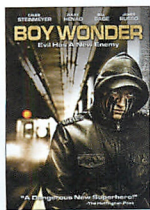


by himself. However, Li tracks him down, and the couple wed and have a child—only to suffer a tragic reversal when Fang is attacked by a thief he's chasing and winds up lying in a hospital near death. As if this weren't maudlin enough, *A Beautiful Life* features subplots involving a blind buddy of Fang's, and the cop's autistic brother, who falls in love with a mute girl. The back-and-forth between uplift and woe makes this an eventful *Life*, if also one that feels very much like a Warner Bros. weepie from the 1940s. Still, the cast plays with conviction, and director Andrew Lau—best known for *Infernal Affairs*, the inspiration for Martin Scorsese's *The Departed*—sets the scenes in vibrant locations. *A Beautiful Life* is essentially soap opera, but the exotic flavor makes it somewhat palatable, despite the manipulative and borderline absurd plot. A strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

Boy Wonder ★★

Inception, 97 min., R, DVD: \$26.99



Sean is a 10-year-old Brooklynite who witnesses his mother's murder during a carjacking; nine years later, he has matured into a young man living a double life: he's a straight-A student by day and a ruthlessly brutal vigilante by night. The cops at the local precinct allow Sean (Caleb Steinmeyer) to hang out and study mug shots in an attempt to find the killer who left him motherless, but no one initially connects the seemingly mild-mannered youth with the twilight violence that is creating havoc in the streets. Eventually, however, a young police detective named Teresa (Zulay Henao) begins to connect the dots and tries to pin Sean to the attacks. While the title may give the impression of a *Batman*-style romp, *Boy Wonder* is a dark and dreary thriller that has nothing to do with the comic book genre. First-time director Michael Morrissey never quite finds his groove, largely because the story is stuffed with too much information—including a distracting subplot about Sean's relationship with his ex-alcoholic father (Bill Sage) and Teresa's interactions with her comic-relief partner, Gary (Daniel Stewart Sherman). And Steinmeyer is never entirely convincing as either the mild Sean or his wild alter-ego. Although *Boy Wonder* picked up a number of awards at second-tier film festivals, this is not a necessary purchase. (P. Hall)

Brighton Rock ★★★

MPI, 111 min., R, DVD: \$24.98



Although based on Graham Greene's first "Catholic" novel, Rowan Joffe's adaptation minimizes the book's religious subtext in favor of its gangster-thriller surface plot—a

small-scale tale of a brutal young gangster named Pinkie (Sam Riley), who romances Rose (Andrea Riseborough)—a naïve and homely waitress he actually despises—in hopes of deflecting her from connecting him to a murder. Joffe has altered the original chronology, setting the story in 1964, when clashes between Mods and Rockers provide a colorful (and violent) backdrop to the narrative taking place in the titular seaside vacation town. But Pinkie remains an utter scoundrel, killing a member of a larger gang in retaliation for the accidental stabbing of his boss, while also aiming to take over leadership of his own crew by shunting aside older rivals. In order to keep the cops at bay, however, Pinkie must deal with the danger posed by Rose while simultaneously negotiating a deal with another mob leader—and he finds a nemesis in Ida (Helen Mirren), Rose's maternal employer. While Joffe's noir-ish style occasionally trumps narrative clarity, it works fairly well. More of a pulpish diversion than the examination of moral issues Greene envisioned, this is still recommended. (F. Swietek)

Carnage ★★1/2

Sony, 79 min., R, DVD: \$30.99, Blu-ray: \$35.99, Mar. 20



Directed by Roman Polanski—who shares screenwriting credits with Yasmina Reza in adapting her Tony Award-winning play *God of Carnage*—this biting NYC-set comedy shot in real time revolves around differences in bourgeois ethics and parenting styles. After a playground incident in which one youngster knocks out another's front teeth, the protective parents of the "victim" invite the chagrined mother and father of the "bully" to their apartment. What begins as a request for an apology and a polite discussion about childrearing soon deteriorates into verbal warfare, with no one escaping the slaughter. Penelope and Michael Longstreet (Jodie Foster, John C. Reilly) are filing an insurance claim against Nancy and Alan Cowan (Kate Winslet, Christoph Waltz), which leads to bickering about the document's wording. A stressed-out investment broker, Nancy feels guilty about the time not spent with her son, a sentiment not shared by her amoral, cell phone-addicted lawyer husband. An angry liberal, Penelope finds the Cowans' behavior "disgusting," while genial Michael, a hardware supply salesman, just wants everyone to get along. Instead, tension escalates not only between the couples but also between the spouses as liquor swiftly dissolves the veil of civility. The main problem with *Carnage*, which resembles a welterweight version of Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, is the miscasting of Foster, who dilutes the ensemble's effectiveness (on stage, Marcia Gay Harden made the same psycho-babbling

character less brittle and more vulnerable). A strong optional purchase. (S. Granger)

Cast Me If You Can

★★★1/2

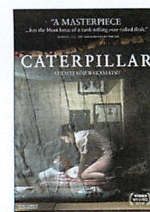
MVD, 97 min., in Japanese w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$19.95



This Japanese rom-com focuses on struggling actor Hiroshi (Toru Masuoka), whose career in supporting roles has brought him recognition but not fame (in public, he's often mistaken for somebody else). Hiroshi's father, Kenta (Masahiko Tsugawa), is a celebrated playwright who views his son's dramatic career with contempt. But Hiroshi's life changes when he meets aspiring actress Aya (Hiromi Nagasaku), believing that she is destined to be the love of his life. Filmmaker Atsushi Ogata offers amusing insights into the Japanese entertainment industry, especially the concept of fame in a country where the national culture traditionally discourages self-promotion. Also entertaining is Hiroshi's endless dilemma of being the victim of mistaken identity—which at one point leads to his arrest when he's incorrectly assumed to be a wanted criminal. However, the Hiroshi-Aya love story never quite resonates, and the film starts to lose steam by the two-thirds mark. The real draw here is Tsugawa as the grouchy dad who cannot fathom his offspring's apparent lack of success; it's a shame the film didn't follow the combustible father-son dynamic rather than veer into the too-safe territory of romantic fluff. A strong optional purchase. (P. Hall)

Caterpillar ★★

Kino Lorber, 84 min., in Japanese w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.95



Koji Wakamatsu's *Caterpillar* takes place during World War II, with Japanese war hero Kyuzo (Shima Onishi) returning from the Chinese battlefield with severe injuries. Kyuzo has lost arms, legs and hearing in the conflict, but is designated as a "war god" and is presented during propaganda rallies. Kyuzo is also a horrible husband: before the war, he beat his wife Shigeo (Shinobu Terajima) for not producing children; now, in his disabled state, he endlessly demands that Shigeo feed his sexual needs, and continues his abusive behavior through insults and spitting. Shigeo, however, can only tolerate so much in her miserable existence. *Caterpillar* clearly aims to present a story of emotional disaster stemming from wartime imperialism and ultra-nationalist patriotism, but it's an extremely unpleasant watch, full of sexual violence (including flashbacks of Kyuzo raping a Chinese girl during the war) and utterly crass framing of the sex between the limless