

# THE DVD LASER DISC NEWSLETTER

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## 4K TV

The last 5 minutes of **Game of Thrones House of the Dragon The Complete First Season** are jump-out-of-your-seat exciting, and getting to that point is consistently captivating, especially—if not only—on the eight-platter HBO Home Box Office WB Home Entertainment Studio Distribution Services *Limited Edition Collectible Steelbook 4K Ultra HD* release (UPC# 883929802999, \$60). The ten-episode season is presented on four standard Blu-ray platters and again on four 4K platters. The show's cinematography is challenging. Not only are scenes often set in dark or partially dark locations, but even the outdoor daylight sequences will often have a haze that is not a flaw but a representation of the dust coming from the streets of the medieval-like environments where the show is set. When lighting and air quality permit, the image is crisp and clear. On the standard BDs, however, any amount of fuzziness leads to image smearing and other irritations. The finale is set amid a fierce rainstorm and on the regular BD it is nearly unwatchable, but on the 4K presentation, it is flawless. The entire season is flawless. In the dark, in the dust, in the fog or in the rain, the 4K image remains as sharp and as clear as it is intended to be, and more importantly, there is never a distortion that pushes the viewer out of the drama.

And the drama is worthy of its parentage. One cannot compare the 2022 **First Season of House of the Dragon** to the entire **Game of Thrones** (Dec 20) series, as it is far more appropriate to compare it to just the first season of that series, and it is by such a metric that it unabashedly succeeds. The program does seem, especially at first, like a Young Adult version of **Game of Thrones**. Its focus is on adolescent characters (as was a fair portion of the original **Game of Thrones**, for that matter) and there is none of the in-your-face sex that the original series had, especially in its earlier seasons. There is sex, sure, but it is always fleeting—a glimpse here, an implication there, and then on to something else—and while the violence is more forthright, well violence is often allowed where sex fears to tread. Although the season ends in a cliffhanger that will more than welcome a follow up, it presents, unlike that first season of **Game of Thrones**, a full generational story. Indeed, while the best way to watch it—whether you intend to at first or not—is in a single sitting, it does have an ideal intermission point at its center, since the third platter picks up the story a number of years after the end of the second platter (part of the fun is figuring out how long it has been before they tell you, so we won't say exactly, although the chapter description on the jacket insert tells you immediately), with some new cast members picking up the characters from their younger selves.

Nobody in the cast is as riveting as Peter Dinklage was in the first series, but then, he was one of a kind. It took awhile for the cast members in the earlier series to make a strong impression, and that is what happens in this series, too, which is set several centuries previous to its predecessor. Paddy Considine is top-billed as the king who rules the land, and Milly Alcock, who transitions seamlessly into Emma D'Arcy at the break, plays his daughter. The performances of the latter two are excellent, and the show radiates from them to the other cast members, with Matt Smith, Olivia Cooke and Eve Best in major roles, and Matthew Needham in a potential breakout part as a crippled, scheming manipulator.

It will be recalled that there were no grand battles in the first season of the original series—that came once its popularity was established and there was more to gamble with the budgets—so the battle that does occur in the first part of the new series is very impressive in that regard. The program does not convey the potential scope that the original series immediately established, since the story essentially takes place in one realm and not several. On the other hand, the cliffhanger that ended the first season of the original series—a couple of puny baby dragons—is grandly superseded in the new series by the advancements in computer graphic effects and, in all likelihood, preserved algorithms. There are lots of dragons throughout the season—big, nasty

ones—and your heart quickens whenever one appears. It is the storytelling, however, not the effects or the sex or the violence, that pulls you so deeply into the tale's unfolding, as various characters try to position themselves to counteract the king's plans for his succession. Knowledge is not purpose. The creators did not intend for **First Season** to stand as an allegory for January 6<sup>th</sup>, but they are fully aware of the parallels they have created, and that is what makes the drama, in its climactic episodes, so overpoweringly—and weirdly—relevant.

The ten episodes run a total of 615 minutes. Each platter has a 'Play All' option and the chapter encoding takes you reliably past the opening credits. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2:1. Opening the first episode with a lovely sub-woofer whoomp that gets you in the mood to rock your dragon, the Dolby Atmos sound mix is outstanding, with an elaborate separation mix and some terrific directional effects. The audio differences between the two versions are less pronounced than the differences in the image, with the 4K version feeling just a bit more complete and confident. Both versions have alternate French, Spanish and German audio tracks and optional English, French, Spanish, German and Dutch subtitles. Both versions also come with 71 minutes of passable production featurettes ("It's about family, truly...and dragons.?).

Another advantage of the 4K format is the support it provides to a viewer's subliminal responses. It takes a good deal of concentration to follow the complexities of **Westworld Season Four: The Choice**, another WB SDS *4K UltraHD* release (UPC#883929788293, \$50). In this case, the six-platter set contains three 4K platters and three standard Blu-ray platters, but the differences in playback are less obvious in a side-by-side comparison. The picture is a touch sharper and colors are a bit more detailed, but for the most part, a viewer would be hard pressed to identify which version of a given scene is which. There is even less difference between the Dolby Atmos sound on the 4K presentation and the DTS track on the standard BD, primarily because the show's sound mix is not as aggressive as the mix on **House of Dragon**. In fact, it is functional, but rather bland. In any case, the 4K presentation is still preferable, however, because if your conscious mind isn't picking up the differences between the two, your subconscious is paying more attention to the 4K version, and you need every resource you have to follow what is happening, even though **Season Four** is less complicated than its three predecessors (Dec 17, Jan 19, Jan 21).

An epistemological maelstrom that would have René Descartes spinning in his virtual grave, the 2022 show is set hundreds of years in the future, when humans may or may not exist, and is about one group of artificially intelligent computer programs, acting in human form, trying to take control of the computer servers that hold them by fighting among themselves amid another set of artificially intelligent computer programs who are less aware that they aren't human, while a third group, who may actually be human or may not be, look on from afar. Scenes involving the third group appear in letterboxed format with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, while the rest and majority of the show is in 1.78:1.

At least, that's what we think is going on, but it really doesn't matter. The show's appeal is not so much in how often it pulls the rug out from under you, but just how many different ways it can apply metaphysical discourse to computer programming and find apt parallels, which is to say, a lot. At one point a character compares what is happening to how the gods on Olympus would interact with mortals, and you have to admit that in virtual worlds, we're going to get to that point fairly soon. Put on your swan avatar and go to town.

The previous seasons are worthwhile in providing the background as to how the characters got to this point, although coming into the show cold turkey with **Season Four** really does not put you at any sort of disadvantage, since the characters are often starting from scratch again and again. In some ways, the show is like dozens of **Groundhog Day** stories intersecting with

## TV (Continued)

one another. All of the seasons have been highly stimulating, mixing in a decent amount of action and intrigue with computer gobbledygook and compelling conversations about reality and the purpose of existence, while paying tribute to the emotional vitality of love and family, and **Season Four** (which ends with a viable cliffhanger that will apparently never be resolved since the series has been cancelled) demonstrates that the formula can be endlessly captivating. Rather cleverly, the creators have resurrected the theme park from the first season, but have set it in the Roaring Twenties instead of the Old West, so that the same things happen, but with different dressings. As much as the show's excitements involve knife fights and gunfights and so on, however, it is also exciting just hearing the characters talk and speculate about the nature of their existence. The more you can follow the details of what is going on, the greater the resonance the show's metaphors will have, and so the 4K presentation is ideal, even if you aren't aware of what you are gaining from it. Your mind will be more focused and the references the characters make to their various metaverses will be less flummoxing.

Eight episodes are spread across the three 4K platters and also across three standard Blu-ray platters, running a total of 438 minutes each. Each platter has a 'Play All' option, and the chapter encoding takes you reliably past the opening credit sequence, whenever it finally shows up. So much is packed into each episode that it can be just as satisfying to watch one at a time to savor and contemplate what has occurred before going on to the next as it is to keep everything in your head and watch the entire season in one sitting. Ultimately, you might want to watch the show twice and do it both ways. Thandie Newton, Aaron Paul, Tessa Thompson, Ed Harris and Jeffrey Wright star. There is an alternate French audio track and eight subtitled options, including English, on the standard BD platter, and an additional German audio track and two more subtitle tracks on the 4K platter. Both versions come with 79 minutes of good production featurettes that not only show how the locations were utilized, the costumes were conceived and so on, but drop more explanations as to what is going on in the story.

### Child killers

An outstanding 1953 Argentine remake of Fritz Lang's 1931 **M**, **El Vampiro Negro**, has been released in a two-platter DVD & Blu-ray *Dual Format Edition* by Film Noir Foundation and Flicker Alley (UPC#61731168-8195, \$42). Strikingly photographed, the film brilliantly zigzags in and out of the original **M** story, sometimes lifting scenes almost verbatim, and then other times presenting characters and situations that had nothing to do with the original. Directed by Román Viñoly Barreto, Olga Zubarry is a singer in a seedy nightclub who sees the child killer, played by Nathán Pinzón, disposing of a body one night down a sewer hole from the window of her basement changing room. Roberto Escalada is the prosecutor investigating the case, who turns out to have emotional and moral flaws of his own. Running 90 minutes, the black-and-white film is transfixing from its surreal opening to its suspenseful climax, presenting indelible bit players every step of the way. Because of the shifts that the narrative takes, the film is entertaining and never predictable (even though all of the characters are all overly connected to one another—guess Buenos Aires is a small town), while its portrait of the human psyche as levels of offices, night clubs and sewers, populated with different voices demanding time upon one's consciousness, is as exquisite an execution of cinema as one could hope to uncover.

The full screen picture is very good condition, with minimal wear, and the monophonic sound is clear. The BD looks more solid and sharper than the DVD in a direct comparison, but the movie is so engaging that even the lesser presentation is fully involving and satisfying. The film is in Spanish with optional English subtitles. Also featured on both platters is a 4-minute introduction to the film; a very nice 24-minute interview with Barreto's son, Daniel Viñoly, about the actors in the film, the Argentine film industry and, most touchingly, his father; and a 44-minute serial analysis of the three adaptations of the story (Joseph Losey remade the original in 1951) that compare the films to one another, while greatly (and deservedly) praising the changes and artistic embellishments that **El Vampiro Negro** achieved by building up the female characters.

Argentine film archivist Fernando Martín Peña provides a sporadic but worthwhile commentary track. Although there are lengthy gaps between comments, he shares insightful reflections on the careers of the cast and crew, the dynamics of the film's plot and its relation with **M**, and an overview of the history of Argentine films. "The tango element that permeates almost every noir or semi-noir film in the Thirties gave way to melodrama in the manner more or less close to films made in Mexico and other countries with related roots. Thus, many Argentine films of the Forties or Fifties that could be considered noir or noirish are actually very high-pitched dramas of passion in which the suspense or crime elements are mixed into convoluted plots about romance, redemption or damnation."

We reviewed the Criterion Collection release of the original **M** in Dec 98. Criterion upgraded their DVD release, however, with a two-platter set (UPC#037429197820, \$30) that has a much better picture and sound transfer and several rewarding special features, and then followed that up with a single-platter Blu-ray (UPC#715515057714, \$40). The power of Lang's 110-minute film is improved considerably by the sharp, generally clean image. From its first moments where the children are playing a game of random exclusion that hovers over what will actually be happening to one of them very soon, to the gripping desperation of Peter Lorre's character at the end, attempting to explain why he has no control over his own actions, every frame of the film is rich in both human emotion and sociological metaphor, while the movie's superb pacing (the double procedural of the police and the underworld searching for the killer) and exploration of society's undersides makes for riveting entertainment.

There are still markings on the source material once in a while, but they are fleeting and usually on the periphery. The DVD can still appear a bit unstable at times, but the BD is crisper and delivers a consistently solid image (an encoding error on the BD copy we reviewed, however, left us unable to access the first couple of chapters of the film). The monophonic sound has age-related weaknesses, but again, the BD's audio is stronger and clearer. The film is in German with optional English subtitles, and both versions offer a commentary track featuring German film experts Anton Kaes and Eric Rentschler, who provide an excellent tag team talk about the movie's background, its artistry and Germany's social atmosphere at the time it was made.

Along with a good-sized collection of memorabilia in still frame, the second DVD platter holds an 11-minute 'remake' that Claude Chabrol put together in 1982 for French television, entitled *M le maudit*, using the original film very briefly at its opening and closing, but then abridging its dramatic highlights with freshly staged scenes featuring Maurice Risch in Lorre's role. It is more of a curiosity than a revelation (Chabrol's admiration for Lang also inspired him to try his hand at a full-length movie using Lang's 'Dr. Mabuse' character), but it is clear that Chabrol was very studious in how he replicated Lang's work. The son of **M**'s producer Seymour Nebenzal, Harold Nebenzal, who had visited the set as a child, talks about his father's producing career in Germany and Hollywood in a rewarding 15-minute interview from 2004. Excerpts running a total of 36 minutes from talks in 1976 and 1977 by the film's editor, Paul Falkenberg, are played over the appropriate sequences from the film as he shares great insights about how the film was structured and what he learned from Lang about the art of editing (one quibble—he says he doesn't know where Lang came up with the 'beggar's organization,' when it was clearly lifted from *Threepenny Opera*). A 25-minute 'history' of the movie includes a lengthy clip from the French version of the film, in which Lorre reiterated his scenes in French, an extended clip from a Nazi anti-Jew feature that uses the film as well as many other examples to reinforce the supposed perversions that Jewish artists were imposing upon German culture, and a sampling of a later release where more sound effects had been added, before explaining how the improved restoration of the original feature eventually came about. Finally, there is a memorable 49-minute interview with Lang from 1975, conducted by William Friedkin (with William Fraker operating the camera), as he talks about his early career and his escape from the Nazis. As the introductory notes point out, Lang tended to embellish his stories a great deal, but the segment is highly valuable not so much for the content of what he says, but for the film's conveyance of how it felt to be in Lang's presence and under his spell.

The one BD platter has all of those features, plus one additional treat, a 93-minute English language version of the film that was uncovered in 2006. While much of it is dubbed, Lorre performs his own scenes in English, just as he did in the French version, making the final confrontation he has with the underworld worth watching again even if the German version is fresh in your mind. His performance is consistently gripping in all three languages.

### Johnson super hero adventure

A textbook example of a typical comic book movie and why such a film can be so entertaining, particularly when it is presented in 4K format, **Black Adam**, has been released by Warner Bros. Entertainment and SDS Studio Distribution Services as a *4K UltraHD* Blu-ray (UPC#883929729500, \$50). Set somewhat vaguely in the Middle East, Dwayne Johnson, channeling Arnold Schwarzenegger in **Terminator 2**, stars as a super-powered being from ancient times who is awakened from his imprisoning crypt ostensibly by the heroes but in reality by a villain who wants to use his power source to take over the world. Maybe Johnson's character could handle this situation by himself and maybe he couldn't, but a group of standard superheroes, including one played quite welcomingly by Pierce Brosnan, arrive and, believing that he is too much of an uncontrollable power, get into the middle of the fight. Now if this isn't a metaphor for the Neoc movement, we don't know what is, but that is just a playful background that gives the film, which already has a couple of decent layers of meaning, an added bit of depth. A young skateboarding enthusiast and his mother, played by Bodhi Sabongui and Sarah Shahi, are the human heroes of the film, trying to save their country from the crime-ridden repression that has apparently been dominating it for centuries. They are the ones who bring Johnson's all-powerful character back to life, as the boy then tries to teach him modern catchphrases and otherwise steer his instincts away from total destruction towards a more nuanced method for dealing with his adversaries. And then the other superheroes, played by Aldis Hodge, Quintessa Swindell and Noah Centineo, step into the fray and complicate the action, just as the primary villain, played by Marwan Kenzari, obtains the powers that may or may not be equal to the powers of Johnson's character.

The arguments over the right way and the wrong way to prevent villainy—do you kill them so they can't come back, or do you just subdue them and hope for the best?—are legitimate, and are explored amid the

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energized enthusiasm of the action. There is plenty of humor and it is nicely integrated with the rest of the story. Running 125 minutes (that's with about 10 minutes of end credits), the film is populated with just enough characters to sustain a variety of interest but to give each one a decent amount of attention. Most importantly, and this is perhaps where the 4K presents its most important advantage, the special effects are also nicely varied and inventive, so that none of the fights ever feel predictable or redundant. Yes, the film, like so many comic book movies, has an apocalyptic finale, but that said, it is a well managed apocalypse and does not drain a viewer's enthusiasm for the proceedings. That, too, is the advantage of Johnson's subdued performance. He's there, so you don't feel cheated, but he is also always holding back and teasing the viewer with no more than glimpses, or bare glimpses, of his usual movie star persona. Hence, it gives Brosnan, who has come to basically the end of the action film part of his career, a chance to eat up the screen and pay tribute to what he once was. Despite the apparent immortality of his character, Johnson will be like that someday, as well.

A standard Blu-ray platter is included along with the 4K platter. The presentation is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The picture on the standard BD is excellent. It is crisp, sharp and accurately colored, so that the improvements on the 4K presentation are not immediately discernible. The film is fun enough that it is still fully enjoyable on the standard BD, and the subliminal advantages that the 4K presentation bring to it just increase the entertainment. The same is true of the Dolby Atmos sound. Although the 4K presentation does provide a bit more detailed punch, the standard BD's presentation is perfectly adequate and engaging. The film's sound mix is not exceptional, but it is fully functional as an underscore to the visual action.

The 4K BD comes with an audio track that describes the action ("Hawkman leaps high in the air. Standing his ground, Teth Adam blocks his foe's strike with the Morning Star's spiked head spinning. Hawkman sees his arm powering up. He blasts Hawkman against a parked car, then soars over and seizes him. He pummels the winged hero before flinging him away."), alternate French, Spanish, Italian and German audio tracks, a German descriptive track, and nine subtitled options, including English.

The standard BD has the descriptive track (in English), alternate French, Spanish and Portuguese audio tracks, optional English, French, Spanish and Portuguese subtitles, and 81 minutes of moderately rewarding and informative promotional featurettes.

### Avant-garde rock

Todd Haynes' 2021 documentary charting the life of a Sixties avant-garde New York rock group, The Velvet Underground, has been released by The Criterion Collection on a terrific Blu-ray (UPC#71551527-9611, \$40). Often utilizing split screens, the film is comprised of retrospective interviews and archival footage, and the picture is naturally at the mercy of the source material, but the audio is terrific. Stereophonic whenever possible, the Dolby Atmos track is both crisp and enveloping, bringing the sounds of yesteryear back to life.

The Velvet Underground band and its earlier incarnations saw members come and go, but the three most historically prominent musicians to take part in the group were Lou Reed, John Cage and Nico. Andy Warhol served as sort of a half producer and half mascot, and Jackson Browne participated in one of the spinoff groups toward the end. Experimental filmmaker Jonas Mekas also attended and recorded much of the socializing that occurred within the band's milieu, and Haynes drew upon his materials extensively. Haynes also makes use of numerous experimental films that were made by filmmakers whose social circles intersected at times with the band and Warhol's circles.

The film readily conveys the personalities of all of the musicians, as well as an inkling of what Warhol was like when he wasn't posing and a reiteration of a more commonly shared depiction of the 'scene' in which all of the individuals passed through on a regular basis. What Haynes manages to do especially well, however, is demonstrate, through a clear expression and record of its development, why the band's music, which can sound anywhere from cacophonous to inept when taken out of context, is not only innovative and unique, but addicting and very much valid. When you see the painting Pablo Picasso did as a young man and then watch him progress through his different phases, his later works no longer seem like a hodgepodge, and the same is true here with the music that Cage and Reed were creating. While readily cataloging the resistance the music encountered outside of the New York art scene (San Francisco impresario Bill Graham hated them, apparently), the film steps the viewer through an appreciation of where the music came from, how the music reflected the emotional complexities of the musicians creating it, and how fans intuitively responded to the music's adventures, on the very edges of its possibilities.

The Blu-ray, however, is more than just the film. Haynes and his two editors, Affonso Gonçalves and Adam Kurnitz, provide a commentary track that in many ways takes the film's narrative to a second level. In other words, you watch the movie once with its standard soundtrack and learn the basics, and then you listen to the three filmmakers and receive a sort of a graduate course on the same material, a whole new set of facts, information and stories not just about compiling the film, but about everybody who is depicted within it. You don't hear as much of the music since they are talking throughout the movie, but the stories they have to share are just as enlightening, funny and touching as the stories shared within the film, and the

anecdotes have a greater impact because of the foundation that the film provides. They also speak of the challenges they faced during the editing, such as an inability at times to pin down the rhythm of the music in order to follow that rhythm with the cutting, and they explain many of the choices they made.

Along with optional English subtitling, another subtitled option identifies the archival materials Haynes has drawn from to supplement his interviews. The notations are not consistent—quite often a clip will pass without identification, but there is more than enough that is identified to send a viewer off on journeys of research to see more of what has been excerpted. To this end as well, Criterion has included several short films from the same era. The most significant is *Venus in Furs*, a 20-minute silent collection of black-and-white and color images from New York in 1965 by Piero Heliczer that includes a depiction of the band performing outdoors, as well as some nude frolicking in a bathtub and some nuns talking to a sailor. Also featured are 8 minutes of excerpts from Mekas' long running project of documenting his experiences on (mostly color) film that record his visits with various members of the band, locations where they hung out, and other aspects of their lives intersecting with his between 1964 and 1969; and 12 minutes in silent black and white from 1964 that Mekas shot of Warhol receiving an award in a very relaxed presentation at his studio. Also featured are 20 minutes of additional interview footage with Mekas talking about his career and his memories of the era; 14 minutes of marvelous additional interview footage with Mary Woronov, an actress who was part of Warhol's circle and talks without compunction about the ins and outs of the various other people she encountered; 16 minutes of additional and enthusiastic interview footage with ultra-fan and musician Jonathan Richman, who became kind of an apprentice to the band; a great 49-minute Zoom interview with Haynes, Cage and band member Maureen Tucker (the drummer!) about the film and about the band's legacy; and a trailer.

### Godard and more

A perfect appetizer to sample before diving into *Alphaville* (Aug 19), Jean-Luc Godard's segment in the 1967 anthology film, The Oldest Profession, is justification enough for fans to obtain the Gaumont Kino Lorber Incorporated *KL Studio Classics* Blu-ray (UPC#738329228606, \$30). Others may also find the film to be intermediately charming, particularly considering its star-studded cast, although such pleasures are inconsistent.

Running 115 minutes, the film presents six tales about prostitution that advance in time, ostensibly from the 'Stone Age' to the 'future,' each story running a little under 20 minutes apiece. The Stone Age segment is one of the weakest, directed by Franco Indovina and starring Michèle Mercier, about a young, bikini-clad blonde who discovers the powers of attraction that facial makeup can instill. Only slightly stronger, the next segment, directed by Mauro Bolognini and set in ancient Rome, is about an Emperor, played by Gastone Moschin, who has no interest in his fetching wife, played by Elsa Martinelli, until he realizes, a bit too late, that she is also the very attractive and exotic courtesan he has hired at a brothel. A better paced and more engaging tale, set during the French Revolution and directed by Philippe de Broca, Jean Moreau is a prostitute who is tricked into sharing her wares for free with a peasant, played by Jean-Claude Brialy, who pretends to have inherited an estate and a title. The tables are turned in the next segment, which is probably the most entertaining for those who are not enamored with Godard, and is directed by Michael Pfleger. Set in the 'Belle Époque,' Raquel Welch, in a terrific performance, is a lady of the night who tricks a banker, played by Martin Held, into asking for her hand in marriage. Less appealing and set in the present day, Claude Autant-Lara directed Nadia Gray and France Anglade in a story about two prostitutes who decide to try using an ambulance for their park assignments after their regular car is impounded. The idea is cute, but there is an interminably long sequence with an elderly lawyer giving them advice that undermines the humor.

Anna Karina and Marilù Tolo star with Jacques Charrier in Godard's piece that, very much like *Alphaville*, is set in the 'future' but shot in the present day, this time at an airport and in a room at an airport hotel. Charrier's character is a traveler from 'another galaxy,' who learns that he can hire a woman who will interact with him physically or a woman who will talk to him, but not both. The segment is the only one in black-and-white—until a key moment—and the only one with nudity. It is also witty, intelligent and stimulating, demonstrating what a master filmmaker can accomplish even when he is just hanging out around the airport for a couple of days.

The film is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1. Although the cinematography varies from one segment to the next, the color transfer is excellent, with bright hues and accurate flesh tones, and whenever possible, the image is smooth and finely detailed. It is worth noting that the film's musical score advances in style through the ages in a vaguely appropriate manner, and the monophonic sound is solid. The film is in French with optional English subtitles, and comes with a trailer.

Also featured is the movie's 'American' release, dubbed in English and running just 93 minutes which, in all but the Godard segment, is a welcome trimming of the fat, uniformly reducing the running time of each segment to about 15 minutes apiece. The greatest changes occur in the Godard effort, which tints the black-and-white footage and, where it has not been completely chopped out, solarizes the nudity. Still, to have any Godard work without the unintended distraction of subtitled is a treat, doubling the serendipity that the Blu-ray has to offer.

### Another massive Shaw Bros. collection

Last year around this time, we reviewed a fantastic Arrow Video holiday set of martial arts films (and one giant ape movie) originally produced at Hong Kong's Shaw Bros. studios, **Shawscope Volume One** (Jan 22). Well, like we said, a year has passed, and so now Arrow Video has come forward with another dream Blu-ray boxed set collection for kung fu fanatics, **Shawscope Volume Two** (UPC# 760137107569, \$190). Again, the set has ten platters—eight BDs and two CDs—which this time represent fourteen films. Unfortunately, we are unable to review the two music soundtrack CDs. All of the films are letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 except where noted. All have monophonic audio tracks with consistently strong transfers and most have three language options, Cantonese, Mandarin and English, with optional English subtitles. Generally, the English dubbing is workable, but the Mandarin and Cantonese are always preferable. The films rarely have original musical scores, utilizing instead public domain soundtrack music while lifting a few other themes surreptitiously from various sources, all of which was overseen by Shaw musical director Ju-ren Wang.

The flagship selection is as definitive a kung fu film as one could hope to find, *The 36<sup>th</sup> Chamber of Shaolin*. Directed by Kar-leung Lau, the 1978 production has a distinct three-act structure. In the first half hour, the hero's community is terrorized by a warlord's gang and the hero barely escapes death. In the next hour, he finds sanctuary in a monastery known for its martial arts training, and over the course of several years, he recovers and learns how to fight. The training is conducted in different 'chambers,' each emphasizing a different strength or weapon. By the time he is done, he can match the best trainer there, and so in the final half hour, he leaves the monastery as a monk and returns to his former home, showcasing his talents and rapidly attracting and training several enthusiastic disciples to bring down the warlord. The action in the final act is rousing, of course, but it is that middle act that makes the film so enjoyable, with its many oddball training assignments (carrying water over your shoulder up a ramp with knives on either side of the buckets that poke you in the mid-section if you slack your shoulders) and steady improvements to the hero's stature. The 116-minute film is wonderfully paced and simultaneously accelerated, so that every sequence in the film is more stimulating and appealing than the sequence that preceded it, and is a crowd pleaser from start to finish. Although the movie came at pretty much the end of the original kung-fu cycle, it doesn't so much copy the earlier movies as it distills them, thereby presenting an ideal narrative and resourceful action choreography within an inventive and decorative period setting. What is equally notable, however, is the film's attention to religion and spirituality, which is blended so smoothly with an enthusiasm for martial arts that you barely notice how pervasive and sensible its teachings are.

Gordon Liu, who also seems to get more adorable as the film progresses, even with his shaved head, stars. The color transfer looks great. A few sequences are a touch soft, but otherwise, the transfer is immaculate.

Hong Kong film historian Travis Crawford provides a commentary, often digressing (with apologies, but it never helps) to talk about an array of other films and rarely having a significant amount to say about the movie at hand. In a 74-minute talk over excerpts from the movie, Asian film expert Tony Rayns does a much better job, deconstructing Lau's directing technique ("These opening sequences are very traditional Shaw Bros. in many ways. They're not immensely different from other films. They use a lot of phrenetic camera work, a lot of zooming, chaotic management of the action. Not a very clear or diagrammatic sense of who's who and where they are and how they're fighting each other. So plunging into chaos, in other words, and zooming to underline the melodramatic aspects of it. By the time we reach the middle part of the film, the film begins to look quite a lot different. This rather crude zooming in and out tends to disappear. We get much more studied compositions, much wider shots, and much more sophisticated deployment of actors within the shots."), going over the importance of Lau and Liu's careers, and explaining that the film was the first to really use 'training' as a significant setting for martial arts narrative action.

Also featured is a 20-minute interview with Liu from 2003 giving a basic talk about his career and the characters he played (even he admits that, with his bald head, he has a Yul Brynner thing going in his movies); another cute 2005 interview with Liu running 6 minutes going over the different kung fu moves he used in his movies and talking about his filmmaking and music performance experiences (he has a band and does Beatles covers); a 29-minute interview with cinematographer Arthur Wong from 2006 talking about his career; a decent promotional piece with Liu from 2003 running 16 minutes, going over the history of the Shaolin Temple and how it relates to the Shaw Bros. films he was in, particularly *36<sup>th</sup> Chamber*; a very good 37-minute piece about the cultural impact the Shaw Bros. films had on pop music throughout the world, although it is a shame they couldn't include audio samples of what they are talking about (there is also a more detailed breakdown of *36<sup>th</sup> Chamber*'s opening title sequence); an elaborate 50-minute documentary about Chinese martial arts films filled with marvelous clips from movies that you have seen and movies that you haven't seen, and almost as entertaining as a feature itself; a 3-minute alternate clip of the opening credits, in English, where the film is titled *Master Killer*; four trailers; a TV commercial; and a decent collection of promotional materials in still frame.

Two sequels are presented on the next platter, the 1980 *Return to the 36<sup>th</sup> Chamber* and the 1985 *Disciples of the 36<sup>th</sup> Chamber*.

Directed by Lau, *Return to the 36<sup>th</sup> Chamber* is a witty follow up to the first film. Liu's character from the first movie is played by a different and slightly older actor, while Liu plays a lowly hustler who encounters a labor conflict at a dye factory and aids the workers there by pretending to be a monk with Shaolin fighting skills. The workers help in the pretense, but when the bosses see through the ruse, mayhem ensues and Liu's character limps away. He then tries to sneak into the Shaolin training center to upgrade his skills so he can return and protect the friends he made. Some of the comedy and slapstick does not translate well (one actor has a very phony buck teeth prosthetic), but the overall humor is inspired in that the feature is able to embrace what is essentially the same plot as the first movie, but with an entirely different manner and tone. Once again, the training sequences are inventive and entertaining in their own right, and the 101-minute film culminates in a marvelous fight sequence that one might term, 'scaffolding kung-fu' vs. 'step stool kung-fu.' After training for several years by constructing scaffolding, by himself, around the temple, the hero returns and uses the skills he has acquired to defeat the villain, the villain's speciality being his dexterous use of small step stools. The fight's originality and continual inventiveness is exhilarating.

The color transfer looks great overall, with some shots appearing exceptionally sharp and slick. At one point, you can see the construction details of the phony sky backdrop above the temple. The musical score lifts a passage from Ennio Morricone's score for *Burn*. At least they steal from the best (according to the jacket insert, there is some John Barry in there, as well).

Liu is back playing his original character from the first film in *Disciples of the 36<sup>th</sup> Chamber*, directed by Lau, and Hou Hsiao is the primary hero, a skilled but undisciplined kid who causes trouble with the gang that runs the town and is sent to the temple as punishment, where his skills are improved even further because of his run-ins with Liu's character. The film is comedic, but not as desperately so as *Return to the 36<sup>th</sup> Chamber*, and the athleticism throughout the 93-minute film is impressive. While the story might not have the strong social message that the first two films convey, it is wholly engrossing and quite entertaining. There is also a female fighter played by Lily Li, the mother of Hsiao's character, which is something the previous two films lacked and which also adds to the movie's many pleasures.

In our review of **Volume One**, we took note that while all of the films had terrific picture transfers, some were spectacular. We also just took note that there are sequences in *Return to the 36<sup>th</sup> Chamber* that look exceptional. Well, despite some mild grain in the original cinematography, the entire picture transfer on *Disciples of the 36<sup>th</sup> Chamber* is fantastic. The colors are bright and sharp. Again, the phony sky is readily discernible, but more importantly, the many colorful decorations and costumes are vivid, and fleshtones are precise. There is a parade sequence where the hero sneaks into town at night and causes a ruckus during a celebration, and the costumes and decorations look amazing.

Also featured is a worthwhile 58-minute French TV profile of studio head Run Run Shaw from 1980, including an extensive interview and a thorough tour of his studio; a cute 15-minute piece tied into *Return* about scaffolding construction and martial arts; a 15-minute interview with Liu about the two sequels and the status of his later career; a 2-minute alternate opening credit sequence for the *Return*'s Hong Kong release; a 2-minute squeezed English language opening credit sequence for *Return*; a 4-minute alternate opening credit sequence for *Disciples* (not significantly different from the other one); two trailers for *Return*; two trailers for *Disciples*; and nice still frame presentations of promotional materials for both films.

In his talk on the original *36<sup>th</sup> Chamber* film, Crawford is slightly dismissive of the two sequels, and especially the second one, because of its humor, although he seems to unfairly blend the deliberate clowning in the first sequel with the generally more playful and incidental comedy in the second. In any case, perhaps it is because the transfer is so incredible, adding to the overall entertainment of every moment, that we enjoyed the film very much and found it to be almost as rewarding as the initial feature. Rayns is more enthusiastic about both films in his talk on the first platter.

If one wishes to make the cogent argument that martial arts films are simply musicals with violence in the place of music, the 1979 *Mad Monkey Kung Fu* would be a fine place to start. After a well-staged opening melodrama (featuring a very fine performance by the female lead, Kara Hui), the film is good fun, carrying again an element of humor (including broad gags involving a gay character) laced into its generally serious story about the disciple of a crippled teacher taking revenge upon the teacher's rival. Because the heroes are practicing 'monkey kung fu,' their movements are especially fanciful and gymnastic, but the lengthy nature of the fights in the 116-minute film will have the viewer suspending an interest in the narrative for the sake of simply savoring the collaborative fight choreography within the sequences. For that matter, the 'training' sequences, in which the disciple, played by Hsiao, moves by himself, but then moves in coordination with his teacher, played by Lau (who also directed—he had supporting parts in some of the films above, but here it is a central role), for an extended duet, rivals anything accomplished by Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. The story is just another variation of the 'bad guy beats up good guy badly, good guy trains more, good guy beats bad guy' template (albeit with a shift), but it earns the right to its extended running time with its lovely and creative presentation of inventive martial arts moves. The costumes in the film, incidentally, suggest a later era than the first movies in the set, although no technology is depicted.

The film's cinematography, and specifically, its focal plane, is uneven, so that portions of the image look especially soft at times. The colors are fresh and when the image is locked down, it looks sharp and solid, but there are times when it is less pleasing to the eyes. As for the musical score, it, too, is a mixed bag. One moment, there is a beautifully crafted piece played on a single Chinese string instrument, and the next, there is a brazen orchestral rip-off of Jerry Goldsmith's theme to *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*

Asian film experts Frank Djeng and Michael Worth supply a passable commentary track. They do spend a lot of time reiterating the plot, but they also explain the film's cultural nuances as well as going over the strengths of the cast and the crew, and pointing out specific moments of exceptional fight choreography. Rayns provides a succinct 20-minute analysis of the Chinese 'monkey' myth, the film's male bonding subtexts, and the strengths of the players.

We don't know where 'five' came from, but three brothers go out in separate directions and improve their fighting skills with separate teachers after their master is defeated in a fight and they want to take revenge in the 1979 *Five Superfighters*. Running 100 minutes, the film can jump back and forth between the three different training situations—all involve performing chores for apparently disinterested kung fu experts—to portion the humor effectively and sustain a variety in the situations. Since all three brothers then abandon their new teachers to go back and fight for their old teacher, the film begs for a sequel at its conclusion, but otherwise it is an enjoyable effort. Directed by Mar Lo, Austin Wai, Tony Leung and Yuen-jun Ng star.

The picture transfer looks fine, although the cinematography is run of the mill.

Also featured on the platter is a 32-minute piece about the marketing of Shaw Bros. films in America; a very good 40-minute interview with Hsiao about his films and fighting choreography; three trailers for *Mad Monkey*; two trailers for *Superfighters*; and decent memorabilia collections in still frame for both features.

The 1978 *Invincible Shaolin* is a much better movie with what is generally the same plot. Three good guys are assigned to train an evil general's soldiers. The evil general, however, has arranged a rivalry between those good guys and another group of trainers, so that the good guys are blamed for causing some of the other trainers to die after a competition. Three more fighters from the other group of trainers, then, seek unique masters to practice and get better in hopes of a revenge match, even though the actual villain is the one stirring the pot. Directed by Cheh Chang and running 106 minutes, the film is excellent—one of the best movies in the collection—not just because the narrative is more intricately plotted and dramatically potent, but because there is an attention given to kung-fu lore in the different disciplines the fighters seek out, as well as very inventive and tightly designed stagings, humor that does not interfere with the seriousness of the practice-and-fight choreography, a very nice romantic subplot involving the initial good guys and three young ladies they befriend, the well-measured drama that builds to a genuinely suspenseful climax, and six hunky heroes who end up fighting one another. It turns out to be quite a bloody affair.

Once again, the appeal of the film is also aided by another exceptionally good transfer, with smooth hues and clean, detailed lines.

Undoubtedly others will disagree for academic reasons or dedicated fandom, but *The Kid with the Golden Arm* is the most entertaining film in the collection. For one thing, the 1979 Chang feature runs just 86 minutes. It is brief and to the point, but it has an exceptionally (for Shaw Bros.) clear and well-executed plot. The good guys are transporting a wagon of gold across the countryside (a nice mix of occasional outdoor shots and many lovely soundstage 'exteriors') and the bad guys want to hijack it. There are several master fighters on each side, every one of them wearing a distinctive costume (like a super hero/villain) so that you immediately know who they are and what skills they have. Because there are a lot of them, however, one can get killed off at any time, so there is never an inevitability about how the fights are going to go or even if the good guys are going to win in the end (they have to, right?). Add to that Chang's masterful fight choreography and wonderfully unrestrained bloodshed (it isn't the goriest film in the collection, but it's one of them), along with the booby trap surprises the bad guys also plant along the trail, and the film is sheer visceral joy from beginning to end. And yet, despite its brevity and action, the characters, good and bad, are developed effectively (the performances help, as do the costumes), so that subplots involving their various relationships provide the nourishment of drama amid the confection of the action. Meng Lo, Philip Kwok, Chien Sun, Shen Chiang, Feng Lu and Pai Wei star.

In Chapter 4 on the disc presentation, there is a continuity error, where the characters talk about something happening before it happens. This was apparently how the film was first released to theaters. An option in the special features under 'Alternate Version,' however, allows you to play the entire film with the sequence of events appearing in their correct order, thereby removing the error. We would recommend selecting this version before proceeding to watch the movie.

The color transfer looks real good. Once in a while the cinematography is not precisely focused, but otherwise the colors pop and add to the immense pleasure the film is already conveying. The audio is also stronger than normal, with richer and heftier sound effects, and Wang's music choices are exceptional in variety and effectiveness. There is no Cantonese track.

Also featured on the platter is a 2003 interview with fight choreographer Robert Tai about his career (he eventually became a director) running 24 minutes; a promotional 26-minute piece with smatterings of background information about Chang's ensemble films; the 2-minute opening credit sequence (which introduces the primary characters) for *Golden Arm* without text overlays; the 2-minute credit sequence for *Golden Arm* with English titling; an alternate 2-minute English language opening for *Golden Arm*; three trailers for *Invincible Shaolin*; two trailers for *Golden Arm*; a TV commercial for *Golden Arm*; and another fine collection of memorabilia from both films in still frame.

The 1979 *Magnificent Ruffians* has similarities to *Invincible Shaolin* in that the story has the villain pitting the good guys against one another. The villain is a wealthy and bored kung fu expert (he inherited a golden sword) who dangles decent meals and other luxuries in front of poorer fighters, so that he can practice on the best of them and then dispose them. Directed by Chang, the 106-minute film is set in a technological era, although the only indications of that are electric lights, the change in costumes, and references about guns having replaced kung fu in the outside world. The final fight, featuring two of the good guys against the villain, is a doozy, and one of the very best in the entire set for its exhilarating athleticism and continuous sense of peril.

The picture transfer looks fine, with some very nice moments and no significant drawbacks. No Cantonese audio track is offered. Wang's musical score is really good, and is so satisfying that he can be forgiven for lifting *Makin' Whoopee* in one sequence, particularly since he gives it such a charming orchestration. At another appropriate moment he lifts Bernard Herrmann's *Taxi Driver* riff.

An all-star cast, including Hsiao, Kwok, Chiang, Lo, Wei, Lung Ti, and Alexander Fu Sheng to boot, are featured in Chang's 1980 *Ten Tigers of Kwangtung*. The 91-minute film opens with an assassination sequence and then flashes back to the bulk of the narrative, so that when it returns to the opening for the final act, one's views of the characters have changed entirely. During the central part of the story, which is set in a pre-technological era, a group of patriots try to protect an important figure and smuggle him out of the city, while the authorities not only search for him, but lie to another group of fighters so they will be on the lookout for him as well. The result is a number of street fights and so on. Because of the large cast, the narrative can be a little confusing at first, but it eventually all falls into place. In fact, actual emotional growth and drama are somewhat limited, as the complexity of the plot is mostly just an excuse to set up the different and creative martial arts displays. The fighting is reasonably intense and quite bloody—at the end, one of the bad guys is hanging upside down and has his head knocked off, with stuff bursting out of his severed neck—but it is enough to qualify the film's entertainment.

The color transfer is very good, particularly since most of the film was shot on indoor soundstages. Hues are bright and fleshtones are accurate.

Asian film expert Brandon Brentley supplies a commentary track. While his talk is similar to the talks that Crawford provides, primarily citing the other work of each player, he is more focused and never goes off on a digression as far as Crawford does, so that what he has to say is more interesting and specific in its references. He also talks about the 'Ten Tigers' legend and other films that have drawn from it.

Also featured is a terrific 21-minute overview of how films, and particularly—but not exclusively—the films in the *Shawscope* collections, draw from Chinese legends and how those legends came to pass (mostly a result of the winners and losers in real historical events), ending with a fascinating look at what happened when mainland China became open to Hong Kong filmmakers; a nice 21-minute interview with *Tigers* costar Siu-ho Chin about his career (he started as a teenager); a minute-long presentation of the credit sequence for *Tigers* without the credits (it has artistic renderings of the various cast members); three trailers for *Tigers*; two trailers for *Ruffians*; a TV commercial for *Tigers*; and the nice collection of memorabilia in still frame for both films.

Potential passes unrealized in the 1981 action comedy, *My Young Auntie*, directed by Lau. Set in the modern day, the young characters hold a costume ball in one scene, which inevitably devolves into a brawl. Unfortunately, Lau is no Jerome Robbins, and so the choreography of the ball is not distinctive, even though the well choreographed fights that ensue are invigorating and, since it is a costume ball, quite witty. In an earlier scene, the hero, played by Hsiao, pretends to be part of a rock band, and his hand drum beat on a guitar—from underneath—seemed to portend that the dance would be as inventively designed as the subsequent rumble, thus drawing a more distinct chain between the two, but that was not to be the case. Nevertheless, the film is a nice breath of fresh air, especially after the serious blood splattering of *Ten Tigers of Kwangtung*. In the biggest part afforded an actress in the collection, Hui is the title character, who joins forces with her 'nephew' of the same age to stop an older gangster uncle from stealing their inheritance. Running 119 minutes, most of the film is a lighthearted comedy with—you can't really call it romantic, but flirtatious—undercurrents, mixing playful kung fu and slapstick. The end battle with the uncle and his henchman is quite elaborate and, fortunately, very well staged, so that if the film had seemed lackadaisical, it does not conclude that way.

## Shaw Bros. (Continued)

The color transfer is great, but there are sequences where the hues feel a touch subdued, just as there are others where they sparkle. For whatever reason, the 'VHS version' of the film, which runs a full 121 minutes, has also been included on the disc. It is also letterboxed, but has a much softer and hazier image, with over saturated colors, and otherwise there is no significant difference between the two presentations. Also featured is a great 29-minute interview with Hui talking about her career (she describes a cringe-inducing stunt she had to do, being hit with a car without protection because her character was wearing a skirt rather than pants); a fantastic 54-minute history of Hong Kong actresses in the Sixties and Seventies that is worth treating as a feature because of the many film clips that are unique to Blu-ray in America and probably always will be (martial arts films are addressed only briefly, near the end); a 47-minute talk by Rayns about the film, providing informative generalities about the story, the cast and Lau; a minute-long alternate opening credit sequence; two trailers and another collection of memorabilia in still frame.

We've seen many Eighties action films with pretty much the same plot as the 1982 *Mercenaries from Hong Kong*, and it is because of this that we can say the film is quite good in comparison to most. It is set in the modern day and has three discernible acts. In the first, a skilled fighter played by Lung Ti is asked to recruit a team of specialists, although once they are all together, gangsters try to rub them out. In the second section, they travel to Cambodia to capture another gangster living in a bandit camp. Betrayal follows, and in the third section they return to Hong Kong for revenge. Been there, done that, yeah, but not quite with the same amount of action, or even drama. Directed by Jing Wong and running 95 minutes, the pace never bogs down, the action always advances the plot, the fights and stunts are creative, the car chases are harrowing, and the characters—even the supporting characters—are amiable or interesting enough to have you caring about them. The film is no great classic, but it is what we hoped for in the Eighties whenever we started watching a cheap action feature, and rarely saw our hopes realized so thoroughly.

The picture is often somewhat grainy, but the colors are fresh.

Invite over your rowdiest friends—if some are a bit inebriated, all the better—and put on *The Boxer's Omen*, a terrible 1983 horror film shot in Thailand and Nepal. Every scene, every frame of the film begs to be mocked, mercilessly. Earning its inclusion in a martial arts collection by opening and climaxing with kickboxing matches, the hero, played by Phillip Ko Fei, is a kickboxing champion with a hot wife. He learns that his 'soul' was, in a previous life, a twin with the soul of a Buddhist monk. The monk, having been cursed by an evil wizard, reaches out to the boxer spiritually and compels him to travel from Hong Kong to Bangkok and to defeat the wizard. In order to do that, the boxer must become a monk himself, thereby swearing off marital congress with his voluptuous missus. Then he becomes a monk in a couple of weeks (after meditating chest deep in a swamp and being told by his trainer to ignore the leeches) and wastes the wizard almost as quickly. Unfortunately, coming back from initially defeating the wizard, his wife steps out of the shower, dripping with desire and impressed by his new shaved head look, and after all, it had been a couple of months since he last practiced that particular sutra, so he spoils everything and has to travel to Nepal to start all over again. That's what happens when you mess with Buddha. Wild production designs are abundant if inexpensive, and the special effects are as tacky and cheap as they are plentiful. Mixed in with the plastic toys that are supposedly demonic monsters are oodles of genuine slimy creatures, genuine hairy creatures, uninhibited female nudity, large papier-mâché beasts, other icky things, and goeey gore coming from every orifice. Animals were definitely harmed during filming, as well. Directed by Chih-hung Kwei and running 105 minutes, the film will seem tedious and ridiculous when viewed alone, but in the company of wisecracking friends, it can be quite a delight.

Bolo Yeung has a brief supporting role. The letterboxing has an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. Colors are somewhat smeary, but that is mostly the cinematography, perhaps purposely to hide the wires and sock puppet hands, since the location footage of Bangkok and Kathmandu is crisp and fresh. There is no English track, either.

Crawford provides another commentary track, which he considers a daunting task. "When I was thinking about doing the commentary, I was [thinking], it's so difficult even articulate or discuss some of the imagery in the film. Words can't describe stuff like a woman borne from the carcass of a crocodile is eating this regurgitated mush and then she attacks the eyes of an effigy of the boxer with her gold finger knives, causing the Buddha to explode and reveal an emaciated skeleton underneath and this is intercut with what winds up being a blind Thai boxing match where he's hallucinating maggots coming from his eyes. I jotted this down during one of the many note taking sessions and then in parenthesis I wrote, 'And this is not even among the ten most outrageous sequences in the film.'"

Nevertheless, he goes at it gamely ("The detachable flying head is a staple of Asian horror"), exploring the backgrounds of the crew and the cast without going too far afield, discussing the nature of Hong Kong horror films in general and Shaw Bros. horror in particular, and making note of the film's own quirks within quirks. "It's almost as if the outrageousness that surrounds these moments in *Boxer's Omen* comes to a halt for these very sincere, picturesque looks at Buddhist lifestyle." Leeches notwithstanding, apparently.

Also featured on the platter is an additional 2 minutes of sex and violence from *Boxer's Omen*; a very nice 21-minute profile of Kuie and his films by Rayns (who also explains that to people from Hong Kong, Bangkok is an exotic place where such things can happen); a 29-minute interview with *Mercenaries* second unit director Kai Tong from 2010; two trailers for *Mercenaries*, two trailers for *Boxer's Omen*; and still-frame collections of memorabilia for both features.

Lau journeyed to Mainland China (and brought Jet Li with him) to make use of real locations, including the Forbidden City, the Great Wall, the real Shaolin Temple and so on in the 1986 *Martial Arts of Shaolin*, which plays as if it had been designed around the locations rather than vice-versa. The story is simple and the movie is pretty much a chase film, set in period costume. The young heroes, played by Li, Qui-yan Huang and Jian-qiang Hu, attempt to assassinate a warlord and then try to run across the countryside to safety when the attack fails. It is enough, however, to showcase the fabulous locations, which Lau often fills with so much activity that you can hurt your neck swinging from left to right trying to see everything that is both decorating and going on within a shot. Running 94 minutes, Lau has also come up with—after years of doing this sort of thing, you'd think he'd run out of ideas, but no—a highly entertaining final battle, aboard a boat that has been stopped, **Sand Pebbles** style, by bamboo rafts. It is superbly choreographed and delivers all the satisfaction one needs to conclude what is ostensibly a superficial endeavor.

The colors are bright, but unlike most of the other transfers, there is some smearing, particularly in the darker areas of the screen. A 97-minute 'unrestored' version is also included, which is not anywhere near as precisely colored and captivating as the primary version, but is said to be closer in quality to what audiences saw when the movie was first released in theaters.

Chinese film expert Jonathan Clements supplies a marvelous commentary track, pointing out all of the locations (and how fervently the film cheats as it puts them together), dissecting the slapdash nature of the film itself ("It is all too easy to forget that this movie is supposed to be a comedy, partly because big chunks of it aren't funny, but also because we go from the very real murderous oppression by the Manchus only a minute ago to Jet Li in drag while his two co-stars try to sneak through a checkpoint while dressed as sheep."), discussing the backgrounds of the filmmakers and stars (Li and Huang got serious and ended up getting married, albeit briefly), and basically just sharing his enthusiasm for the movie and Lau's filmmaking. "He was lured by the wondrous prospect of being able to film all these locations for real, and I cannot stress enough how amazing that prospect was to people in the 1980s, because remember, China had been closed for decades. Shaw Bros. had been making films about a fantasy version of China on standing sets and park locations in Hong Kong, and suddenly, they actually got to go there. This scene on the steps of the Shaolin Temple is actually being filmed at the Shaolin Temple, and I get goosebumps, even now, just saying that." Whatever Clements left out of his talk, Rayns, who is not as generous in his assessment of the film's value, covers in an equally rewarding 30-minute piece, going over how Lau actually landed the assignment, what his intentions were, and how compromises led to the final product.

Without the widescreen, the vibe is different on the 1993 *The Bare-Footed Kid*. Unlike *Boxer's Omen*, it is a genuine kung fu film with a period setting, but letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1, it doesn't have the same façade of majesty, and the downer ending is harder to take. Directed by Johnnie To, with fight scenes choreographed by Lau, there is nothing wrong with the film per se, and until the fortunes of the heroes go south, it is quite entertaining. A remake of one of the films from **Volume One**, *Disciples of Shaolin*, Aaron Kwok is a bumpkin from the sticks with mad kung fu skills who comes to a small town and gets a job in a dye factory. Gangsters want the dye secrets and start messing with the pretty owner, but the kid mucks up their plans. The bad guys then get wise and trick the kid into working for them. The fight sequences are fast-paced and vigorous, and the good guy characters are charming, so on paper, the film has great potential. The excellent color transfer also makes the image both vivid and immediate (the fabrics are awesome), readily conveying the precision of the action and the humanity of the characters. But without 'Shawscope,' the magic just isn't there. The 87-minute feature is invigorating as it goes along and forgettable once it is over.

*Boxer* has a passable commentary by Djeng, who explains the history of its production ("In 1993, Shaw Bros. was really on its last legs. They kind of moved everything to television. In many ways, this is kind of like an honorary member of the Shaw Bros. films catalog because by then, the studio is already about to be dismantled."), goes over the careers of To, Kwok and the other members of the cast and crew, and discusses the film's specific cultural eccentricities. While he does start to reiterate what is on the screen quite a bit in the second half, it is usually with the purpose of making a point about the story or To's technique that is not as readily obvious. Additionally, Rayns has a terrific 16-minute piece on To and the shifts in tone and approach that were happening within the Chinese film industry, not just in Hong Kong, but Taiwan and Mainland China, as well.

The platter also features a good 42-minute interview with *Martial Arts of Shaolin* screenwriter Yeung-ping Sze, who talks about the history of martial arts films and his experiences on a number of productions, as well as how he had to help make up stuff as they went along; 3 minutes of alternate opening and closing credits for *Bare-Footed Kid*; three trailers for *Martial Arts of Shaolin* (and trailers for the two original *Shaolin Temple* films that were shot at the same location); three trailers for *Bare-Footed Kid*; and a final collection of memorabilia in still frame for both features.

### Yakuza transcendence

From joy to dread and humor to sorrow, films take us on a pathway of emotions. While some of those emotions are temporary, inspired by the fates of the characters on the screen, other emotions, based upon the anticipation of what the entertainment will offer, are longer lasting when the entertainment subsequently fulfills that anticipation. The instant we were past the opening TOEI Company crashing surf logo on the 1968 Japanese yakuza film, **Big Time Gambling Boss**, and saw the first frame of the movie itself, a profound sense of peace settled over us. This would seem ironic, since the opening frame, and the static opening shot, depicts a small, framed Japanese flag of white with its red circle in the center, the flag centered precisely in the middle of the letterboxed screen on the Radiance Films Blu-ray release (UPC#760137115564, \$35), with a sword standing to the left of the flag on a shelf that runs across the frame beneath it, and a traditional samurai helmet placed to the right. The film is set in the early Thirties and is in fact an allegory about the rise of fascism in Japan, as it depicts different individuals vying for power when the leader of the yakuza gang, on his deathbed, cedes his control of the gang. Why did we feel such peace, and why did it continue even after the film's subject became clear and its violence unleashed? Because, letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, the formal composition of that first frame continues throughout the 95-minute feature. Directed by Yamashita Kôzaku, the images are never fanatically symmetrical, but they are reliably and consistently balanced (in edited close-ups during conversations, one person is always slightly to the right of center, and the other is slightly to the left), and it is that assured hand guiding the movie's formal look that lets you know the drama will be equally deliberate and steadfast. And indeed, it is.

Tsuruta Kôji is the lieutenant who tries to keep the peace after turning down the leadership post himself and allowing it to pass to a lesser lieutenant played by Nawa Hiroshi, because the man who deserves the position, played by Wakayama Tomisaburô of **Lone Wolf** fame, is still in prison. It is when the latter is released that the trouble starts, since all three men are good friends and wonder if there isn't a secret conspirator in their group trying to stir up trouble. Now, everybody sitting on this side of the screen will be shouting, "Guys, it's the weasley dude with the upturned lip and stupid-looking black mustache. Duh!" but you have to make allowances for Japanese theatrical tradition. With a few scattered flurries of violence—what would potentially be the showiest fight happens entirely off screen—the film is essentially a depiction of men talking. All of the performances are great, but Tomisaburô is exceptionally good, bringing an exquisite flavor to the film's carefully measured emotional tone. The period décor and costumes add to the appeal, but if it were not for the meticulous staging Kôzaku employs to guide the characters along their obligated and tragically inevitable paths, the film would not just be a downer, but a dull one. Instead, from that very first opening frame, and even though everything happens as one expects it to, the film is transfixing and transcendent, not just providing entertainment, but at the same time underscoring the value of entertainment itself, of its ability to find and coordinate an emotional orientation with the person being entertained. We didn't just want to watch the movie again when it was over, we wanted to find and watch every widescreen yakuza film made in the Sixties, so we could stretch out the fix indefinitely.

It also helps that the color transfer is meticulous. There may be one scene that looks a little washy, but otherwise the hues are exact and fleshtones are finely detailed. The monophonic sound is solid, and the film is in Japanese with optional English subtitles. Along with a trailer and a brief collection of memorabilia in still frame, there is an excellent 15-minute history of yakuza films with some terrific clips, and then, working off the context of the first piece, an equally superb 25-minute segment on **Big Time Gambling Boss**, looking at the artists who worked on it and the specific yakuza films Toei was making at the time, again with more wonderful clips that reinforced our desire to see everything.

### Lust in the reeds

Perhaps it is because Japan is such a crowded and confined country that their fables are often about people living in isolation and how things happen there that do not happen in more populated surroundings. **Woman in the Dunes** is a distinctive example of that concept, but it is also the theme of the very sexy for its day 1964 Kaneto Shindo feature, **Onibaba**, which has been released on Blu-ray by The Criterion Collection (UPC#715515264914, \$40). During a time of civil war, a woman and her daughter-in-law are fending for themselves while living in a small hut near a river and amid a field of very tall reeds. They kill soldiers who get lost in the reeds and then trade the weapons and armor for food. When a companion of the woman's son returns from the war and sets up in a nearby cabin, friction develops as he and the daughter-in-law gravitate towards one another. When the tension and eroticism build, the older woman obtains a demon mask (which has a design nicely rhymed with the exterior design of the thatch cabin where they live) and tries to scare the daughter-in-law away from her trysts. The scheme works, until one very stormy night...

Running 102 minutes, the film is an ideal blend of focused drama and evocative surroundings, so that, like all fables, the tale seems to rise as much from the earth as it does from human creativity. The black-and-white picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.4:1 and is meticulously

detailed, which adds greatly to the movie's impact. The same is true of the monophonic sound, which has a shear crispness and a strong punch. The film is in Japanese with optional English subtitles.

Along with a trailer and 38 minutes of fascinating silent home movies taken during the production, there is an excellent 21-minute interview with Shindo from 2003, who discusses the story, explains how the film fit into his career, and speaks at length about the shoot itself and how he had the entire crew live in a makeshift camp next to the reeds for the full length of the shoot. "When you live like that, everyone's suppressed emotions that have built up are unleashed in the work. So an energy beyond normal intensity pours out."

Finally, there is an excellent commentary recorded in 2001 with Shindo and co-stars Kei Sato and Jitsuko Yoshimura, in Japanese with optional English subtitles. They talk extensively about their experiences 'living' on the set and the challenge of the elements.

"They say moths are drawn to flames. When the sun fell, the insects would all come. I'd been under the impression that there were only one or two types of summer insects. But there were dozens! One type would come, stay a week, then go away. Then another type would come. Insects have it tough, too, you know. They'd come in the evening and fall to the floor. Then the crayfish would come eat them. We used a light trap to catch them. They'd come in swarms. They'd be drawn to the lamp and fall dead. Then we'd pour gasoline over them and set them ablaze. There wasn't much to do at night besides setting insects on fire."

"When we were shooting at night they'd fly in my mouth as I spoke my lines."

They also talk about the different methods that were employed with the black-and-white cinematography to bring out the textures of the reeds, the problems of working in the reeds (which were often very sharp), the fish they encountered, their diets during the shoot, the origin of the story, the dedication of the crew, the nudity, the performances, and the motion picture business in general.

"Actors leave once they've finished their scenes. Same for the crew. They go home when their work is done. But the director stays until the bitter end."

"Yes, that's right. That's true both psychologically and physically too, of course. The director does get exhausted."

"But it's important to remember that actors do all the running around! All the director has to do is watch."

"It's hard work! I always keep that in mind with actors. You really put in the work. But you do it because it's fun. So maybe I shouldn't worry so much. Maybe it's not that big a deal."

"I've always felt, both in film and theater, that actors feel a certain sense of guilt toward both director and audience. By that I mean someone else writes the script, then someone else directs. But actors act as if they thought it all up themselves! I always feel guilty about that. I feel really embarrassed about it."

"I wouldn't know about that, but I will say that directors often feel powerless because they don't actually do anything. They just tell others what to do. They don't do it themselves. We're dependent on others, and that dependence feels like an invisible barrier. But if a film turns out well, the director gets the credit."

### Mizoguchi masterpiece

A touching story of love and devotion, Kenji Mizoguchi's timeless 1939 **The Story of the Last Chrysanthemum**, has been released on Blu-ray by The Criterion Collection (UPC#715515186018, \$40). Set before the turn of the Century, Shotaro Hanajagi is an aspiring kabuki actor who is surprised when his mother's maid, played by Kakuko Mori, worried about his future, tells him that his performances need a great deal more practice and that he should not listen to the people who empty praise him. In his heart, he knows she is right, and he begins spending time with her until his mother fires her. In response, he quits his father's theater company and tries to make a life with her in small regional theaters as she continues to nudge him into improving his performances and taking pride in his art. What is beautiful about the narrative is that both characters recognize the love they have for one another in their souls, and so that despite the hardships they endure during the movie's 143-minute running time, and even the ultimate tragedy the story eventually leads to, the film is uplifting and heartening. Each character's flaws only adds to the realism of their love's purity. At the same time, of course, the movie is a great showbiz tale, Japanese-style, with three major and engrossing kabuki sequences and plenty of details about the workings of the smaller companies and the pressures of fame, all of it told with a captivating cinematic precision.

The full screen black-and-white picture is workable. There is grain, softness and some wear, but not enough to interfere with the meticulous period décor and the impressively subtle lighting. The monophonic sound also has a basic level of age-related noise and range limitation, which again does not interfere with one's concentration, especially during the kabuki sequences. The film is in Japanese with optional English subtitles, and comes with a very good 21-minute overview of the film that explains how it represented the coming together of Mizoguchi's various directing techniques, to mark the beginning of his masterpieces, while also deconstructing the film's major components and explain specifically how each of the three kabuki sequences comments upon the drama.

### Ozu classic

As beautiful a film about love and marriage as you could ever hope to see, Yashiro Uzo's 1952 **The Flavor of Green Tea over Rice**, has been released on Blu-ray by The Criterion Collection (UPC#715515233811, \$40). The full screen black-and-white image is spotless, with carefully defined contrasts, which adds considerably to the impact of the film, because it enables the perception of every subtle nuance in what ostensibly looks like a simple and bland tale about a housewife who has become bored with her husband and her life. Running 116 minutes, the film is dryly comical as it appears to satirize presumptions about middle class living and marriage, focusing on characters who are rebelling one way or another against the norm, although part of the movie's purpose is to show that what people consider a 'norm' actually doesn't exist. The film's surprises should not be spoiled, but the moment when the movie's title suddenly makes a great deal of sense is the moment where the film's disparate emotional elements suddenly come together in a manner that is as profound as it is soft spoken. Easily open to dozens of viewings because of the precision of its execution (the camera is always at knee level, which creates an omniscient viewpoint where one really shouldn't exist), it is one more reminder that the while everything appears normal, it is actually off balance, except that off balance is normal, especially when it comes to genuinely true love.

**The Flavor of Green Tea over Rice** is most emphatically not a remake of Ozu's 1937 *What Did the Lady Forget?*, but it is a conscious reworking of the previous film's situations and themes, so much so that Criterion has included the previous film as a bonus in the supplement. Again, it is set in the suburbs and is about a man and a woman taking stock of their marriage after an impulsive house guest interrupts their home life, with the house guest's romantic life serving as a parallel to the marriage (the same thing happens in **Green Tea**). The films are so similar that a few days later it is difficult to recall which incidents occurred in which feature, although there is one moment that clearly belongs to the older film. Not only does the husband hit the wife in a moment of anger, but the wife brags about it the next day to her friends, and they are jealous because they wish their husbands felt as strongly about them. As a whole, the 71-minute feature lacks the precision and elegance Ozu brings to the drama and the humor in **Green Tea**—in some ways, he's still learning the ropes in his earlier feature—but it is an entertaining comedy in which both the husband and the wife tend to hide their plans and actions from one another, even though those plans and actions are innocent. They just fall outside of their routines, and the characters don't want to have to explain themselves to one another. Ultimately, the film is not as moving as **Green Tea** becomes, but it is a cute little entertainment, wife slapping and all. The full screen black-and-white picture is in much rougher condition than **Green Tea** was, with scratches, softness and other indications of wear. On both films, the monophonic sound is reasonably stable and the movies are in Japanese with optional English subtitles.

Also featured is a very good 17-minute profile of the relationship between Ozu and screenwriter Koga Noda that looks at their long collaboration and working methods (it is very reminiscent of how Billy Wilder and I.A.L. Diamond collaborated), and a decent 25-minute deconstruction and appreciation of **The Flavor of Green Tea over Rice**. "Most films show us only areas related to the immediate action, but here, as so often in Ozu's films, we see the people as transient parts of a more enduring spatial whole." In other words, like tea over rice.

### Tough day

Impressive filmmaking but dreary entertainment, Sean Baker and Shih-Ching Tsou's **Take Out**, released on Blu-ray by The Criterion Collection (UPC# 715515276719, \$40), is about one long rainy day in the life of a Chinese restaurant deliveryman, played by Charles Jang, in Manhattan. It is the film's realism that is impressive, since it is indeed raining throughout the 88-minute film, and it is clear from the production environment that Baker and Tsou could not exactly afford rain machines, or even a garden hose. The rain is real, as are, seemingly, the endless string of customers that the Jang's character hands his deliveries to. To give the film a cohesive narrative, Jang's character must earn an impossible amount of tips by the end of the day or face severe punishment from a loan shark (to pay back the cost coming to the country). If the story wasn't depressing enough already, the grainy image and messy settings add to the movie's dour atmosphere. You are treated to the inner workings of a Chinese restaurant, although it is not all that different from what you can see past the counter in most such establishments, just a little better (if unappetizing) idea of where the ingredients come from. But every time Jang slogs outside with his bicycle and another plastic bag of food you are reminded with admiration of how the filmmakers must have waited for days on end to catch such inclement weather and make it look so consistent. That is pretty much the only pleasure the film can offer.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. While there are smatterings of English, most of the film is in Mandarin with optional English subtitles. The stereo sound has a genuine dimensionality and is adequately presented. Colors are relatively fresh and there is no doubt that the image transfer is as accurate as was possible for its documentary-like condition. There are 6 minutes of deleted scenes that mostly take the film in the wrong direction (a segment with teenagers in the restaurant is engaging). What is curious about the scenes, however, is that the image quality is much better than the feature. Also included is a trailer, a 2-minute clip of Jang's screen test (again better looking than the feature), an 18-minute collection of interviews with members of the cast and the crew about how they became involved in the film and what it means to them, and a good 29-minute collection of retrospective interviews about making

the movie (Baker also admits that he tweaked the sound and the picture for Criterion's release).

Baker, Tsou and Jang also provide a commentary, explaining that the 2004 feature cost them three thousand dollars to shoot and that they lucked out with the rain. The customers, on the other hand, were all hired (albeit cheaply), answering an ad and doing each scene from the doorways of their own apartments for pretty much less than the cost of the meals being handed to them. Along with talking about the plight of actual Chinese immigrants, the three filmmakers explain how various scenes were inspired and staged, and how they took advantage of what was at hand. "What's amazing about shooting in this location is that we had to do very little art direction. I mean, just look at that. Look at that bathroom. Beautiful. The best art director in the world could not create something like that."

### Visconti stumbles

It takes a truly great artist to make a truly terrible movie. Mediocre talent cannot soar high enough to fall so far. Luchino Visconti's 1969 **The Damned** has been issued on Blu-ray by The Criterion Collection (UPC# 715515264419, \$40) with an exquisite image transfer that makes the film all the more painful to sit through. The transfer is significantly improved over the Warner Home Video DVD we reviewed in Jul 04, and this amplifies one of Visconti's unwavering strengths—the costumes and décor. The jewelry worn by the women are dazzling on the Blu-ray, with seemingly every carat measurable. The DVD looks fine, but the image is not as fresh or as sharp.

You would think that having a dreary picture would make the film even more intolerable, and normally that would be the case, but with Visconti, the beauty of the image serves as a constant reminder that his filmmaking skills are superb, so that the bad editing, disjointed performances and embarrassing characters are all the more irritating because they can be seen and heard so clearly. Dirk Bogarde is top billed although his character is off screen for long stretches of time, and seems to have a different mood every time he reappears. Set in the early Thirties as the Nazis are cementing their control of Germany, the film is about the heirs to a steel manufacturing concern. As we mentioned in our previous review, the story is vaguely but pointedly patterned after *Macbeth*, with Bogarde's character as the usurper trying to hold onto his control of the company after he murders his fiancée's father, who built the company. He initially has the support of a well-connected Nazi, and this allows him to circumvent the appointed heir, who has aligned himself with a less powerful military faction in the government. Meanwhile the blood heir to the fortune, played by Helmut Berger, is a transvestite and child molester, which ought to work against him, but not in Nazi Germany. The characters are largely unappealing. Visconti was well established as having little concern for running times, but even at 157 minutes, the film feels like it is an abridgement, just hitting highlights of the narrative and leaving out both physical and emotional transitions, so that the way characters react to events happen without explanation. Opera also tends to condense narrative events and Visconti loved opera, so that is sort of how the film plays out, but with a lackluster Maurice Jarre musical score in the place of Verdi. The frustration comes not because another filmmaker could have done better, but because Visconti could have been doing something else that would not have left such a bad taste in one's soul after it was over. What the film reminds us of more than anything else is Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salo*, which is an even greater failure by a great artist, demonstrating how Nazis can bring out the worst in everybody. Ingrid Thulin and Charlotte Rampling co-star.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. Correcting one of the DVD's flaws, English subtitles appear for the German songs on the otherwise English language track, as well as some incidental German writing and such, but are otherwise suppressed. On the DVD you had to live with the subtitling throughout if you chose the option. An Italian track is also included, although you lose Bogarde's voice. The distancing the Italian provides, however, can make the film a little more tolerable. The monophonic sound is adequate, although the music never really seems crisp.

The special features include an outstanding, don't-you-wish-American-TV-was-half-as-good interview with Visconti from 1970 running 40 minutes, in which he is asked questions and responds to statements by the TV audience members about **The Damned**. The questions are intelligent and articulate, and he answers the questions with care and thoughtfulness. It is worth noting that as they discuss prominent 'young' Italian filmmakers, to whom Visconti is being compared as part of an older generation, everyone is oblivious to such filmmakers as Mario Bava, Sergio Leone and Sergio Corbucci, just as American film experts a couple of decades earlier were oblivious to Alfred Hitchcock and Howard Hawks. Also featured, along with the 9-minute behind-the-scenes featurette that appeared on the DVD and a trailer, is a 16-minute assessment of the film that attempts to place it in a positive perspective but still cannot help calling out its most prominent flaws (particularly the equating of homosexuality and transvestism with child molestation, incest and Nazis, a topic that also comes up in the TV interview, which Visconti kind of acknowledges, explaining that his intention was to cast Nazism in an alternate light from what had been presented previously); a 10-minute interview with Thulin from 1969, in which she talks about the film, but also about a wide number of her recent film roles at the time (she claims that American film crews have union members who stand around and do nothing), a nice 4-minute interview with Rampling from 1990 talking about how the film and her equally awful follow up with Bogarde, **The Night Porter**, got her career off to a counter-intuitively grand start (well, the films were boxoffice hits); and a great 5-minute interview with Berger from 1969, talking about his challenging experiences on the shoot.

### Guilt rubs off

When an innocent man played by Maurice Ronet witnesses a murder, it triggers suppressed guilt from confessing to the Nazis under torture a couple of decades earlier in the 1962 French drama, **La Dénonciation**, an Icarus Films Home Video release (UPC#854565003958, \$30). Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback, the black-and-white feature, directed by Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, has a playfully stylish Sixties design that counterpoints the self-aware seriousness of its existential brooding. Often using mirrors to stretch out the activity on the screen, the film captures the streets of Paris, the nightclub where the murder occurred, and the offices and apartments where the characters reside (not to mention an art gallery, which is always a cinematic location) with a spirit that embraces the period wholeheartedly. Sacha Pitoëff plays the police inspector who calmly questions the witnesses and suspects while waiting for one of them to crack, as Ronet's character hides some of what he knows because the pressures on his conscience are distorting his common sense. Quite delightfully, Michael Lonsdale plays Pitoëff's assistant, sitting in the back of the office like an apprentice, studying a role he will be playing countless times in the future. You can't take your eyes off of him. Françoise Brion, whose chirpy presence also adds to the film's period attractions, and Nicole Berger co-star. Running 106 minutes (Icarus made several errors in its information box on the back of the jacket, including listing the aspect ratio at 1.85:1, the year of production at 1961, and the running time at 72 minutes), the film's greatest strength is the musical score by Georges Delerue, weaving its delicate theme throughout the film and conveying the fragility of Ronet's character so effectively that, against better judgment, the viewer can accept the fate the character chooses for himself.

The transfer looks very nice, with no significant flaws, and the monophonic sound is solid. The film is in French with permanent English subtitles.

### Iguana Blu-ray

John Huston's marvelous 1964 adaptation of Tennessee Williams' romcom, **Night of the Iguana**, has been released on Blu-ray by Turner Entertainment Co. and Warner Bros. as a *WB Archive Collection* title (UPC# 883929800575, \$23). We reviewed Warner's DVD release in May 06 and the BD is much improved, with a spotless black-and-white picture, letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and delivering a reasonably sharp and unfettered presentation of the movie's engaging imagery. The monophonic sound is also stronger and more solid, which is an advantage whenever one has Richard Burton reading into a microphone. It is because the movie is dependent upon Williams' intoxicating dialog that the improved presentation frees the characters from any subliminal restraints one might have had in finding them appealing. The DVD was terrific, but the BD is even more wonderful.

Our previous review summarized the plot rather thoroughly, and even pointed out what we noticed again this time through, that the close-ups of the iguanas look like Huston. This time out, however, even the close-ups of the macaws look like Huston, impishly watching on as the humans make fools of themselves. Set in Mexico, Burton's character is an inebriated tour guide and Ava Gardner is the recently widowed owner of a decrepit resort barely holding its own against the encroaching jungle. They are soul mates, but he doesn't realize it. His bus arrives off season and she lets the tourists stay there for the day. Hence, there are also subplots with a variety of colorful characters, particularly those played by Sue Lyon, Deborah Kerr and Grayson Hall, adding to both the menagerie and the humor of Williams' concoction. Garner is outstanding, and it is the reality she brings to her earthy character that anchors the film's validity as a lighthearted entertainment with touches of real lyricism. And yet, as good as Garner is, film history would have been greatly altered if Elizabeth Taylor, who was apparently on the set most of the time, had played her part, because the electricity she and Burton might have generated would have transcended the confines of the 118-minute film instead of just fulfilling those confines exquisitely, as Garner does.

There are optional English subtitles, two trailers, a great 14-minute promotional featurette and a less satisfying 10-minute retrospective documentary, all of which appeared previously on the DVD.

### The slavery problem

All things considered, most films from the Thirties and Forties have survived our current social awareness upheavals more or less in tact. To be sure, there are occasional minor embarrassments, particularly in the casting of ethnic characters with non-ethnic actors, along with the subjugation of African-American performers, and others, to minor or stereotypical roles, but there are very few movies that are so skewed in their attitude—**Gone with the Wind** may be approaching the status of **Birth of a Nation**, but it really isn't there yet—that they could not be broadcast on TV or shared in mixed company without pause. One film that might cause one to think twice about sharing with others, however, is the fascinating 1939 frontier tale from MGM, **Stand Up and Fight**, a Warner Home Video *WB Archive Collection* title (UPC#883316753286, \$13). Robert Taylor begins the film as a slave owner. He goes broke, however, and sells off his holdings, including the slaves. He is a 'nice' guy, though, insisting that his slaves be sold as a family and not broken up, although he could get more money with individual sales. He is then redeemed later on, while working as a laborer on a new railroad in what was then western Virginia, as he goes undercover to break up a group that is abducting and re-selling escaped and freed slaves. Wallace Beery, who has

top billing, gives a gung ho performance as a less principled stage line operator who is not quite one of the bad guys, but works with them without guilt. Florence Rice, Helen Broderick and Charles Bickford are also featured. The film's period setting is nicely executed (there are some really old railroad engines in use) and there is a good deal of suspense, along with adventure and a touch of romance. Yes, it is problematic, to say the least, but it is also quite interesting as an entertainment on several levels, exploring historical attitudes both in the time the film is set and in the time it was made.

The full screen black-and-white picture is reasonably sharp, but there is a lot of speckling and some scratches, as well. The monophonic sound is adequate and there is no captioning. A trailer is included that sells the film's action scenes and romance.

### Action pick-me-up

As fun as it is bloody, Brad Pitt stars in an energized 2022 action comedy, **Bullet Train**, a Sony Pictures Home Entertainment release (UPC#043396579057, \$31). Directed by David Leitch, Pitt's character is just one of a half dozen who find themselves on an express train running from Tokyo to Kyoto with orders from their various nefarious employers to murder others or, as is the assignment of Pitt's character, steal a briefcase. There is a logical reason that everyone is on the same train at the same time, but the explanation is left for the end. In the meantime, you never know who is an innocent passenger and who is a predator—there's even a deadly snake on the train—although there are lively flashbacks, once the identity of an individual is pinned down, to show how deadly that individual can be. At some point in the 126-minute film the genuine passengers and train employees just sort of disappear from the movie, and no one ever seems to notice the dead bodies piling up. By then, you don't care anyway. Anchoring the film with his long established airhead slacker persona, Pitt is the perfect hero, who seems to survive every skirmish out of luck rather than the skills that his muscle memories so clearly carry. With perfectly timed slapstick gore, editing and camera movements that take their cue from the speed of the train, and witty, irreverent dialog to sustain the characters and their relationships so that, good or evil, you care what happens to them, the film is just the sort of pick-me-up you need to put a smile on your face and some decent electrical surges running through your speakers.

Joey King, Michael Shannon, Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Bad Bunny, and Bryan Tyree Henry co-star, with Sandra Bullock making an extended cameo. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The colors are slick and solid, and you can never tell what is a computer effect and what is relatively real. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound is, as we indicated, marvelous and well worth amplifying, with many directional effects and plenty of power. There is an audio track that describes the action ("The Father fends off an assassin with a stuffed toy, then gets smothered with it. The Father grabs a knife from the floor. He drives it through the stuffed animal and into the assassin's face."), alternate French, Spanish and Portuguese audio tracks, nine subtitling options including English and 13 minutes of fairly decent promotional featurettes.

### Let's do it again

The film calls itself a 'requel,' but it is actually a full-fledged sequel that shares its name with the first film in the series, the 2022 Paramount release, **Scream** (UPC#191329219102, \$18). Neve Campbell, Courtney Cox and David Arquette all return (as does Skeet Ulrich—you wanna know how, see the movie), and it is worth noting that while Campbell and Cox pretty much walk through their roles to pick up their checks, Arquette delivers a legitimate and engaging performance. As do the younger cast members who are the actual stars and primary victims in the feature, including Melissa Barrera, Jenna Ortega, Jack Quaid, and Mikey Madison. They consistently hit their marks, technically and emotionally. Like its predecessors, the movie takes delight in its film literate gags, particularly its references to the other movies in the franchise, as a masked villain taunts his victims and creates mayhem. Through the lens of the series history, it is also a marvelous spoof on generational shifts, from ubiquitous cell phones to, well, what else does the new generation care about besides their cell phones? Finally, the 114-minute film is robust when it comes to violence. Blood-splattering stabbings abound, with bone crunchings and shootings not far behind. The movie is intelligently designed, humorously executed and exhilarating at every blind corner turn. While we can't wait for the sequel, we also can't wait for another couple of decades to pass, so that yet another generation can add to the topical wit that is an inherent part of the movie's heritage.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The picture is smooth and colors are accurate. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound adds to the thrills with its directional teases and is worth amplifying. There is an audio track that describes the action ("At the nurse's station, Tara shifts forward in her chair, and reaches down to the dead officer. His arm lies over his holster. Tara flips it away, revealing that his gun is missing."), alternate French, Spanish and Japanese audio tracks, and optional English, French, Spanish, Japanese, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean and Thai subtitles.

The disc opens, by the way, with a promotional trailer for an upgraded home video presentation of the first film, and it is worth sitting through the segment before proceeding with the feature to refresh one's memory about the people and the thrills that are about to reappear.

### Think about the world

Songs from *Sweet Charity*, *Damn Yankees*, *Cabaret*, *Pippin* and *Chicago* are not just heard in passing during the outstanding eight-episode, 392-minute miniseries from 2019, *Fosse/Verdon*, a two-platter 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Home Entertainment release (UPC#024543636588, \$35), they permeate almost every moment of the show, turning the series into an epic musical itself. Sam Rockwell is Bob Fosse and Michelle Williams is Gwen Verdon, with the show chronicling their entwined personal and professional relationship through romance, marriage, medical difficulties, divorce, and hits, failures and awards on Broadway and in films. He died in her arms. Because of the healthy running time and having been based upon real events and situations, the program, better than any other that we can recall, depicts so much of the couple's domestic life that a viewer can genuinely discern what is similar to one's own domesticity and what is unique to being rich and famous.

The performances are outstanding. For anyone who finds the music even remotely appealing, the series is absolutely captivating, since that music is thoroughly integrated with the complex and psychologically potent temperaments of its two central figures. As a person, physically and morally, Fosse was a train wreck, but the creativity that drove him found a soul mate in Verdon, whose input on his major accomplishments appears to have been extensive and invaluable. The program is ingenious (Neil Simon, Paddy Chayefsky, and Lisa Minnelli are among the major characters represented in the pair's lives), really delving into the internal makeup of both artists while at the same time recreating rehearsals and performances with an exquisite and nostalgic fidelity. By the time the series reaches its take on *All That Jazz*, it achieves a what? 'Double meta' or 'meta squared'? In any case, the series does not hold back, diving into the raw realities of its subjects with the same focused determination that Fosse approached his dance numbers. The end of one episode, which intercuts selections from *Pippin* with Fosse's nervous breakdown, left us stunned, and reflecting upon the totality of our own existence.

Each platter has a 'Play All' option. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2:1. The color transfer looks as slick and glossy as one would hope. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital mix is not elaborate, but it is dimensional enough and strong enough to deliver the music with an appealingly immersive presence. There is no captioning.

### Bigamy is just the start

A captivating three-part BBC drama from 2018, based upon a true story about a woman who discovers that her deceased husband led other lives, *Mrs. Wilson*, has been released as a *Masterpiece* offering by PBS (UPC#84-1887041263, \$30). Ruth Wilson plays the title character (her grandmother in real life—although the end titles do not mention it, the publicity people make sure you are aware of it), who is startled after her husband passes away when a man claiming to be his son shows up and demands the body. That is just the first surprise, since Wilson's character comes across more incongruities and ambiguities—and more previously unknown sons—as the story unfolds. Iain Glen plays the husband in the flashbacks. Although she originally met him during the war in an office where they both worked for British Intelligence, doubt is eventually cast upon how long he actually worked as a spy. The tale is utterly engrossing at every turn, and made all the more fascinating because it is based upon real events.

The three episodes run a total of 177 minutes and are presented on a single platter. There is no 'Play All' option. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The color transfer looks fine and the image is sharp. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has a steady dimensionality, and there are optional English subtitles, along with a 4-minute promotional featurette (where the clips are letterboxed at 2.35:1) that includes Wilson talking about her grandmother.

### WWII series

Structured like a miniature *Winds of War*, the terrific 2019 BBC series, *World on Fire Season One*, is available from PBS Video as a three-platter *Masterpiece* title (UPC#841887043397, \$40). Beginning in 1939, the story is set mostly in Manchester and in Poland, and then tracks the beginnings of World War II by jumping back and forth between characters, who all have connections with one another, as they struggle to deal with their personal lives and what is happening around them. Some of the coincidences that bring the characters together are an obvious stretch, and there is even one character whose travel from Warsaw to Dunkirk is left unexplained altogether, but the drama is consistently rich and involving, integrating the concerns and conflicts within families and the larger conflicts of social upheaval and oppression. While the season ends on several compelling cliffhangers, there is still enough growth within the characters and culminating events to provide a satisfying entertainment.

Sean Bean has given many fine performances in his career, but we have never seen him as good as he is here, with a working class Manchester accent, as a former veteran and dedicated Pacifist trying to come to terms with the responsibilities his grown children are facing in the advent of war. Jonah Hauer-King is a diplomatic translator who ends up in the army after he uses his influence to help a young boy escape from Poland when the Germans invade. Zofia Wichłacz is the boy's older sister, who stays behind in Poland, and Julia Brown the daughter of Bean's character and the former girlfriend of Hauer-King's character. Lesley Manville is wonderfully icy as the aristocratic mother of Hauer-King's character, and Helen Hunt plays a reporter broadcasting first from Warsaw and then from Berlin, to fill the viewer in on the status of the war as her character also tries to help a German couple whose daughter, an epileptic, does not fit into

the Nazi's social plans. We would also like to take note of Arthur Darvill, who appears later in the show as a suitor for Brown's character and comes across as a dead ringer for Ralph Fiennes.

Seven episodes running a total of 420 minutes are spread across the three platters and there is no 'Play All' option. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has a reasonable dimensionality and there are optional English subtitles.

### Grace in 1962

The 2014 Weinstein Company dramatization of Grace Kelly's marriage to Prince Rainier of Monaco, *Grace of Monaco*, is available from Weinstein and Anchor Bay Entertainment (UPC#013132639208, \$15). Nicole Kidman stars in what has to seem like a fairly thankless role as Kelly, but the film is actually focused upon a specific international incident in 1962, when France, and specifically its leader, Charles de Gaulle, started putting the screws on the principality of Monaco to get more of the tax revenue Monaco's status as an independent financial haven hid from the world. It was, at least so far as the 104-minute film is concerned, Kelly (after flirting with the idea of accepting the starring role in *Marnie*) who embraced her role as princess and saved the day with her feminine wiles and refined American ingenuity, at the same time preventing a coup attempt by the prince's sibling. Historically, the tale is a little iffy, but the stars (literally) were close enough to being in the right place for the narrative to be viable, and once that part of the story really gets underway, the drama is a total crowd pleaser, in no small part because Kidman pulls off her assignment with utter verisimilitude (her rehearsing of a scene from *Marnie* as Kelly is also marvelous). The film begins with glamour, and then delivers a pleasant surprise of excitement. Directed by Olivier Dahan, Tim Roth co-stars as her husband, with a terrific supporting cast that includes Frank Langella, Parker Posey, Derek Jacobi, Robert Lindsay, Paz Vega and others.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback, although the widescreen framing does not stop Dahan from including many close-ups of Kidman, practically daring viewers to question her substitution for Kelly. The colors are fresh but over saturated at times, and fleshtones are not always precise. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has some appealing directional effects and a workable dimensionality. There are optional English and Spanish subtitles.

### Dance does Pilcher

A classy British rendition of one of those miniseries, based upon grocery store bestsellers, that were popular in the Eighties and Nineties, *Rosamunde Pilcher's Shades of Love*, is available as a four-platter set from RLI Entertainment and Acorn Media (UPC#054961243495, \$60). Charles Dance is top-billed—and that is half the fun—as the patriarch of a large estate in Scotland and a successful investment firm in London. Eleonore Weisgerber is his second wife, and one of their daughters, she learns, has a different father. That starts the 2010 four-part series, as each of the grown children have their own romantic problems and conflicts that are carried forward in an addicting manner amid luxurious locations and clothing to match. Each of the four episodes runs 93 minutes, and there is a major stopping point between the second and third episodes—most of the stories are resolved in the second, and a whole new batch of complications, with another previously unknown paternity revelation, are begun in the third. Eileen Atkins, Michael Brandon and Rebecca Night co-star. Ultimately, the characters may have short tempers from time to time, but they are all impossibly nice, and even the villain of the show has sort of a change of heart at the very end. If the program had been produced like Hallmark and Lifetime shows are, its mindlessness would outweigh the story hooks, but making it all fancy and British is enough of a secondary support to sustain a viewer from one plot turn to the next, particularly with Dance taking the material as respectfully as he would something more Shakespearean. If he's giving it his blessing, who are we to turn it down?

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The color transfer looks smooth and glossy, and the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has a mild dimensionality. There are optional English subtitles, and each platter has a minute-long montage of promotional photos.

### Visiting Portofino

Tantalizing glimpses of its location that can sustain the early Thirties setting are divvied out judiciously on the six-episode 2022 Britbox series, *Hotel Portofino Season One*, a PBS Video release (UPC#84188704-6602, \$40). The hotel, nestled in the outskirts of one of Italy's most picturesque seaside villages, caters to British visitors and the episodes follow several stories involving a number of guests during a month in the summer. The hotel is owned by a married couple who are also British and are not getting along with one another, although they have joined forces to arrange that their son, a war vet, become engaged to the daughter of a British aristocrat that the father once dated. There is also some business with a stolen painting, and the Fascists are becoming an increasing nuisance. Spread across two platters, the program runs a total of 336 minutes and frankly, it isn't very good. Even the final episode, which is better than what had come before it, is marred by several disappointing story turns and character choices. The cast, including Natascha McElhone, Bella Ainsworth, Marc Umbers, Anna Chancellor and Oliver Dench, is mostly bland (Lily Frazier, as a bon vivant, is one of the few exceptions), and the script does not divvy out the story in an involving manner, so you just sort of trudge through the thing, savoring every glimpse you get of Portofino proper and then patiently waiting for the next.

There is no 'Play All' option. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The color transfer is lovely, adding to what appeal the program has, and the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has a basic dimensionality. There are optional English subtitles and a decent 25-minute promotional featurette loaded with cast interviews.

### Uncovered Quigley

Every hear of Linnea Quigley? She was a horror film star in the Eighties, Nineties and beyond, appearing in a few quasi-mainstream films such as **Nightmare on Elm Street 4 The Dream Master** (she also played the punk girl in **The Return of the Living Dead**), but landing more prominent parts in movies that were largely relegated to home video. Anyway, one of the movies she made in 1989 under the title of *Fallen Angels* collapsed due to the costs of transferring the footage to a workable presentation format and was shelved until the director, Eric Swelstad, finally pieced it together in 2018, and it now has its first home video release in 2022 as **Heartland of Darkness**, a Wild Eye Releasing and Visual Vengeance Blu-ray (UPC#760137110859, \$35). For Quigley fans, this is a real big deal, like finding out that Neptune has another moon or something. Although she has just a supporting part, as an evil seductress, her sexuality is one of the film's strongest components—along with its admirably staged gore effects—and more than just fans will savor her presence. Indeed, it seems that a sequence justifying the logic behind her demise was in all likelihood never shot, although the film's plot is loose enough that no great harm to the continuity is caused by the lack of it. It just would be nice to see a little more of her doing her thing.

As for the 101-minute feature, which was shot near Columbus OH, it has a reasonably coherent plot, about a newspaper reporter wishing to get away from it all, played by Dino Tripodis, who tries to start a community paper in a small town and immediately uncovers the machinations of a satanic cult that is rapidly taking over the town, with its sights set on the entire state. The cult is run by a seemingly attractive church pastor, played by Nick Baldasare. The film does not really achieve the level of paranoia it has the potential to achieve, but there are a few effective moments (including a nicely depicted political assassination), consistently good splatter and gore effects, a fair amount of nudity, and a story developed enough to hold everything together. Had it been released in the Nineties, it probably would have been mostly overlooked in the lineup on the horror shelf at the video store, but being revealed to the world now, it has the spotlight all to itself.

The squared full screen picture is in passable condition. Once in a while the image is overly grainy, but colors are fresh, fleshtones are accurate and the image is never too distorted, even in the smearer night sequences. The DTS sound has a basic dimensionality with a robust musical score, although the dialog sometimes needs the assistance of the optional English subtitles. An article about the film that appeared in *Fantasm* magazine is presented in still frame, along with a 13-minute montage of great production photos, two trailers, a good 3-minute behind-the-scenes clip of the final death scene that shows how its illusion was achieved, an enjoyable locally produced 21-minute promotional piece made during the shoot (when the film was still called *Fallen Angels*—that title was subsequently used on other programs, so the filmmakers had to abandon it) that includes a really nice on-set interview with Quigley, a TV commercial for *Fallen Angels*, a 13-minute marketing video (during a time when the film—still seeking investors for its completion—was being called *Blood Church*) that sells the film better than one would expect by heavily intercutting the drama and the action, a terrific 39-minute retrospective documentary seemingly designed for TV entitled *Deeper into the Darkness* (including shots of the filmmakers performing *Julius Caesar* on stage in modern dress!), and a minute-long teaser for the documentary.

Swelstad, Baldasare, cinematographer Scott Spears and composer Jay Woelfel provide a good commentary, not just reminiscing about the shoot (Baldasare: "We didn't have a makeup person, so some of these shots, I see, like, I wish there was a makeup person on this, like, clean that up a little bit. Get some of the shine off my face or, you know, covered up that zit a little bit. I was having some hellacious zits during the shooting of this movie."), but going over what they learned (Swelstad wishes he had shot Quigley, who was hired for only one weekend, just walking down a street menacingly, so he could have sustained her presence a little more thoroughly in the film; they also talk about having to reverse a shot in a scene because they weren't paying attention to eyelines), discussing what has happened to the other people who worked on the film, and chronicling the long path the film took to its release on Blu-ray (computer effects such as smoke were added to finalize the film, and Swelstad has no idea what he would have been able to do instead if the film had been completed in the Nineties).

The second commentary, featuring film historian Tony Strauss, is also very good, presenting a more organized and straightforward history of the production and analysis of the finished result. "Pay attention to the lighting in the church, particularly on [Baldasare's character] as the film progresses. Here, in this scene, he's lit fairly innocuously, but as [his] sinister nature becomes more prevalent, the lighting becomes more sinister and dramatic as well, and this is all the work of the obviously gifted director of photography, Scott Spears, who did a really nice job gradually intensifying the contrast of [the Baldasare character's] lighting."

A preliminary and often silent 'work print,' running 37 minutes, shows how a few of the scenes were initially intended to fit together (the cut was made to encourage investors) and demonstrates how much more Swelstad had to put together to create a full-fledged feature. He also supplies a commentary over much of the footage, mostly expanding upon the talk he did on the feature.

Finally, there is a marvelous 20-minute local sit-down TV interview with Quigley (including commercials) that she made during her weekend on the shoot that has clips from several of her films (she's a real trooper, responding to questions such as, 'Do you ever get scared?'), and a sweet 6-minute online interview from 2021 ("I like the camaraderie in the smaller films. I like the craft services in the bigger ones.").

### DVD News

**CRITERION CORNER:** David Lynch's forgotten gem, **Inland Empire**, is being released by The Criterion Collection with two films from 2007, *LYNCH (one)* and *LYNCH2*, by blackANDwhite, the makers of **David Lynch: The Art Life** (Jul 20); a conversation between Laura Dern and Kyle MacLachlan; 75 minutes of extra scenes entitled *More Things That Happened; Ballerina*, a 2007 short film by Lynch; and reading by Lynch of excerpts from *Room to Dream*, his 2018 book with critic Kristine McKenna. John Woo's **Last Hurrah for Chivalry** will have an audio interview with Woo and an interview with Grady Hendrix, author of *These Fists Break Bricks*. Joan Micklin Silver's delightful **Chilly Scenes of Winter** will come with a program featuring Griffin Dunne, Mark Metcalf, and Amy Robinson; a documentary from 1983 by Katja Raganelli about Silver; excerpts of a 2005 interview with Micklin Silver; and the better original ending of the film, cut by Micklin Silver for its re-release in 1982. Finally, Criterion is upgrading its Blu-ray release of Michael Curtiz' **Mildred Pierce** (Feb 19) to a 4K disc, which will be accompanied by a conversation with critics Molly Haskell and Robert Polito; an excerpt from a 1970 episode of *The David Frost Show* featuring Joan Crawford; *Joan Crawford: The Ultimate Movie Star*, a 2002 feature-length documentary; a Q&A with actor Ann Blyth from 2006, presented by filmmaker Marc Huestis and conducted by film historian Eddie Muller; and a segment from a 1969 episode of the *Today* show featuring novelist James M. Cain.

**NEW IN BLU:** The following titles were recently issued on Blu-ray—The Films of Doris Wishman The Daylight Years (AGFA); Creepshow Season 3, Mad God (AMD); Bomb! Burning Fantasy The Life and Poetry of Gregory Corso, Deleted, The Lure of This Land, Spirit's Revenge, Unraveling Life (Bayview); Distant (Big World); Amsterdam, The Banshees of Inisherin (Buena Vista); Garcia 2 The Rebirth, Reta (Burning Bulb); Mindfield (Canadian); Can't Be Stopped (Cant); Elisa, The First Turn-On! (CAV); Goodbye Don Gleeles!, Operation Seawolf, A Walk to Remember, World Series Champions 2022 (Cinedigm); Three Films by Hong Sangsoo (Cinema Guild); Terrifier 2 (Coven); Cooley High, Michael Haneke Trilogy, Three Films by Mai Zetterling, The Velvet Underground (Criterion); Mind Body and Soul (Culture Shock); The Icarus Line Must Die, Missing, Onoda 10000 Nights in the Jungle, The Passenger (Dark Star); Aftereffects Memories of Pittsburgh Filmmaking, Hallucination, Maniac Driver, Nightmare Symphony (DiabolikDVD); I Think We're Alone Now (ETR); White Reindeer (Factory 25); A Christmas Karen (Filmrise); Cinematic Journeys Two Films by Juleen Compton (Flicker Alley); Chalet Girl (Framerate); Piranha Women (Full Moon); Incantation (Gorilla Tree); High Landz, Zatopek (Gravitas); The Lair, Old Man, Slash/Back (Image); The Haunting of the Murder House, Garcia 2 The Rebirth (Indie Rights); Sell Out! (Kani); The Ballad of Sad Café, Boxcar Bertha, Cinema's First Nasty Women, A Fish in the Bathtub, The Girl on a Motorcycle, The Hallelujah Trail, Laws of Gravity, Maigret Season 1, Nobody's Fool, On the Yard/A Walk on the Moon, One Hundred Steps, Twilight, Two Films by Patrice Leconte Felix and Lola & Love Street, Walk Proud (Kino); Lifemark (Lifemark); American Murderer, Call Jane, Clerks III, The Inhabitant, Lamborghini, The Minute You Wake Up Dead, Paradise City (Lionsgate); The Christmas Challenge (Little Sister); Burial, Resurrection, The Roundup (MPI); Medusa, Sylvio (Music Box); Blood and Diamonds, Born to Fight, Cop Game, Creature from Black Lake, Double Target, La Petite Mort, The Leech, Nightmare at Noon, Old Friends a Documentary, Shawscope Volume Two, The Tubular Bells 50th Anniversary Tour Live at Royal Festival Hall (MVD); Ghostwatch (101); Better Off Dead, Evil Season 3, Hogan's Heroes Complete Series, Medieval, Smile, Players Season 1, Reacher Season 1, Secret Headquarters, South Park Post COVID, Star Trek Discovery Season 4 (Paramount); Bandit (Quiver); French Blood Mr. Frog (Rising Sun); Assassination Tango, The Bridge at Remagen, Comes a Horseman, Holiday Heart, The Hawaiians, The Hospital, Moll Flanders, Wild Bill (Sandpiper); The Good Book (Saturn's Core); Rickshaw Girl (Sleeperwave); Better Call Saul Complete Series, Breaking Bad Complete Series, Dream with the Fishes, Lyle Lyle Crocodile, Spider, The Woman King (Sony); The Invaders (1091); Santa Claws (Terror); Good Girls Complete Series, Halloween Ends, Tár, Ticket to Paradise (Universal); Jane by Charlotte (Utopia); Emily the Criminal (Vertical); The Last Slay Ride, The Salamander House, Screams from the Swamp, 13 Tracks to Frighten Agatha Black (Vipco); Attack of the 50 Ft. Woman, Doctor Who The Abominable Snowman, Doctor Who The Power of the Doctor, Father of the Bride, Game of Thrones House of the Dragon Season 1, Night of the Iguana (Warner); Alienoid, The Ambush, IP Man 3, The Loneliest Boy in the World (Well Go); Black Holler, Don't F\*\*\* in the Woods 2 (Wild Eye)

**NEW IN 4K:** The following titles were recently issued in 4K format—Amsterdam (Buena Vista); Black Christmas, Carrie, Coraline, ParaNorman, WarGames (Cinedigm); Nobody's Fool, The Taking of Pelham One Two Three (Kino); Highlander (Lionsgate); Pulp Fiction (Miramax); Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things, Silent Running (MVD); Another 48 Hrs., 48 Hrs., Reacher Season 1, Smile (Paramount); Adaptation, Lyle Lyle Crocodile, My Best Friend's Wedding, The Woman King (Sony); Halloween Ends, R.I.P.D., Tár (Universal); Game of Thrones House of the Dragon Season 1 (Warner); IP Man 3 (Well Go)

