



QUEUED UP

BY BRYAN REESMAN

CONTAMINATION (1980)

The buildup: After deadly alien eggs are discovered in a shipment of Colombian coffee crates in a New York City warehouse, federal agents track their source and try to stop them from spreading across the country and the world. The eggs, once warmed up to the right temperature, explode and release acid that causes people's chests to burst.

The breakdown: This low budget, sci-fried flick from Italian regurgitates part of the *Alien* concept (without the Xenomorphs) crossed with a touch of *Invasion Of The Body Snatchers*. The story and characters are weak and the tension minimal, but it's got elements that will endear it to cult film enthusiasts: great locations, bloody carnage, striking cinematography, and a kickass Goblin score.



Plus an alien that looks (Spoiler Alert) a bit like Kang and Kodos from *The Simpsons*.

MORE GREAT STUDIO GHIBLI TREASURES

Disney has been releasing some great anime titles from Japan's famed Studio Ghibli over the last few months. Three more can be added to the list: the Oscar-winning *Spirited Away* (2001), *The Cat Returns* (2002), and *Lupin The 3rd: The Castle Of Cagliostro* (1979), which Steven Spielberg is allegedly a big fan of. Hayao Miyazaki directed *Spirited* and *Castle*, and Hiroyuki Morita directed *Lupin*. Each of these films possesses its own special charms. Ten-year-old Chihiro



and her parents become trapped in a spirit world in *Spirited Away*, and she must navigate through it to find them and a way to escape. Her adventures involve all sorts of magical creatures and animals. Another young girl, Haru, faces a similar ordeal in *The Cat Returns* after she saves the Prince of the Cat Kingdom from being run over, and he whisks her away to the Cat Kingdom to get married. Animal allies of her, including a white cat, a raven, and a well-dressed, talking cat named The Baron,



try to help her escape before she undergoes a total feline transformation. In *The Castle of Cagliostro*, master thief Arsène Lupin III is drawn to the small country of Cagliostro because of fabled riches, but he and his accomplices Jigen and Goemon soon get caught up trying to stop a counterfeit operation and save a young woman named Clarisse from a forced marriage to royalty. There is too much to say about

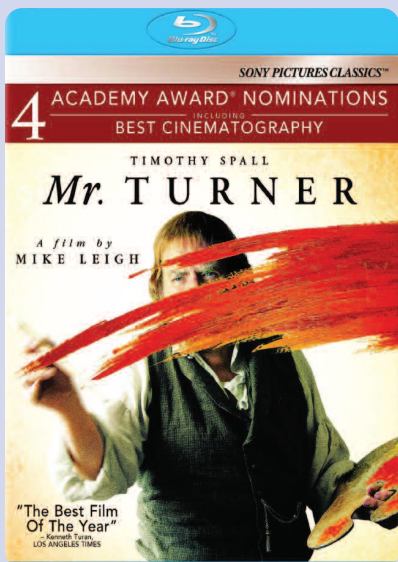


these films in this column, but if I had to reduce each movie to one word it would be: magical (*Spirited Away*), whimsical (*The Cat Returns*), and rollicking (*Lupin The 3rd: The Castle Of Cagliostro*). Animation buffs should snatch them all up.

MR. TURNER (2014)

The buildup: The life of Romantic landscape painter J. M. W. Turner is explored in this beautifully shot biopic directed by Mike Leigh (*Naked, Vera Drake*), which was nominated for four Academy Awards. In contrast to his acclaimed and striking paintings, which predated the Impressionists, Turner's life is portrayed as a mixture of the ordinary and darkly eccentric.

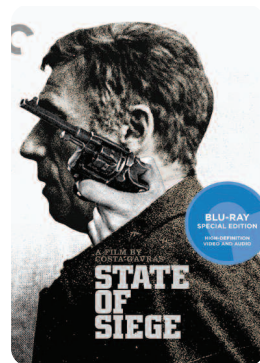
The breakdown: Many Hollywood movies tend to portray classic artists as larger than life characters, but Leigh's look at a middle-aged Turner reveals him to be an isolated individual who has respect among his peers yet has few friends and is awkward with women in spite of his social status. Timothy Spall (*The King's Speech, Rock Star*) inhabits the painterly role and makes him oddly endearing and a touch romantic despite his selfish predilections, occasionally ill-tempered moods, and the way he ignores his estranged wife and two daughters.



Many artists are able to find the beauty around them even when their own lives lack it; it takes true genius and artistry to achieve the sublime when weighed down by the mundane. Leigh and Spall recognize that in Turner.

A DOUBLE SHOT OF COSTA-GAVRAS

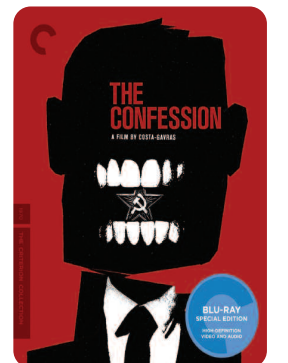
Although known here more for films like *Missing* with Sissy Spacek and Jack Lemmon and *Betrayed* with Tom Berenger and Debra Winger, Greek-born writer-director Costa-Gavras has made most of his films in France and with French actors. Criterion has beautifully restored his second and third films, *The Confession* (1970) and *State Of Siege* (1972), both starring Yves Montand, and they are important viewing. While the term "political thriller" often conjures images of overblown Hollywood action movies laced with paranoia, Costa-Gavras has made films about real people and real situations that are gritty, edgy, and realistic.



In *The Confession*, a dedicated Communist party member in the 1950s Czech Republic finds himself suddenly incarcerated, interrogated, and expected to confess to crimes he maintains he did not commit. Only as the near two-year ordeal unfolds do we learn bit by bit what is really happening and why he has been forsaken by his peers and colleagues. In *State Of Siege*, a Brazilian diplomat and an American "aid" official are abducted by a leftist organization in Uruguay and held as barter for political prisoners unknown to the general public. As the alleged terrorists question the American, we learn more about his involvement with American business interests and the subversive police tactics (i.e. torture) imported from the U.S. to keep people in line with the regime.

Both films seemingly indict corrupt systems but also show different sides of the political chaos they portray. We see how officials, police, and even ordinary citizens are consumed by the propaganda that keeps them all

in line, and how the right amount of double talk and censorship can misrepresent true government interests. One can develop sympathy for the protagonist of *The Confession* because of how his ideals are shattered, and with the rebels



of *State Of Siege* for the way in which they find themselves requiring desperate measures to battle threats to democracy by alleged proponents of it. Costa-Gavras delves into gray areas many choose to ignore.

As usual with Criterion releases, there are cool extras included, including vintage news footage and conversations with the director from over the years.

Netflix Fix:

STONEHEARST ASYLUM (2014)

After a young doctor (Jim Sturgess) takes up residence at a strange, isolated asylum in late 19th century England, he becomes entranced by a seemingly normal and beautiful patient (Kate Beckinsale) and also begins to question the strange methods of the doctor in charge (Ben Kingsley). Based on Edgar Allen Poe's short story "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether," the film at first feels familiar but soon deviates from clichés in ways you will not expect. It's a well-crafted psychological thriller with touches of horror and fine performances from the stalwart cast, which also includes Michael Caine and Brendan Gleeson.

