, and there is an alternate audio track that isolates the lovely array of music—mostly older jazz tunes and standards, with some intrusions of classical music—in what is otherwise a dialog-heavy program. There are optional English subtitles and a trailer.

Wildcatting drama

A Robert Duvall vehicle that never gained much traction, **The Stars Fell on Henrietta**, has been released by Warner Bros as a *Warner WB Archive Collection* Blu-ray (UPC#840418307687, \$22). Directed by James Keach, the 1995 feature was produced in part by Clint Eastwood (his daughter has a supporting role) and co-stars Aidan Quinn, with Brian Dennehy in a small part that he commands as he did with so many screen roles at that time, and Billy Bob Thornton in another supporting role. Believe it or not, there is an entire genre of oil wildcatting movies, spanning the history of American film, and this is one more entry, with the spectacle coming, as it usually does, in the final act. Duvall is an unsuccessful oilman who is trying to drum up backing to sink a well in West Texas during the Dust Bowl in the mid-Thirties, and Quinn is the farmer who is about to lose his spread to the bank because his crops are drying up. The film runs a full 110 minutes, and so its focus is really not on the action of the final act but on savoring the characterizations—Duvall's rascallious character is wizened and has a cat who follows him everywhere; the dynamics of the family headed by Quinn's character is naturally being strained by the economic hardships they are facing—and the period setting. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, with a solid color transfer and a nice though unremarkable 5.1-channel DTS audio track, the film is decent storytelling that relies on the stars to pull you along until everything is set up and can run on its own. Not everyone had the patience for it when it first appeared, but perhaps now viewers will be more forgiving. There are optional English subtitles and a trailer.

Hospital drama

In the early days of sound films, Columbia Pictures was known as one of the cheaper studios. They weren't Poverty Row, but they were by not MGM, either. An excellent example of the small but efficiently features that the studio was churning out, the 1933 **Once to Every Woman**, has been released on Blu-ray by Sony Pictures Home Entertainment (UPC#043396637870, \$27). It is a hospital drama that runs just 65 minutes and only has to use a handful of sets—some of which you can see are just redressed, so that one 'office' can represent the offices of a couple different characters—and yet it manages to be both thrilling and touching. Although some aspects are dated—one patient is proud that her husband beat her and broke her ribs—there is an amazing surgery scene that conveys how surgeries are actually conducted even though it is all just pantomiming on the part of the masked cast members, with a few of well timed inserts, and there is at least one scene after the surgery is over that can readily induce tears. Getting a rare chance to be the lead rather than the secondary romantic interest, Ralph Bellamy stars as a young, brilliant surgeon who feels frustrated by the antiquated methods his boss, played by Walter Connolly, insists on following. The movies never got enough of Fay Wray, who plays the head nurse, in love with a caddish doctor, played by Walter Byron ("The 'M.D.' at the end of his name stands for 'More Dames.'"), while Bellamy's character pines for her. Mary Carlisle and Billie Seward are also featured. Directed by Lambert Hillyer, the film delivers precisely what it intends to deliver—romance, drama, and a look at how hospitals function without the burden of visiting one—without frills, sure (the sets are spare, but still relatively persuasive), but with just enough professionalism to sell the playacting and deliver some

viable emotions.

The squared full screen black-and-white picture is sharp and spotless, adding to the appeal of the stars and the clarity of the narrative. The monophonic sound is fine. The disc has no menu, but optional English subtitles can be activated manually.

Suspense on a train

Mostly a train movie, the wonderfully entertaining 2004 Media Asia Chinese crime film, **A World without Thieves**, has been released on Blu-ray by Shout! Studios (UPC#82663247183, \$35). Set in the Mainland China's hinterlands, Andy Lau and Rene Liu are a pair of pickpockets who befriend a country bumpkin carrying his life savings home, when a more sophisticated band of criminals set their sites on the bankroll during the crowded train ride. A cop is also on board. Directed by Xiaogang Feng, the film's fight scenes are not just dances, they are tangos. More importantly, while the film is dazzling you with its action and its gorgeous scenery, it is also delivering solid emotional, moral and even spiritual conflicts between the characters, so that the 113-minute film is wholly compelling just for its drama, with the other material serving as a delightful bonus. While the conclusion wraps up most of the narrative, Feng allows the fates of a couple of characters to remain a bit obscure, but up until the finale, the film feels like it is one of the greatest movies ever—smart, slick, suspenseful and caring.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The cinematography is lovely and the Blu-ray sustains its beauty. At times, there is a cinematic choice to make hues and shades layered rather than blended smoothly together, but the effect is never distancing or distracting. A speckle pops up once in a while, as well, but otherwise the image is crisp and allows the viewer to concentrate on the complicated moves and countermoves by the various thieves. The 5.1-channel DTS sound is also enjoyable, with a strong bass—Liguang Wang's musical score is almost schizophrenic in the way it swings from soft and romantic (*La Vie en Rose* is even incorporated at one point) to hard punching excitement—and terrific directional effects (gotta love those soothing train sounds, as well). The disc's one flaw is its optional English subtitles, which must be activated since they are not set as the default, and do not translate phone text messages, even though a few are key to understanding the ending.

Kung fu in Japan

Arriving in Kyoto, Japan, to investigate his father's death and the disappearance of a large sum of money intended for a Chinese charity that the father was carrying, Jimmy Wang Yu's character immediately announces who he is and deliberately gets into fights with local criminals in order to attract attention and work his up the mobster hierarchy to identify who was responsible for the murder in the wacky 1973 Golden Harvest **A Man Called Tiger**, a Fortune Star Eureka Blu-ray (UPC#760137159841, \$40). He takes on a whole gang of punks in one early fight, and they start out just using their hands until suddenly they are holding short pipes and sticks and—where was he keeping it, in his back pocket?—a monkey wrench. The guy holding the wrench also shows up later on in another fight, as if he never let go of the wrench or has some serious plumbing problem at home and keeps getting called away for fights in the middle of his repair work.

Yu cuts a cool figure when he is standing around in his dark glasses, and he is an energetic fighter, but his line readings leave something to be desired. Directed by Wei Lo, the 112-minute film has acting that is bad even under the loose standards of Chinese action films, and there is a gambling sequence so impossible (the gamblers have to roll dice in a cup and have the cubes come out correctly stacked on top of one another) it must be happening under different gravity than Earth's. Nevertheless, the plot is reasonably methodical and the fight scenes, however crazy, are so gloriously bloody that fans will be completely captivated by the feature and even casual viewers will find enough to tickle their fancies. There is another wild fight aboard a cable car crossing a seaport inlet, where Yu appears to fall more than a hundred feet into the water, and in the grand finale, the gang attacking the hero suddenly all have axes—they probably keep them in their back pockets, like the wrench. The hero gets gashed several times as he is dispatching them, including one solid hit on his leg that forces him to do his kicks with one leg partially disabled.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The colors look fresh and sharp, and the source material is in good shape, held back only by occasional shortcomings with the cinematography itself. The monophonic sound is reasonably strong most of the time, but there are passages that drop down precipitously and come across as somewhat stifled. The film is in Mandarin with optional English subtitles, although there is an alternate English language track if you want to go for totally kooky. A 're-release' version, running just 80 minutes, has also been included on the platter, with both Mandarin and English audio tracks, but too much entertaining material is removed to make it worthwhile. Also featured is a very good 7-minute summary of still missing scenes based upon what survives from a master subtitling reference, two music videos compiled from clips in the film where the heroine, played by Frances Yip, sings complete songs in a nightclub, a 2-minute presentation of the film's opening fight without the interference of the credits, and a trailer.

The longer version has two commentary tracks. One features Chinese film expert Frank Djeng and Asian film enthusiast Michael Worth, who talk extensively about the different cast members, discuss the narrative in detail, go over Lo's filmmaking acumen (in one fight, Yu's character is wearing a light blue suit, while the gaggle of villains facing him are in dark suits, making it easy to follow as he beats on them all) and sharing obscure trivia, such as how Japanese license plates are coded depending upon where they are registered. They also talk quite a bit about how the film was very seriously intended as a Bruce Lee vehicle, and how many of the supporting players from Lee's movies are in the film. "It's hard not to, especially if you're a Bruce Lee fan, to be watching this movie knowing it was closely going to be—like seeing this end fight on the roof—imagining it could have been Lee up there."

On the second track, martial arts film enthusiasts Mike Leeder and Arne Venema provide a slightly more gossipy track, also discussing the other cast members and the relationship between Yu and Lo, and what was going on in the Hong Kong film industry at the time. So far as an analysis of the film is concerned, Djeng and Worth's talk is more dependable, but Leeder and Venema do add a great deal of color.

Cape Town death wish

Based upon a page-turning crime novel by Deon Meyer, the five-part BBC Studios program, **Devil's Peak**, begins as a vigilante action thriller set in Cape Town, South Africa. Sisanda Henna is a former state security operative seeking revenge after his young son is killed. He soon begins targeting wealthy individuals who are kidnapping or otherwise exploiting children, and Hilton Pelsler is an instinctive, competent but alcoholic cop who pieces together what Henna's character is up to. Released in a two-platter DVD set by BBC (UPC#883929822928, \$28), the program cuts back and forth between the actions of the two characters, and become one fantastic cliffhanger after another in the process. Meanwhile, as the story progresses, it dives deeper and deeper into their individual psyches, while taking on many other fascinating characters and fleshing them out, as well. Hence, the drama is not only valid, it is engaging, so that you start by being hooked onto the action scenes, but then stay for the rich and complex portrait of the lives of the characters, while at the same time taking in a terrific portrait of Cape Town as a bustling metropolis and the disparities within its social strata. In other words, the show has everything, and is impossible to stop watching once you get started.

Each platter has a 'Play All' option and the program runs a total of 275 minutes. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback, the image is sharp and smooth, accentuating the detailed establishing shots that often encourage one to pause and savor, regardless of the excitements going on. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has many wonderful separation effects and a strong dimensionality, more satisfying than many motion picture audio mixes. There are optional English subtitles. It should be noted that while the plot has a fully satisfying conclusion, the fates of several central characters are still somewhat open, so perhaps a second season will be forthcoming. We would welcome it.

Dublin detective

The allure of a relaxed, absorbing and clever detective story is just about the greatest entertainment home video can offer. It is transporting, taking you not just to interesting corners of the world, but to atmospheres and environments you would otherwise never see, and introducing you to characters you would otherwise never meet, all the while leaving just enough of a threat lingering in the background to keep you alert and involved with where the hero is taking you. The director of **Barber**, Fintan Connolly, likes to include shots where the actor in the foreground is motionless and the only movement is in the background, severely out of focus, in the 2023 feature, a Brainstorm Media DVD (UPC#840418306338, \$15). That's as good of a metaphor for a detective's journey as any. Aidan Gillen plays the hero, a former Dublin cop who lost his job because he was bisexual and has become a private detective to earn his living. A wealthy woman hires him to find her missing granddaughter, and that sets off a series of run-ins and brush offs with powerful men, including the hero's old boss. In the process, the villains attempt to use incidents from his own past against him, and he must come to terms with how the world has changed to help his ex-wife and his own teenaged daughter through their difficulties. The film was shot during the pandemic, and so the characters wear masks and face shields at times, which already begins to look a bit bizarre, but it does not in any way undercut the basic appeal of the program, accompanying the hero as he digs for leads, figures out connections, sorts through the twists and otherwise rights the wrongs of others.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. Deliberate focus manipulation aside, the image is often a little soft and shadows are very dark, obscuring details now and then, although colors are basically fresh and the picture quality is workable. There is an unremarkable 5.1-channel Dolby Digital soundtrack that is most effective during the film's quiet moments, when a soft musical score by Forrest Gray accentuates the peacefulness of pensive contemplation. A trailer has been included. Contrary to a jacket notation, there is no subtitling.

Smart lawyers

It is easy enough to point out the deluge of flaws swamping the Cinedigm *Hallmark Movies & Mysteries* release, **Darrow & Darrow: Body of Evidence** (UPC#767685161272, \$15), from unlikely police procedures to magical evidence appearing when it is most needed, but none of that really seems to matter. While you might be steps ahead at spotting who the villains are, the 83-minute film—closer in spirit to a TV episode than to a motion picture—is so awash in relaxed, crime-solving activity that it picks you right up and sweeps you along with its modest pleasures. Part of a series of Canadian productions that pretend to be taking place in the United States, Kimberly Williams-Paisley is a partner in a small town law firm with her mother, and Tom Kavanagh is a prosecuting attorney who, in the 2019 program, takes time off from his position and assists Williams-Paisley's character in an eccentric case, proving that an incarcerated woman did not kill her husband, whose body has never been found. The characters—particularly but not uniformly the male characters—are clownish at times in contrast to primarily the female heroes, who are intelligent and determined. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The image transfer is vivid and smooth, so that the film does manage to convey its small town atmosphere effectively, at least from time to time. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has a number of very nice separation effects and an appealing dimensionality, also adding to the validity of the entertainment. There are optional English subtitles. What basically happens is that while you might be spotting the solutions ahead of the characters, that just increases the excitement of waiting for them to figure it out, and otherwise there are a sufficient number of clever twists to sustain the story's momentum.

Low rider culture

Applying a classic dramatic concept—the older responsible brother has to take care of the younger, irresponsible brother—to an American Hispanic community pretty much the same way that **La Bamba** did, the 1979 Warner Bros. production, **Boulevard Nights**, is set in East Los Angeles, using the 'low rider' craze as an opening to insert the dependable emotional conflicts, while the friction between

rival neighborhood 'gangs' provide complications and action. Released as a *Warner WB Archive Collection* Blu-ray (UPC#840418309803, \$22), the film does a nice job capturing the atmosphere and what is now a period setting, from the storefronts to the houses. It was all clearly shot on location and is a wonderful time capsule in that regard. The two actors, Richard Yniguez and Danny De La Paz, deliver very appealing performances, as well, so that their charisma, combined with the drama and setting, are enough to sustain the film's 102-minute running time effectively.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. Disregarding the movie's embrace of urban grime, the picture looks sharp and colors are accurate. There are optional English subtitles. The film's monophonic sound is reasonably strong, but the movie's one anachronism is its score. One the one hand, the film features one of Lalo Schifrin's very best jazz compositions, studiously and generously applied to carry the drama along. On the other hand, despite Schifrin's Hispanic roots, neither the jazz score nor the Fifties oldies that pop up as music within the film are what would define the inner lives of those characters at that time. It just doesn't fit. Even the music, not from the film, used in the trailer that has been included on the disc is closer to aligning with the kids.

4K Smith con

Already smooth and hyper-slick when we reviewed the original Warner Bros. Blu-ray in Jul 15, the 2014 Will Smith con man movie, **Focus**, is even sharper and slicker as a *4K UltraHD* title (UPC#840418306178, \$25). The image details are crisp down to the tiniest facet and since the film is a reasonably fun expectation rollercoaster ride of crosses, double crosses and triple crosses in a world of wealth and luxury, the 4K presentation lowers whatever resistance one has left for its predictable plot twists, recherché pop hits (The Ray Conniff Singers? Really?) and movie star performances. The 7.1-channel DTS sound also adds to the subliminal thrills. Directed by Glenn Ficarra and John Requa, Smith and Margot Robbie play con artists who team up, separate and then team up again. The pleasure of the 105-minute film comes from the incrementally daring cons that the two become involved in, and if you find the film at all appealing, then the 4K presentation is the best way to savor the fun.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1. There are optional English subtitles, 11 minutes of deleted scenes and 20 minutes of promotional featurettes, all of which originally appeared on the standard BD.

Depp as Bulger

Playing him like a sober Hunter Thompson, Johnny Depp, of all people, was cast as the Boston mobster, Whitey Bulger, in the 2015 gangster feature, **Black Mass**, which has been released as a 4K UltraHD Blu-ray by Warner Bros. (UPC#840418306185, \$25). We reviewed the standard Blu-ray in Mar 16. Directed by Scott Cooper, the film weaves a fairly complex story of FBI snitches and moles, as Depp's character rises to take control of the city by ratting out each of his rivals. One gets the impression from the film that a life of crime is pretty much like spinning plates—the object is to keep them going as long as possible, and then get the hell off the stage before any of them drop. While it takes a lot of concentration to follow who is who and what is happening in the 122-minute feature, the assassinations are as exhilarating as they are blunt, and while the film lacks the pizzazz and flash of some of the more popular mob movies (and TV shows), it is always engrossing and conveys a very satisfying sense of realism. To all of this, the addition of 4K is highly welcome. The picture is deliberately drab and grey, and the standard Blu-ray looked fine, but the 4K precision locks you into each scene in a way that the standard BD does not. Depp's makeup is imperfect—it just isn't entirely persuasive—but the sharpness of the image adds to his reserved performance and really creeps you out when he is supposed to creep you out. You never know how he is going to react, and you become so concerned about it that you pay less attention to his unconvincing baldness. Benedict Cumberbatch, Kevin Bacon and Joel Edgerton are also featured.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The 5.1-channel DTS sound is deliberately subdued—even the rock music that invades the audio from time to time does so with restraint—but the presentation is solid. There are optional English subtitles. Carried over from the standard BD is a terrific 62-minute documentary about Bulger's adventures following the end of the film, and 35 minutes of passable production featurettes.

Where Jesus freaks came from

Based upon a true story—archival clips of the real people are displayed during the end credits—the Lionsgate release, **Jesus Revolution** (UPC#031398339212, \$30), is about a Southern California pastor in the late Sixties who reaches out to the 'hippies' in his community and joins forces with a young bearded man who has a talent for promoting the Gospel. They both ended up founding churches with enormous followings, but the film is about their initial years and the people who worked with them in adjusting church traditions to what were then modern and rather rebellious times. In an earnest performance, Kelsey Grammer stars as the pastor, with Jonathan Roumie, Joel Courtney and Kimberly Williams-Paisley. The 2023 film teases the viewer initially with the idea that Roumie's character may be more than just a knowledgeable and earnest itinerant evangelist, but it also spends a good deal of time exploring how many of the kids, who were referred to at the time as 'Jesus Freaks,' had underlying emotional issues that had to be assuaged by something, be it religion or substance abuse, so that as it proceeds it delves more and more into the problems that were created by the growth of the movement in the lives of those involved and less about being some sort of divine intervention that kickstarted everything. As a period film about the Sixties, the nostalgia is deftly blended with the spirituality to touch viewers who are, once again, longing for a meaning to their lives. Those whose confidence in their sense of purpose does not align so readily with the beliefs of the characters will find that the drama, while interesting, may be insufficient to justify the film's 120-minute running time.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The color transfer looks fine and the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound brings a nice dimensionality to the many period pop tunes on the soundtrack. There is an audio track that describes the action (“At Pirate’s Cove, figures walk up a rocky, sand dusted surface. A massive, cheering throng fills the narrow beach below. In the water, Chuck and Lonnie baptize people.”), alternate French and Spanish audio tracks and optional English, French and Spanish subtitles.

Directors Jon Erwin and Brent McCorkle provide a good commentary track with producer Kevin Downes. They provide a detailed description of the production, sharing stories about their research, the cast’s efforts, their own outlooks on spirituality (“I think the disconnect in the Western modern church is this idea that you can’t really be flawed, and I think is got broken early, like Colonial times, with the Puritans and the Quakers, where you’ve got this ‘perfect’ façade. It’s not in the Bible. So now, that’s why everyone in church gets accused of being a hypocrite.”), and the problems and successes they encountered on the shoot. They also share a few filmmaking tips about scene blocking and getting the most from a limited budget. Additionally featured are 27 minutes of promotional pieces that include interviews with the people the film is based upon, as well as the shooting of a music video, and 10 minutes of nice deleted scenes with an optional commentary from Erwin and McCorkle.

Irish kids causing trouble

A film for children, provided they can follow thick Irish accents, **War of the Buttons**, has been released by Warner Bros. as a Warner WB Archive Collection Blu-ray (UPC#840418307694, \$22). Set in the Fifties, the 1994 feature, directed by John Roberts, is about two rival gangs of kids from neighboring towns in the Irish countryside, one group appearing to be slightly better off economically than the other. The film depicts their increasingly elaborate and sophisticated pranks and skirmishes, including all-out battles in fields and ancient ruins, where nobody is seriously hurt but there are plenty of close calls. The battle scenes have sophisticated tactics and are deftly shot to convey the intricacies and changing fortunes of the conflicts. Other than these scenes, however, adults may find their patience strained by the 94-minute feature’s blend of humor and pre-adolescent/adolescent drama, although kids could be more inclined to identify with the protagonists and feel invested in their fates.

Colm Meaney is the best known adult member of the cast. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and the color transfer looks fine. The monophonic sound is clear, although American viewers will be greatly aided by the optional English subtitles. A trailer is also included.

Concubine confusion

A gorgeous 1974 Hong Kong Shaw Bros. period erotic feature, **The Golden Lotus**, has been released on Blu-ray by Celestial Pictures and 88 Films (UPC#760137158615, \$35). Peter Yang stars as a wealthy gangster who seduces the wife of a baker and persuades her to poison her husband and become his own fifth wife. The film runs 116 minutes and that part of the story, which is clearly articulated, takes up most of the film’s first half. The movie is based upon a famous novel, however, and as it tries to squeeze more material into its second half—he takes on a sixth wife, igniting jealousy in the fifth wife—the narrative becomes more confusing and fragmented. Nevertheless, directed by Han-Hsiang Li, the production designs and cinematography are gorgeous—letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, the transfer also looks impeccable—the sex and nudity are not only wonderful but are depicted every which way but loose (and there has never really been kissing in movies like the kissing depicted here—it’s like the players are doing it for the first time), and the ending is resolute, drawing the story to a sensible conclusion. While the film will not be of interest to action fanatics, those who enjoy more worldly pleasures will find plenty of moments in the film that will hold their interest. In his first screen appearance, the young Jackie Chan has a brief, comical role as a street vendor and, for what it is worth, delivers quite a good, sharp performance. The monophonic sound is in Mandarin with optional English subtitles and can be raspy if raised too greatly in volume, but is otherwise sharp and reasonably clear. There is a trailer that contains a couple of scenes that didn’t make it into the film, and a 2-minute montage of promotional stills.

DVD News

CRITERION CORNER: The Criterion Collection is releasing a 4K presentation of Federico Fellini’s **8½** with an introduction by Terry Gilliam; a commentary featuring film critics Gideon Bachmann and Antonio Monda; *Fellini: A Director’s Notebook*, a short film by Fellini; *The Last Sequence*, a documentary on Fellini’s lost alternate ending for **8½**; *Nino Rota: Between Cinema and Concert*, a documentary about Fellini’s longtime composer; interviews with Sandra Milo, Lina Wertmüller, and Vittorio Storaro; photographs from Bachmann’s collection; and a gallery of behind-the-scenes and production photos. Wim Wenders’s **Paris, Texas** will be in 4K and feature a Wenders commentary; interviews with Wenders, cinematographer Robby Müller, composer Ry Cooder, Harry Dean Stanton, Dennis Hopper, Peter Falk, Hanns Zischler, Patricia Highsmith, Samuel Fuller, Allison Anders and Claire Denis; deleted scenes and Super 8 home movies; a gallery of Wenders’ location-scouting photos; and behind-the-

scenes photos by Robin Holland. Joel and Ethan Coen’s **No Country for Old Men** will be in 4K and will include a conversation between Joel and Ethan with author Megan Abbott; a conversation between Roger Deakins and associate producer David Diliberto, also featuring Abbott; archival interviews with Javier Bardem, Josh Brolin, Tommy Lee Jones, and Kelly Macdonald; a behind-the-scenes documentary by Brolin; and three documentaries about the making of the film featuring on-set footage and interviews with members of the cast and crew. Sammo Hung’s **Eastern Condors** will have *Meet the Filmmakers*, an interview with Hung; interviews from 2001 with Hung and actor Yuen Wah; and *Eastern Condors Live!*, an onstage performance from the 1987 Miss Hong Kong Pageant.

CLOSED OUT OF TOWN: The following titles have been removed from our *Coming Attractions* listing—*Before Now & Then*, *Monsters of California*, and *Blacklight / Memory / The Marksman*.

NEW IN BLU: The following titles were recently released on Blu-ray—*Mind Melters V.51*, *Mind Melters V.52*, *Mind Melters V.53*, *Mind Melters V.54*, *Mind Melters V.55*, *Mind Melters V.56*, *Mind Melters V.57*, *Mind Melters V.58*, *Mind Melters V.59*, *Mind Melters V.60*, *Mind Melters V.61*, *Mind Melters V.62*, *Mind Melters V.63*, *Of Dice and Men (Acid Bath)*; *Supersoul Brother (AGFA)*; *The Brokenwood Mysteries Season 10*, *The Walking Dead The Ones Who Live Season 1*, *A Wounded Fawn (AMD)*; *Fagara*, *Our Time Will Come (Bayview)*; *Nightmare on Elmo’s Street (Bill Zebub)*; *After the End*, *Little Johnny (Bounty)*; *Inside Out 2 (Buena Vista)*; *Broken*, *Dawgz Life*, *Paradise*, *Taxi 121 (Burning Bulb)*; *Sweet Substitute (Canadian)*; *Anthropophagous*, *Bloodbath at the House of Death*, *Devil Times Five*, *Hell’s Trap*, *The Suffering of Monique (CAV)*; *Big Fan*, *Clockwatchers*, *Linoleum*, *Man of the Year*, *Miranda (Cinedigm)*; *All of Us Strangers*, *Gregg Araki’s Teen Apocalypse Trilogy*, *Happiness*, *Tótem (Criterion)*; *The Fabulous Four*, *Longlegs*, *Mothers’ Instinct (Decal)*; *Of Dice and Men (Die Star)*; *A Fat Wreck The Punk-U-Mentary (ETR)*; *Escape from Germany (Excel)*; *I Am a Sex Addict (Factory 25)*; *The Great Escape II The Untold Story (Film Chest)*; *The Dragon Painter*, *The Poetry of Lee Chang-Dong*, *Scarlet Diva (Film Movement)*; *Doll Graveyard*, *The Primevals (Full Moon)*; *Art of a Hit*, *Lost in the Shuffle (Giant)*; *The Box*, *Charlie Tango*, *Great White Summer*, *I’ll Play Mother*, *The Nana Project*, *Night of the Harvest*, *Paradox Effect*, *The Pitch Patient Safety’s Next Generation*, *Stylebender (Gravitas)*; *Avenging Force*, *Babylon Berlin Season 4*, *Below the Belt*, *Botany Bay*, *Chains of Gold*, *Fatal Vision*, *Film Noir The Dark Side of Cinema Volume XX*, *Film Noir The Dark Side of Cinema Volume XXI*, *Les Femmes*, *Madness*, *My Favorite Spy*, *Naughty Girl*, *Red Mountain*, *The Proud Rebel*, *Rolling Vengeance*, *Two Weeks in September (Kino)*; *We Are Zombies (Kinology)*; *Here for Blood (Last the Night)*; *Dangerous Ones*, *Treasures of Terror V.1 (Leomark)*; *Kill (Lionsgate)*; *Icons Unearthed Fast & Furious (Mill Creek)*; *Scab Vendor*, *Late Night with the Devil*, *Scab Vendor*, *T-Blockers (MPI)*; *The Bounty Hunter Trilogy*, *Caligula The Ultimate Cut*, *The Champions*, *The Chronicles of Riddick*, *The Creature*, *A Dog Called... Vengeance*, *Fill ’er Up with Super*, *The Golden Lotus*, *Lake Michigan Monster*, *A Man on His Knees*, *A Midsummer Night’s Sex Comedy*, *The Mummy and the Curse of the Jackals*, *My Love Affair with Marriage*, *The Profane Exhibit*, *Red Sun*, *Redneck Miller*, *The Shadow Boxing*, *Tattooed Life*, *The Threat*, *To Kill a Mastermind*, *Tremors 2 Aftershocks*, *Two Taoist Tales*, *You Are Not Alone (MVD)*; *Canary*, *God and Country*, *This Much We Know (Oscilloscope)*; *Belgravia The Next Chapter*, *Knuckles*, *Reacher Season 2 (Paramount)*; *La Llorona (Powerhouse)*; *Counter Histories Rock Hill*, *Dirt Road to Lafayette*, *Eric Clapton Standing at the Crossroads*, *Essex Boys Retribution*, *Faye*, *Fields of War*, *Fixed*, *Forget Me Not*, *The Viking Sisters (Rising Sun)*; *Blame It on Rio*, *Clive Barker’s Lord of Illusions*, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *Lady in White*, *Marat/Sade*, *Moby Dick*, *Saving Grace (Sandpiper)*; *Our World Is Drowning and Going to Hell The Underground Films of Richard Baylor (Saturn’s Core)*; *Bad Boys Ride or Die*, *The Crown Season 6*, *Once to Every Woman (Sony)*; *In Her Name (Tribeca)*; *Sky Pirates (Umbrella)*; *Despicable Me 4*, *Law & Order SVU Season 25*, *Ted Season 1*, *Touch (Universal)*; *Omen (Utopia)*; *The Exorcism (Vertical)*; *House of Dolls (VMI)*; *Amos & Andrew*, *Bathing Beauty*, *Batman 85th Anniversary*, *Black Belt Jones*, *Boulevard Nights*, *Cheech & Chong’s The Corsican Brothers*, *Conflict*, *A Guy Thing*, *Horizon An American Saga Chapter 1*, *I Remember Mama*, *Jonny’s Golden Quest/Jonny Quest vs. The Cyber-Insects*, *Journey into Fear*, *Kinjite Forbidden Subjects*, *Lethal Weapon Season 1*, *A Prairie Home Companion*, *September*, *Speechless*, *SuperFriends! Complete Series*, *Top Cat Complete Series*, *Valkyrie*, *Young Sheldon Season 7*, *Young Sheldon Complete Series*, *The Zen Diaries of Garry Shandling (Warner)*; *Before Dawn (Well Go)*; *A Heart of Love (Yellow Veil)*; *The Diet Deception*, *A Kingdom for a Crown (Zapruderflix)*

NEW IN 4K: The following titles were recently issued in 4K format—*Inside Out 2 (Buena Vista)*; *The Amityville Horror*, *The Boy*, *Doomsday*, *The Stranger*, *The Stepfather*, *Village of the Damned (Cinedigm)*; *All of Us Strangers*, *Gregg Araki’s Teen Apocalypse Trilogy*, *Happiness*, *The Long Good Friday*, *Repo Man (Criterion)*; *Longlegs (Decal)*; *The Antichrist*, *The Ladykillers*, *Link*, *Zoltan Hound of Dracula (Kino)*; *Kill (Lionsgate)*; *Caligula The Ultimate Cut*, *The Chronicles of Riddick*, *Dark Night of the Scarecrows 1 & 2 Double Feature*, *Devil Times Five*, *Friday the 13th*, *The Million Eyes of Sumuru*, *Torso*, *Tremors 2 Aftershocks (MVD)*; *Bringing Out the Dead*, *Knuckles*, *Murder on the Orient Express*, *Reacher Season 2*, *Stardust*, *Transformers 7-Movie Collection (Paramount)*; *Bad Boys Ride or Die*, *Body Double*, *A League of Their Own*, *Richard Pryor Live on the Sunset Strip (Sony)*; *Despicable Me 4*, *Sweeney Todd The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, *Universal Classic Monsters The Essential Collection (Universal)*; *Friends Complete Series*, *Horizon An American Saga Chapter 1 (Warner)*

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Current Attractions

The following titles recently appeared for the first time: Abused (Fimhub) About (Fimhub) The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet Video Scrap Book (MPI) After the End (Bounty) All This I Will Give to You (Kino) Amos & Andrews (Warner) Arctic Circle Seasons 1-3 (Kino) At Her Feet (Freestyle)* At the End of Eight (Leomark) Babylon Berlin Season 4 (Kino) Bad Boys Ride or Die (Sony) Bad Kill (Fimhub) The Balad of Davy Crockett (VMI) Be Careful What You Wish 4 (Fimhub) Before Dawn (Wild Eye) Belgravia The Next Chapter (Paramount) Blame It on Rio (Sandpiper) Blind Date Book Club (Leomark) Lifelong Love (Cinegrim) Blue Desert (Indiepix) Bo Nan Za (Freestyle)* The Boo (Fimhub) Bounty (Fimhub) The Box (Gravitas)* Breaking the Science Barrier (Fimhub) Brigitte Bardot Collection (Kino) Broken (Burning Bulb) The Brokenwood Mysteries Season 10 (AMD) Buffalo (Fimhub) By No Means (Fimhub) Cage (Fimhub)* Call My Agent Complete Series (Kino) Canary (Oscilloscope)* Charlie Tango (Gravitas) Chicago P.D. Season 11 (Universal) Christina Aguilera Pop Diva (Fimhub) The Clean Up Crew (Sony)* Cve Barker's Lord of Illusions (Sandpiper) Cocaine Cougar (Social) The College Hero (Alpha)* Counter Histories Rock Hill (Rising Sun) Creating Christ (Fimhub) The Crossroads (Deskpop) The Crown Season 6 (Sony) CSI Vegas The Final Season (Paramount) The Dancing Monkey (Random) Dangerous Game (Warner) Danny, Legend, God. (Rising Sun) Darkest Hour Annihilation (Fimhub) Darkheart Manor (Leomark) Darwin & News Season 1 (Deskcape) Darwin & News Season 2 (Deskcape) Dawgz Life (Burning Bulb)* Despicable Me 4 (Universal)* The Diet Deception (Zapruderfix) Dirt Road to Lafayette (Rising Sun) The Divine Protector Master Salt Begins (Freestyle)* Do! Graveyard (Full Moon) Easy Land (Fimhub) Eden Prime (Fimhub)* El Hombre Besta (Gemini) Ephemeral Eternity (Fimhub) The Equalizer Season 4 (Paramount) Eric Clapton Standing at the Crossroads (Rising Sun) Escape from Germany (Excel)

Essex Boys Retribution (Rising Sun) Exevigis Lovcraft (Fimhub) The Exorcism (Vertical) The Fabulous Four (Decal) Faye (Rising Sun) Fields of War (Rising Sun) Finding Tony (Level 33)* Fire Country Season 2 (Paramount) Fireplace (Fimhub) First Love (Kino) Fixed (Rising Sun) Forget Me Not (Rising Sun) 41 (Fimhub) Game of Love (Cinegrim)* Game of Love (Fimhub)* The Gardener's Keeper (Fimhub) The Girl (Fimhub) Goblin (Fimhub) God & Country (Gravitas) The Godfathers of Hardcore (Fimhub) God's Love Saved Me (Fimhub) Going to Mars The Nikki Giovanni Project (Kino) The Golden Age of Burlesque Collection V.2 (Alpha)* The Grab (Magnolia) Great White Summer (Gravitas) A Guy Thing (Warner) Habibul (Fimhub) Hang on to Your Hanger-Ons (Bounty) Harawata Man (Wild Eye) Haunted Indiana State Sanatorium (Fimhub) Heaven's Revenge (Fimhub) Horizon An American Saga Chapter 1 (Warner) Hot Hotel Nights Noodles Del Sol (Leomark) The House of the Baskin-Villes (Sandpiper) House of Dolls (VMI) How to Come Alive with Norman Maier (Kino) Hustle on Lombard (Fimhub) I'll Be Your Mirror (Strand) I'll Play Mother (Gravitas)* Kenan Man (Wild Eye) In a Violent Nature (AMD) The In Between (Paramount) In Her Name (Tibeca) Inheritance Italian Style (Fimhub)* Inside Out.2 (Buena Vista) Intensely Independent The Micro-Budget Films of Blake Eckard (MVD) Into the Cosmos (Deskcape) Jubilo (Alpha) July Rhapsody (Cheng) Jurassic Extorist (Wild Eye) Justice Is My Mind (Fimhub) Karmetz a Bynd (CMV)* Kill (Lionsgate) Killing Zedda Sparks (Fimhub)* Kinjite Forbidden Subjects (Warner) A Kingdom for a Crown (Zapruderfix) Knuckles (Paramount) Lady in White (Sandpiper) Late Night with the Devil (MPI) Law & Order SVU Season 24 (Universal)* The Life of Peter Gottlieb (Freestyle) Liac Time (Alpha)* Link (Kino) Little Cooper (Fimhub) Little Johnny (Bounty) Loki 7 (Fimhub) A Lonely Woman (Fimhub) A Long Way Off (Fimhub) Longlegs (Decal)* Looking for Mr. Miyagi (Fimhub) Lost in the Shuffle (Giant)

Louise Brooks Collection (Alpha)* Love Blood And Aztec Demons - The Lost Films Of Juan F. Modestama II (Leomark) Love Destination Courses Forgiveness Meditations (Deskcape) The Love Destination Courses Inner Child Meditations (Deskcape) The Love Destination Courses Morning Meditations (Deskcape) Mahjong and the West (Fimhub) Marat/Sade (Sandpiper) Megalithic Underworld (Fimhub) A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy (Warner) Midwives (Fim Movement) Mike Muratore Crowd Work (Fimhub) Miles in the Life (Fimhub) Mind Games (Fimhub) Mind Melters V.51 (Acid Bath)* Mind Melters V.52 (Acid Bath)* Mind Melters V.53 (Acid Bath)* Mind Melters V.54 (Acid Bath)* Mind Melters V.55 (Acid Bath)* Mind Melters V.56 (Acid Bath)* Mind Melters V.57 (Acid Bath)* Mind Melters V.58 (Acid Bath)* Mind Melters V.59 (Acid Bath)* Mind Melters V.60 (Acid Bath)* Mind Melters V.61 (Acid Bath)* Mind Melters V.62 (Acid Bath)* Mind Melters V.63 (Acid Bath)* Miss Bluebeard (Alpha)* Moby Dick (Sandpiper) Mom and Dad's Nipple Factory (Kino) Moral Remains (Triple The) Mothers' Instinct (Decal) My Father's Keeper (Fimhub) My King (Fimhub) My Little Friend (Fimhub) My Love Affair with Marriage (MVD) The Nana Project (Gravitas)* The Next 24 Hours (Fimhub) The Night Bird (Alpha)* Night of the Harvest (Gravitas)* Night of the Zombghouls (Fimhub)* Nobody's Home (Freestyle) Of Dice and Men (Acid Bath) Off Ramp (Freestyle) Once upon a Time in Amityville (Wild Eye) The Outlaws (Well Go) Paradise (Burning Bulb) The Paradise Motel (Fimhub) Paradox Effect (Gravitas)* The Passing On (Fimhub) PBS Kids Four Seasons of Fun (Paramount) Peter Five Eight (Invisible) Petrol (Indican)* Pipville USA The Official Players Ball (Fimhub) Pompeii The New Dig (Paramount) The Primavels (Full Moon) The Profane Exhibit (MVD) Rally Cars (BMV)* Ready Season 2 (Paramount) Redemption Value (Fimhub) The Return (Fimhub)

Rhinegold (Strand) Ring Shark (SRS) Rio Grande Air (Fimhub) RxCall (Fimhub) Saving Grace (Sandpiper) Scab Vendor (MPI)* Science Friction (Fimhub) Science Kids Microbes Living Inside of Us (Wonderscape) Science Kids Orcas vs. Great White Sharks (Wonderscape) The Secrets of Bella Vista / Mystery Island (Cinegrim) The Senator (TLA)* Separation of East Pakistan The Untold Story (Fimhub)* September (Warner) Serengeti III (Warner) Shadows on the Road (Fimhub) She's Out of His Mind (Fimhub) Sin Apple (Fimhub)* Sister (Fimhub) Something Good Coming (BMG) Sometimes Our Friends Come Over (Fimhub)* Sorry / Not Sorry (Kino) Speedless (Warner) Spirit of Friendship (Vision)* Spies: The Struggle for Freedom (Fimhub) Spoked Streets (Fimhub) Street Soccer New York (Fimhub) Strong Hawk My Sister's Keeper (Fimhub) Sylebeard (Gravitas)* Succubus (Cinegrim) Super Friends Complete Series (Warner) Superman A Love Story (Fimhub) Taxi 121 (Burning Bulb)* Ted Season 1 (Universal)* Thieves (Fimhub) 13 Notes in Red (Kino) 13* Summer (Indican) This Much We Know (Oscilloscope)* Timeless (Fimhub) Together (Warner) Tormented Revenge (Fimhub) Totem (Criterion) Treasures of Terror V.1 (Leomark)* 22 The Unforgotten Soldier (Fimhub) Unsolved History Life of a King (Fimhub) US and the Game Industry (Fimhub) #UNTRUTH: The Psychology of Trumpism (MPI) Valkyrie (Warner) The Viking Sires (Rising Sun) Vintage Sexploitation Movie Collection (Alpha)* The Walking Dead The Ones Who Live Season 1 (AMD) Waterfall 1 No Words No Sex, Just Relax (Fimhub) The West Ones (Fimhub)* Wheels on the Bus and More Kids Songs (Fimhub) Wild Genus (Freestyle) Wineville (MPI)* Woman in the Maze (Stonecutter) A Wounded Fawn (AMD) You Are Not Alone (MVD) Young Sheldon Complete Series (Warner) Yoyo Season 1 (Deskcape) Yoyo Season 2 (Deskcape) Yuzo The Biggest Battle in Tokyo (SRS)

*Did not appear on last month's Coming Attractions listing

Coming Attractions

The following select DVD titles are promised for the near future. How many of them will show up is never a certainty. Logical subdivisions appear unmarked within each division. Titles which did not appear on last month's list are marked with an arrow (→) and are added to the bottom of subdivisions so that the longest awaited titles appear at the top within each grouping: From Acid Bath: →Glitch Ditch 7 →Glitch Ditch 8 →Glitch Ditch 9 From AMD: Beheaded Anne Rice's Interview with the Vampire Season 2 Harry Wild Season 3 →Sanctuary A Witch's Tale Season 1 →My Life Is Murder Season 4 →Murdoch Mysteries Season 17 →Orphan Black Echoes Season 1 →Paris From Big World: →Disco Boy From BMS: Grace Wins →Grace by Night →Finding Christmas →Chicken Coop →Joy of Horses →My Private Line to God →The Day You Found Me →Summer Rain From Breaking Glass: →School of Magical Animals 2 From Buena Vista: →Kinds of Kindness From Buffalo 8: →Handshake From Cinegram: Christmas on Cherry Lane →Never Been Chris'd →The Perfect Christmas Present →A World Record Christmas →Round and Round →Haul Out the Holly Lit Up →Christmas Island →Mystery on Mistletoe Lane/Claus To If a Good Night →A Sudden Case of Christmas From Cinephobia: The Summer with Carmen From Classicflix: →The Little Rascals Complete Collection From Criterion: I Walked with a Zombie/The Seventh Victim Demon Pond Totem About Dry Grasses Ryuchi Sakamoto | Opus →The Beast →Evil Does Not Exist From Decal: →Subversive National Anthem →Slingshot →Hounds of War

From Deskpop: →2 Lives in Pittsburgh →The Window →Robot Dreams →Remnant →From Disciples: →Disciples in Moonlight →From Dreamscape: Amazonian Undercover The Love Destination Courses Soothing Forestscapes for Deep Sleep The Love Destination Courses Soothing Oceanscapes for Deep Sleep A Maleta Full of Treasures Riot Island Summer Snow →Christmas Catch →Christmas in Paris →Christmas with a Prince →Christmas with a Prince Becoming Royal →Hometown Holiday →Operation Christmas List →Snowbound for Christmas →A Very Country →From Green Planet: →A Bluegrass Christmas →Cat and Keet Season 1 →Cat and Keet Season 2 →Discovering Who Is This Jesus? →Food Energy Water →Fruit Ninja Zenzy Force →Infinite Grief →Luna, Chip & Inkie Season 1 →Luna, Chip & Inkie Season 2 →Luther vs. Rome →Martin Compston's Scottish Fling →My Father's War →Riding Tornado →Secrets of Sacred Architecture →Siesta Z Season 1 →Siesta Z Season 2 →Ukrainian Women →Why Do We Even Work From Electric: →Bonded in Blood →The Dig →Baby Boomer Yearbook From Film Movement: →Cora →Colette and Justin →On the Wandering Paths →From Found Footage: The Found Footage Festival V.8 Found Footage Festival V.10 From Freestyle: →Heightened →A Million Days →Close the Fold →Unicorn Boy →Mad Key →The Zombie Wedding →Children of the Pines →All Happy Families →From Fun City: Paradise →Heavenly Bodies From Gravitas: Studio One Forever →Down Below →Little Brother →Another Happy Day →Hauntology →In Tenbras Into the Darkness

→Mother Father Sister Brother Frank →My Home Unknown →9 Windows →Between the Beats →Martinez Margaritas and Murder! →Apache Warrior →Mags and Julie Go on a Road Trip →Dark Figures →Promised →The Vampire and the Vigilante →The Devil's Stomping Ground →American Tragedy →Goodbye Butterfly →Sour Grapes →Killer Weekend →Slay Ride →Bad Impulse →The Mystery of Brittanica →Mercy Christmas →A Song for You The Austin City Limits Story →Truth Is the Only Client →Hello World →The One You Feed →Two Ways Home →To Fall in Love →Meatball Machine →From Green Planet: →Da Vinci's Dream The Secrets of Flight From Greenfield: →The Twisters From Inlente: →The Story of G.I. Joe From Image: →The Last Breath From Indican: →Devil's Mind →From Indiepix: Family →Last Shadow at First Light From Intellectual: →Joy Christmas with the Tabernacle Choir From Kino: Made in England The Films of Powell and Pressburger Terrestrial Verses →Plan Dier Walk Close to You The Falling Star The Boy in the Woods Happy Clothes A Film about Patricia Field →First Love →Sebastian →The Throwback →Slow →Roseland →Merchant Ivory The Documentary →Blue Christmas →Food and Country →Mad about the Boy The Noël Coward Story →Daytime Revolution →The Critic From Leomark: The Syndrome Path to Pain Inbred →Cora →Tresures of Terror V.2 →Ash and Dust From Level 33: →Cottontail From Lionsgate: →MaXXine →Borderlands →The Crow From Magnolia: The Convert Thelma →The Arctic Convoy →Dance First →Yoshiki Under the Sky From Mark: Mark A Call to Action

→Future Soldier From Roundtable: #AMFAD All My Friends Are Dead From Rutless: From Power to Prison The Trump Story Part 2 From Scream Team: The Pumpkin Man From Soapy: →Happy Times →Kill 'Em All 2 →Kneecap →Harold and the Purple Crayon →It Ends with Us →Afraid From SRS: The Great Yokai War Guardians →Amityville Turkey Day →Liverleaf From Strand: →All Shall Be Well From 360: →Dogon Theory of Creation →Space Station →Space Shuttle →The History of Cybernetics From Toho: →Godzilla Minus One A Quiet Place Day One NCIS Hawaii Final Season NCIS Hawaii! Complete Series (15 series) NCIS Hawaii! Complete Series (25 platters) →Summer Snow →From Utopia: Chestnut Trilogy New Wave The Good Half →From Vertical: Chief of Station From Virgil: →Fancy Like Walker Hayes →From Vision: →The Lady of the Lake From Warner: Babylon 5 Complete Series (31 platters) →Blink Twice Captain Planet: The Complete Franchise Curb Your Enthusiasm Season 12 Curb Your Enthusiasm Complete Series (24 platters) The Gilded Age Season 2 House of the Dragon Season 2 →Trap →From Well Go: Extruina →End of the Rope →You Gotta Believe →Twilight of the Warriors Walled In From Wild Eye: Mummy Shark →Catnado →Apex Predators 2 →The Spawning →Found Emulsion →Abduction of the Innocent From Wizard: →Barbie & Kendra Crash Joe Bob's Drive-In Jamboree From Wonderscape: History Kids What Is a U.S. Representative to Congress? History Kids What Is a U.S. Senator? →Science Kids Biggest and Baddest Tornadoes →History Kids Famous Explorers