

# THE DVD LASER DISC NEWSLETTER

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## Succession

The first season of the **Game of Thrones** prequel spinoff, **House of the Dragon** (Jan 23), ended with a rousing cliffhanger, with two factions, in contention over who should be their common ruler, at the brink of war. **House of the Dragon The Complete Second Season**, a 4K Blu-ray from HBO Home Box Office WB and Studio Distribution Services (UPC#883929831883, \$50), despite the cliffhanger, does not dive immediately into any sort of grand action sequence. There are plenty of special effects and modest action sequences in the first few episodes, but there is also a substantial amount of conversation—strategy meetings, treacherous plotting and so on. It is only in the fourth episode that the grand spectacle, which brings the show to par with every great motion picture, kicks in. It is well worth the wait.

We have made note in the past that series television can come a great deal closer to conveying the satisfactions of a novel than a feature film can. There is more time to develop characters, more time to explore their worlds and ways of life, and even more time to philosophize from their experiences. Not every series accomplishes this, but the best ones easily rival the greatest motion pictures in visceral entertainment, emotional enlightenment and spiritual satisfaction. That is what **Second Season** achieves or, rather, that is what it builds upon and advances from the first season. We readily admit that before beginning **Second Season** we re-watched the first season, and we are very glad we did. The show is not complicated, per se. In contrast to the original **Game of Thrones** series, the drama is confined to a single land, rather than multiple continents, and has just a handful of primary characters—each with a retinue of supporting characters, of course—rather than the two dozen or so that stretched through the eight seasons of the original series. But there are still complexities to those supporting characters, and having the specific details of their schemes, betrayals and experiences fresh in your head gives you a greater appreciation of their decisions, impulses and fates as the story advances. In comparison to the major motion picture spectacles of 2024, **Furiosa** and **Dune, Part Two**, the 2024 **House of the Dragon Second Season**, unconfined by the limits imposed upon feature films, is a greater work with greater rewards.

This is also, most emphatically, not a show to be watched one episode at a time with a damn week in between each episode. It just doesn't work that way. The show's medieval atmosphere, its smatterings of sex (much less than the original series, but there is a split-second hardcore shot—a prosthetic, but no matter—of fellatio in one part of the screen at one point, and other moments of nudity throughout) and unrestrained gore, and its dragons (unlike the original series, there are no outright supernatural components beyond a few prescient dreams), all supported by state-of-the-art special effects, create a cocoon for the viewer that befores the realities of everyday life. If you don't have the time to watch an entire season in a single day or a string of two or three evenings, you will lose the marvelous transportation that its atmosphere and fantasy achieve. Once it begins, the intrusions and necessities of life can wait.

After a lengthy half-season prelude depicting the younger selves of some of the characters, the first season became a drama over who would become the heir to an aging king. He chose his eldest daughter, played by Emma D'Arcy, and stood by that choice even after he remarried her best friend, played by Olivia Cooke, and sired sons with his new wife. When he passes away, Cooke's character claims the king told her that her son should be the heir. No one else heard this, however (and the reason for her declaration is eventually explained, with some wit, in **Second Season**), and the first season was left with Cooke's character and those who support her having control of capital city, while D'Arcy's character, who has control of most of the land's dragons, gathers her supporters in a far off castle. **Second Season** continues to follow both sides as they build up their numbers, organize their leadership and begin their campaigns of war. What the big spectacle battle sequences offer you is the excuse to sit and absorb everything else, knowing that there will be a payoff for your patience. In the meantime, the characters deepen. Within the drama there are a number moving scenes depicting characters who cope with parenting and illegitimacy. There are questions about the qualities needed for leadership, about the value of letting go, and about the nature of decision making. The wisdoms or discoveries the characters undergo enrich your

own appreciation of life, and the sheer storytelling on display enralls you. One incredibly spellbinding scene has just two characters who have never met before confronting one another on a beach, their dragons edgily standing behind them. It is the drama of each character learning the nature of the other, coupled with the jaw-dropping realism of the enormous dragons, that makes the scene so compelling. You just want to watch that one scene over and over, but the more the show moves forward, the more such scenes appear and the more greatness the program achieves.

Every scene, no matter how inconsequential, is beautifully composed and performed, and more often than not contains resonance all of its own. At one point, fairly late in the season, a minor character is briefly introduced, a teenager who has assumed the role as the leader of a group of clans after his grandfather passes away. The young actor playing the role is terrific, to be sure, but it is more than anything else the weight and breadth of the narrative itself that allows you to look into that character's eyes and not only see his actions and decisions in the moment, but his entire potential future as a good and brave hero and a leader of men, regardless of whether he appears again in the tale at hand or not. That is why the series is so exceptional. It doesn't just spin a tale for you, it puts your hand on the wheel of your imagination and lets loose.

It is a measure of our advance into the future that while the first season had both standard Blu-ray platters and 4K platters, **Second Season** has only the 4K platters (and does not see the need to preface the title with **Game of Thrones** on its spine as the first season did), with four platters presenting eight episodes for a total running time of 512 minutes. It is a measure of how far we still have to go that if playback is terminated during an episode, the ability of the platters to start up where they left off is erratic. It did work once in a while, but we could never figure out the pattern. Each platter has a 'Play All' option. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2:1. Befitting the setting, the image can sometimes feel soft and murky, particularly in dark and murky castles, but the picture quality is flawless and, subliminally, it enhances your emotional involvement with the characters and emotional participation in the battle scenes. There is at least one moment that will send you flying out of your seat in fright, and it would not be quite as effective if the picture were not so sharp. The Dolby Atmos sound has a wonderful, elaborately detailed directional mix. There may not be as much bass activity as there might be in a feature film, but when it shows up, it is worth the wait. Otherwise the audio provides a total envelopment of the show's world, with the steady presence of environmental sounds and some impressively sly directional effects. There are alternate French, Spanish, Italian, German and Czech audio tracks and fourteen subtitled tracks, including English. In the 22 minutes of satisfying promotional featurettes on the fourth platter there is an excellent and valuable piece that diagrams the family tree for the central characters. Spread across all four platters are a whopping 277 minutes of additional production featurettes. While they may spoil a bit of the show's magic, they are still fascinating ("We should be quite good at setting people on fire by now.") and quite entertaining ("We were concerned about how many times were we going to hit Olivia with fish. Even though it was a prop, it was still nasty.").

## 4K Funny Girl

We don't want to rain on The Criterion Collection's parade. Both platters of the 1968 Columbia Pictures production, William Wyler's **Funny Girl**, released on a two-platter 4K Blu-ray by Sony Pictures Home Entertainment and Criterion (UPC#715515305310, \$50), look fantastic. We actually prefer the 4K release, which has a smoother, more involving image and a reasonably decent color palette. The colors on the standard Blu-ray included in the set are brighter, and in some scenes they are more pleasing, but there is also more instability in their glow, making the 4K presentation feel more grounded and less distracting. On both, the 5-channel DTS sound provides a rudimentary, Sixties separation mix to the music, and not much else, but it is competently presented.

## Funny Girl (Continued)

The Sixties have a bad rep when it comes to musicals, because musicals for the most part represented the quintessence of Old Hollywood, and New Hollywood just cringed at the seemingly gargantuan nature of their indulgences. On the other hand, where Hollywood musicals in the past had been scrappy and inventive, they were also just movies, but in the late Fifties and then on into the Sixties, a number of Broadway hits were not just transposed to the screen, they were given a unique Roadshow treatment to underscore their source. In the hands of the best directors, like Robert Wise, George Cukor and others, the artificiality of the stage was expanded with the boundless artistry that films were free to incorporate. Wyler was one such director who was uniquely positioned to take a fairly eccentric property—a brilliant young Jewish singer in a hit musical show based upon the life of an earlier Jewish stage entertainer—and turn it into a universally appealing tale about a working class girl who uses humor as a defensive weapon so well that, combined with her exceptional singing voice, not only makes her a star, but attracts the affections of a dreamboat guy.

Wyler begins the film with Barbra Streisand's character standing outdoors in front of a theater where her character's name is already in lights as a headliner. It is hard to tell if it is an actual theater marquee, but it does look like one, as opposed to a studio set. She goes into the theater wistfully—she's early for her call—and settles into an orchestra seat looking up at the stage as her mind drifts back to her beginnings. From that point forward, outdoors and indoors, the film is takes place on studio or studio lot sets. Her character meets the dreamboat, played by Omar Sharif, and the two have some conversations that establish an attraction, but nothing more. Then Sharif's character goes off to do his business—he's a playboy and a gambler—and Streisand's character advances from an initial smash success at the Ziegfeld Follies to becoming the Follies' primary attraction. The show goes on tour and the next scene is set in a train station, although this time, rather than being a studio set, it's a real train station (Hoboken, standing in for Baltimore). Not only does Sharif's character show up, but they soon consummate their relationship, her character apparently doing so for the first time. Suddenly, mixed with the studio sets, the two are in real locations, and when Sharif's character leaves and she belatedly decides to follow him for the memorable number that precedes the film's Intermission, not only is she is running down real streets, but there are helicopter shots of her on a train and then, most memorably of all, a tugboat (somehow her lips are moving in perfect synchronization with the song the entire time). It is a subtle, even subliminal representation of her character achieving womanhood (the Statue of Liberty also graces that tugboat shot). Under Wyler's brilliant conceptualization (with Herbert Ross overseeing the physical movements of the song numbers), with Streisand's unstoppable voice (it is melodic, most definitely, but it is also uniquely forceful and, for the film's songs, meticulously articulated), the film was an enormous hit, one of the last of its kind, but one of the most deserving. And since 4K does subliminal better than any other home video medium, the film's appeal has not aged a day.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. In addition to the Entr'acte, the 155-minute film has an Overture and, with the credits displayed for the film's 2013 restoration, Exit Music. There are optional English subtitles. The standard Blu-ray also has a number of special features (which do not start up where they left off if playback is terminated, although the movie itself does), including a rewarding 3-minute deleted scene that was too redundant to spare between musical numbers but still adds some details to the relationship arc between the two leads; a lovely 18-minute interview with Sharif from 2003, who talks about his career but also speaks extensively about Wyler and about his role (he initially intended to play him as the ethnic character his part was based upon, but Wyler insisted that he be an exotic figure instead, which most certainly did not harm his career, even if the critics were a little miffed); a very nice 27-minute interview with Wyler's son, David, sharing his memories about the shoot (he was a teenager at the time) and of his father; 25 minutes of terrific promotional featurettes containing all sorts of great behind-the-scenes footage (including a wonderful piece filled with Streisand costume tests); an excellent 1986 profile of Wyler (with restored film clips from 2022) that includes an extensive interview with Wyler himself just a few days before he passed away, as well as interviews with more than a dozen luminaries, from Bette Davis to Streisand, as it steps its way through his life and career; and a terrific 2024 audio-only interview with Streisand running 40 minutes about the film and working with Wyler.

## 4K by Northwest

A film composed by a master filmmaker holds a special treat for 4K Blu-rays, because such films are usually constructed on a subliminal level. The filmmaker knows, instinctively, exactly what camera angles, what cuts and what performances are best for how the film will play to audiences, which is an unusual skill given that audiences will be seeing the film for the first time while the filmmaker must watch the movie scores of times in the course of putting it together. One such master was Alfred Hitchcock, who ushered in the Sixties with a film energized by his experience making television, *Psycho*, using faster edits, quick set-ups and loose, almost organic acting, a style that would soon become the norm across Hollywood. But before he made *Psycho*, he staged what he considered at the time to be the crowning achievement of his motion picture career, *North by Northwest*, a grand amalgam of his nearly trademark suspense tropes, produced at history's greatest film studio, MGM, and he filmed it in the fabulous quasi-widescreen format that enabled an incredible depth of field across the screen's focal plane, VistaVision. He also cast one of Hollywood's greatest movie stars, Cary Grant, whose fame had exceeded the concept of his embodying a character in the eyes of audiences—they go along with it, willingly, and his timing was always so impeccable (as were his looks)—so that while they fully accepted each character he played, they still saw him as Cary Grant facing this or that dilemma, and romancing this or that young lady.

The 1958 film, which has now been released as a *4K UltraHD* title by WB and SDS Studio Distribution Services (UPC#883929820863, \$34), is very much a pre-Sixties film, with a slower relative pace than what audiences would soon be exposed to, and a pace that can feel especially slow to the TikTok viewers who even find MTV to be lethargic. But, on the other hand, the film is designed to be seen for the first time. Repeat

viewers, those who wonder how Grant's character got the address for the house that James Mason's character owns in Rapid City so he can take a cab directly there after escaping from the hospital, are on their own. The film runs 136 minutes as Grant's character journeys north and west across half of America. If you watch the film through the perspective of Grant's character, as he is shanghaied through a case of mistaken identity, framed for a murder, and stows away on a train while on the run from the police, only to meet and fall in love with an especially attractive and unusually available—even if you look like Cary Grant—blonde train passenger played by Eva Marie Saint, you take each sequence as it comes, with intrigue, excitement and bedazzlement at each new situation or challenge. Hence, with Hitchcock's precision in every scene, supported by the clarity of detail provided by VistaVision (the 'modernist' set designs, sometimes set against older Beaux-Arts designs, are especially delightful in our post-modernist world), and then preserved with a nearly film-like quality through the 4K presentation, whatever trappings of cinematic style age has imposed upon the play of the film are negated by the perfection of its display and Hitchcock's uncanny and enduring acumen of knowing what will excite and please a viewer.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. Along with the consistently crisp and accurate image, the sound has been preserved with its original mix, but has also been embellished with a fantastic Dolby Atmos track that does just not dimensionalize Bernard Herrmann's wonderful musical score, but accentuates every detail during every moment of its presence, fully contributing, along with the image, to the manipulation of a viewer's emotions from one breath to the next. The Blu-ray we reviewed in Jan 10 looked and sounded terrific, but the 4K BD improves every aspect of the entertainment experience even more. There are alternate French, Spanish, Italian and German audio tracks, and ten subtitling options, including English. The isolated musical score featured on the standard BD has not been carried over, but other special features have, including a commentary track from screenwriter Ernest Lehman, a good 39-minute retrospective documentary, a 26-minute appreciation of the film, a 58-minute piece on Hitchcock's cinema based upon the films that Warner controls, and a 3-minute promotional trailer featuring Hitchcock. Also featured is a good 23-minute piece that specifically examines the film's music, cinematography and editing, and deconstructs three key scenes from the film.

## Traveling back in time with 4K

The tacky Eighties coalesce through one of the greatest motion picture screenplays ever written in James Cameron's groundbreaking 1984 Orion Pictures production, *The Terminator*, which has been given such a definitive *4K UltraHD* rendering by MGM and SDS Studio Distribution Services (UPC#883929823550, \$34) that it brings the past to life. The image is compellingly smooth and even silky at times, an ideal counterpoint to the vivid grime and grit of Los Angeles where much of the action is set. The 4K presentation is so good that it accentuates not only the film's greatness, but its shortcomings, not that they matter. Seen with such clarity and sharpness, it is jarring to behold Linda Hamilton's awful hairdo and wardrobe, and it also makes you realize that her performance really isn't all that good, either, although it is decent enough that she sells the film's critical romantic component, the element that sets it apart from all of the other exploitative action features of its day, if ever. Cameron's script is truly brilliant, not only revealing the romance in the final act, but constantly dropping exposition in the middle of action sequences, and the 4K mastering picks everything up and runs with it. There is an option to resurrect the film's original audio track, but another option provides a fresh Dolby Atmos mix. Along with the gun blasts, squealing tire and sirens, it still has the same, terrible 'techno' musical score, but like the image, it is beautifully delivered, with one smooth punch after another. The presentation is so fantastic, in fact, that it will be the way to watch the movie a couple of years hence, when, according to the 2029 date given for the film's inexpensive but prescient images of the future (hey, there's a battle drone just exactly like the ones being used in Ukraine...), you will be able to leap into the past to 1984, just like Michael Biehn and Arnold Schwarzenegger's characters, for 107 minutes of complete immersion, and you won't have to remove your clothing, if you don't want to.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. There is an audio track that describes the action ("He leaves, while the officer at his desk returns to his paperwork. The officer stares in shock as a car crashes through the front wall and the enclosure, crushing him against the back wall of his office. Sarah wakes with a start. The Terminator gets out of the car and brushes past the red partitions. He shoots officers on sight. The Terminator wields the shotgun in one hand and the assault rifle in the other. Sarah cringes."); alternate French, Spanish, Italian, German and Czech audio tracks; thirteen subtitling options including English; a 10-minute appreciation of the film; an interesting 2005 12-minute piece about the film's technological speculations; and a good 13-minute segment on creating the film's special effects and digital music. Finally, a fascinating 10-minute collection of deleted scenes have been included, which feature, among other things, the wonderful revelation that a chip from the skull of Schwarzenegger's character has been pocketed by an engineer at the evil company that goes on to create the A.I. mess that caused everything. The scenes are great, but also demonstrate how smart and sensible the film's outstanding editing is (the chip scene would have given the movie one too many final beats). Cameron speaks on an alternate track over the deleted scenes, talking about what they were meant to accomplish and why they were removed.

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### Return to the wacky land of no return

Tim Burton's enormously fun 2024 resurrection of the afterlife, **Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice**, has been released as a 4K UltraHD Blu-ray by WB and SDS Studio Distribution Services (UPC#883929817870, \$35). Catherine O'Hara and Winona Ryder return from the original 1988 feature (Aug 97) as mother and daughter, with Jenny Ortega (from Burton's *Wednesday* TV series) in a lovely turn as the teenaged daughter of Ryder's character. Michael Keaton also returns as the mischievous demon from a carnival-like purgatory, although his role is smaller than in the first film since he no longer needs to be introduced, and only has more than a teasing presence until the final act. The three women come back to the New England house where everything began in the first film for a funeral, and Ortega's character, seemingly the only sane one of the trio, meets a local boy who understands her frustrations with her crazy family. Interspersed with the activities in the normal world are the inventive absurdities and wildly amusing antics occurring in the beyond, which has portals to the normal world all over the place, at least when Ryder's character, who has retained the connections established in the first film, is around. Like **Deadpool & Wolverine** (see below), the 105-minute film thrives on its lightning pace, unrestrained performances, uninhibited special effects, abundantly comical gore and an overflowing cornucopia of cultural references and lampoons. Unlike the **Deadpool & Wolverine** film, it also manages to use the romance and the mother and daughter relationships as a valid emotional anchor in counterpoint to the craziness, making the film as sweet as it is wacky.

And in 4K format, every gag, every surprise and every nuance, sane and insane, is delivered to the viewer with a precision that disarms even the most resistant cynic. The colors (and the wonderful black-and-white sequences, including a spot-on parody of an Italian horror film) are crisply detailed. Regardless of how breathlessly images pass across the screen or slip in and out on the side, some part of your brain catches each and every one. The image is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The Dolby Atmos sound has a busy and highly enjoyable surround presence, and is particularly effective at accentuating Danny Elfman's re-explored musical score. There is an audio track that describes the action in American ("A train pulls in alongside those on the platform, many in colorful Seventies era clothes and some sporting large Afros. The two Cossack guards, frosted with snow, force Astrid to an upper area as people below on the platform dance."), another that describes it in British ("A train with brightly flashing lights and sparking wheels arrives, and two jets of steam shoot up from its front grill. As Astrid is dragged into the station, everyone else is dancing on the platform."), alternate French, Spanish and Italian audio tracks and optional English, French, Spanish, Italian, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish and Finnish subtitles. Additionally, 79 minutes of wonderful promotional and production featurettes have been included that are nearly as much fun as the film itself. The depiction, for example, of Ortega and O'Hara playing with improvisations for a dance they do near the end conveys quite readily how the film must have been just as joyful to make as it is to watch.

Burton provides a pleasant commentary. Although there are gaps during the second half, his talk is lovely and informative, and well worth listening to, even though he speaks in a very conversational stream-of-consciousness manner, rarely completing a conceptual statement before jumping to where his brain takes him next. We have done our best to transcribe a case in point: "The only reason I wanted to make this **Beetlejuice** is because it felt personal. Working again with Michael and Catherine and Winona, I was shocked at how I felt on the set when I saw all of them together, you know, it was like quite emotional, it was like a weird family reunion. And I was surprised by those feelings. And I was surprised at how much fun—I mean I don't usually say I have fun on a movie, and it's not, movies aren't fun, but the energy, and again, I think, and I didn't really realize this until after we shot, that we even shot the movie in the same amount of days almost as the first one, so it's not something I really planned specifically that way. It just sort of ended up being that way, and I think the energy it created on the set with everybody contributing and everybody feeling like, you know. And seeing everything there on the set, you know, it's like we don't have a lot of blue screen where you kind of try to imagine what's there. And we can sort of see what was there, and so, it does give the whole project a, in terms of making it, a special energy, which, like I said, it doesn't, you kind of lose that, in certain big films, you kind of lose that when you get, you know, really into the whole sort of Hollywood big franchise, reboot, tentpole, whatever you want to call that stuff. Rehab, reboot, but whatever. Those are just all the feelings that I had in terms of wanting to make the film. Not recreate a specific thing, but just recreate a feeling that kind of brings you back to why you like making things, and why you like making movies."

### Ribald superheroes

The ribald meta superhero comedy blockbuster hit, **Deadpool & Wolverine**, is available on DVD from Walt Disney's Marvel Studios and 20th Century Studios (UPC#043396638693, \$35). It is a sequel not only to the two previous **Deadpool** movies (Jun 16, Oct 18) but to the 2017 *Logan*, a superhero drama so dreary we did not have the heart to review it on home video. Ryan Reynolds and Hugh Jackman star as the title characters in a story that not only lampoons the concept of multiple universes—made popular not only in other Marvel films and the Oscar-winning **Everything Everywhere All at Once**, but, as Reynolds's character so deftly points out, **The Wizard of Oz**—but constantly steps out of itself to thumb its nose at Marvel and Disney. Despite being jam-packed with in-jokes, Shakespearean anatomical insults and frantic displays of action and gore, audiences ate it up, and well they should, since the movie is funny as all get out. Set partially on the imaginatively designed landscape of a wasteland outside of the universes, filled with discarded relics from the eons, the two characters team up to find their way back to a control station, where a nebbish human villain, wonderfully embodied by **Succession**'s Matthew Macfadyen, is trying to destroy every universe there is. Running 128 minutes, the film has ample special effects, ample carnage, ample wisecracks, ample witty confrontations with other heroes and villains, ample cameo appearance by other movie stars and Marvel characters, and a plot just logical enough to follow that holds it all together. Directed by Shawn Levy, it is difficult to speculate how many times the creators could get away with something like this, but its success is fully deserved. There is even an adorably grotesque dog.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The color transfer is bright and crisp, and the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has an energetic mix that delivers its punches. There is an alternate audio track that describes the action ("From the portal, a shapely leg emerges. The view travels up the curvy figure clad in a Deadpool suit, with a long, blonde ponytail hanging past one of her shoulders. A floating skull wearing a propeller helmet and a torn Deadpool mask flies out after her."), alternate French and Spanish audio tracks and optional English, French and Spanish subtitles.

### Let your fingers do the walking

The outstanding squared full screen black-and-white image transfer on the *Warner WB Archive Collection* Blu-ray does nothing to dissuade a viewer from believing in the special effects that animate Robert Florey's magnificent 1947 tale of horror, madness and murder, **The Beast with Five Fingers** (UPC#840418316962, \$22). Even though the image is very sharp and very clear, it just makes the effects look even better, never revealing the wires or black cloths or matte lines or whatever it was that the filmmakers used to make it look like a disconnected hand is playing a piano, choking victims or otherwise causing fear and mayhem. What may be even more surprising than how well the film looks and plays is that the story is a great deal more sophisticated and complex than its later imitators. J. Carrol Naish is a former pianist confined to a wheelchair by paralysis on one side of his body, who has mastered an orchestration of a piece by J.S. Bach that only requires one hand. He dies in an accident, however, and when his heirs and the local police (the film is set in Italy at the end of the Nineteenth Century) begin investigating the same music apparently coming from the piano late at night, they open his coffin and discover that the good hand has been severed from the corpse. Robert Alda and Andrea King star, with Peter Lorre, who never received an Oscar nomination in his career but fully deserves one for the wonderful performance he delivers as the pianist's secretary. Running 89 minutes, the film is both a whodunit and a giddy fright fest, but most importantly, and thanks to the BD presentation, it has not aged a day, either physically or intellectually. It definitely deserves a big hand.

The source material does have a couple of hidden splices, but that is its only drawback, and the monophonic sound is in fairly good condition, with minimal distortion. There are optional English subtitles, a wonderfully funky trailer, an 8-minute 1946 *Merrie Melodies* cartoon entitled *The Foxy Duckling* about a fox trying to nab a wily duckling in what feels like a failed attempt to start another franchise, a 6-minute 1946 *Merrie Melodies* cartoon entitled *The Gay Anties* with elaborate picnic pest gags at the Turn of the Century (with a secondary string of jokes built around the idea that the ants are black and ending with an attempt to get a watermelon into their hole), and a very good commentary track for the movie featuring film historians Steve Haberman and Constantine Nasr, going over the history of the film's production and how Warner's horror film efforts were being wrapped up at the time, identifying the different tech that was used for the hand, going over a thorough history of the story source and subsequent errant 'hand' films, and providing detailed backgrounds of the cast and the crew, and in particular, of Lorre and the under-regarded Florey.

### Have a Blue Christmas!

We hate to spoil it, but it happens in the first few minutes anyway and it is just the very beginning of the film's inspirations when you hear that the name of the grumpy detective's dead partner, at the start of the VCI Entertainment MVDvisual Blu-ray, **Blue Christmas** (UPC#089859911422, \$30), is 'Jake Marley.' It is 1942, and Marley was killed a year ago, of course, on Christmas Day. What happens when you take **A Christmas Carol** and cross it with **The Maltese Falcon**? Well, with a good-sized cast and the creative inspiration already in place, you get the most perfect community theater property to show up this side of **Mamma Mia!** That is how the very low budget film plays, but its imagination and wit are so compelling, and the Dickensian emotional hooks are so effectively preserved, that it can do no wrong. Written and directed by Max Allan Collins, Rob Merritt stars as a 4F detective who is running a reasonably successful detective agency in Chicago, even though he's chintzy with his staff and blows off requests for charity. He falls asleep at his desk that night, and the visitors start coming, the first of which is his former partner, who needs him to find the killer. Everything else in the 79-minute feature is such a joy to discover, we will leave it to you with glad tidings.

The entire film was shot on a single set, mostly as the detective's office, but redressed slightly for a few flashback scenes and the like. The one quibble we would have is that the film, shot on HD, is presented in widescreen format with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. It is very clear in scene after scene that there is not enough decoration to support the framing and that blocking the movie in a squared, full screen image would not only have given it greater production value, but would have better captured the Forties tone the film otherwise so lovingly conveys. Nevertheless, the colors are bright and sharp, and the endless string of instrumental Christmas tunes playing on the soundtrack are well served by the modest dimensionality of the stereo sound. There are optional English subtitles, a trailer, an excellent 26-minute profile of the Iowa-based Collins that barely mentions his work as a film director as it focuses on his prolific writing career (nothing like the Iowa cost of living when you're trying to get by as a writer...), and an extensive 102-minute collection of post-screening interviews with almost the full cast and crew at different locations, as they all share their eagerness for the project and the enjoyment they had putting it together. Although she only appears in one of the Q&A's, it is worth noting that regional actress Alisabeth Von Presley is as captivating in person as she is in the memorable part she plays in the film as the specific and inspired ghost of Christmas Past. Scot Gehret, as another inspired ghost of Christmas Future, also has several crowd pleasing moments in the interviews.

Collins and producer Chad Bishop provide a decent commentary track, talking about each cast member (including how they were chosen, their working methods, their personalities and many other details), the technical choices, the adjustments when they decided to do the whole thing in one location (they shot it at a college theater in Iowa in 6 days), how the story was gestated, its previous iterations, and what their own working relationship was like.

## Get out your popcorn, Shawscope returns

Not just a great martial arts feature, but a great motion picture, Cheh Chang's 1967 *The One-Armed Swordsman* leads off as the sole title on the first platter of the fourteen-film, ten-platter Blu-ray set from Celestial Pictures and Arrow Video, Shawscope Volume Three (UPC#760137161844, \$200). Don't be fooled by the film's gimmicky title. Yes, the fight scenes are exhilarating and expertly staged, but the 116-minute production is a genuine melodrama, with widescreen cinematography that is not only drop-dead gorgeous, but superbly composed, so that the dynamics of the rectangular image constantly add to the narrative and its emotional depth. Jimmy Wang Yu, who reminds one of Steve McQueen at times (with a touch of Brad Pitt), stars as the title character, who has to redevelop his fighting skills after he loses his arm in a situation that is too exquisite to be spoiled. That part of the plot is the standard template—he goes off, re-trains and then saves the day when the villains gather to destroy his former master. Woven into that plot, however, is a wonderful triangular romance, between him, his master's martial arts savvy daughter, and the innocent farm girl played by Lisa Chiao Chiao, who rescues him when he is left for dead (and just happens to have a kung fu manual in her closet that is specifically about using an unfavored arm). With a lovely orchestral musical score by Fu-Ling Wang, crisply delivered dialog and sound effects on the monophonic audio track, and an image transfer that is as meticulous as it is spotless, you really feel like you are watching the film in a theater regardless of the size of the screen you are using. It is the film itself which has that old fashioned grandeur, covering all of its bases by giving out equal amounts of romance and action (and it is not exactly bloody, although there is a lot of red paint getting splattered about). You couldn't ask for a better way to dive into the collection.

And the collection is well worth diving into, head first. We reviewed the first massive Shawscope collection, which celebrated the Shaw Bros. Studios kung fu and gangster features, in Jan 22, and the equally large second collection, which was somewhat more eclectic in its genre selections, in Jan 23. Both collections were highly rewarding and entertaining, to be sure, but Volume Three, which focuses on the Shaw Bros. swordfighting films from mostly the Seventies, set in pre-technological eras, is the best curated of the three. Not only do the films explore the terrific range of possibility within the swordfighting genre, known as 'wuxia,' but they are arranged to play off of one another so that the entire collection, if watched sequentially, is a specific and highly satisfying entertainment experience. Additionally, each platter is designed as a fully satisfying single or double bill, that latter always pairing two films that deftly play off of one another. Among the collection's many charms, the viewer will also come to recognize several of the standing Shaw Bros. outdoor sets that get used again and again, as well as a number of the props—perhaps most notably a staff with a dragon's head, which seems to be in almost every movie, to the point where one starts watching for its Easter Egg appearances, like the bottles of J&B Scotch in giallo films.

The films are presented on eight platters. The ninth platter contains special features related to several of the films, and so its material is identified and covered in the reviews of those specific films. As indicated by the collection's title, all of the films are letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. All are monophonic, with an original Mandarin soundtrack (although the sound is almost always recorded later) and optional English subtitles. Most have an additional English track, except where noted. While the English tracks may be convenient, especially since (although there is plenty of gore and a decent smattering of nudity throughout the collection) you'll probably want to share most of the films with youngsters, the dubbing remains emotionally distancing in a way that the Chinese dialog does not.

All of the films have commentaries (one of them has two commentaries and another has three) and all of them have trailers. Only a few, however, have additional special features. Along with two trailers and a 23-minute collection of trailers for other Chang films, *One-Armed Swordsman* comes with an excellent 38-minute rumination upon the film and its two sequels by Asian movie expert Tony Rayns, who also uses the three films as a guide to the maturation of fight scenes were undergoing in Hong Kong at the time; a thoughtful 22-minute appreciation of Chang, his films ("His early films was a transition from a middle class sensibility to a working class sensibility. This kind of sensibility also coincides with a transition from a female sensibility to a male sensibility."), his coded and sublimated sexual messaging, and his visceral action scenes; a good 11-minute analysis of Chang's visual approaches; a terrific 41-minute interview with Yu from 2022 talking about his career and experiences; a cute 10-minute piece on Yu playing handicapped heroes in a number of films; and a really nice 2005 interview with Chiao running 17 minutes, about the films and her career.

Film historian David West supplies a reasonably decent commentary track, going over the careers of the cast and Chang, but always in the context of the film and its breakout success. He also comments upon scenes in the film as they relate to its production—Chang employs a handheld camera for one sequence—or otherwise have a general impact upon the shifts in the genre. "What follows here is a great sequence that demonstrates that whilst the swordsman may represent the ideals of chivalry, of serving the greater good, of righteousness, honesty, integrity, that doesn't preclude him from a little arrogance, a little satisfaction in his own abilities, because in this sequence we get to see [Yu's character] enjoying humiliating these men before he slaughters them."

The second platter contains the two follow-up films, both directed by Chang. The first is an immediate sequel, *The Return of the One-Armed Swordsman*, from 1969. By any measure, it is a terrific action film and a great deal of fun. It does not have the classicism that sets the first film apart, and interestingly, while the picture transfer looks spotless and immaculate, it, too, does not have the same gripping artistic presence that the first film conveys. Yu's character, true to his word, is working as a farmer and staying away from politics, but an evil warlord has assembled a gaggle of other evil villains, each with a

unique set of weapons and fighting skills, and demands fealty from every other group in the land. The leaders come to Yu's character and beg him to help them, but he refuses until he can't refuse any more. Then it is a series of systematic confrontations up the organization ladder, with more red paint being splattered all over the place, more actual gore as swords and other sharp objects pierce people every which way, and a steady stream of interesting fights for the film's 110 minutes. The movie is staged specifically to keep viewers interested, changing locations from the woods to inns to the castle that the villains are operating out of, changing the nature of the fights (sometimes, it is the young sons of the leaders who do the fighting, instead of the hero, who is organizing their fight strategies), and Chiao's character tags along, to give lip service to the romance (there is also a wonderful female villain, who is nasty as all get out). In short, it is everything you could want from a sequel to the first film, except for the artistic considerations that made the first film so exceptional.

The monophonic sound is solid. The composer grabs just one instrumental line from John Barry's music in *Thunderball*, using only enough of it that he won't get caught. Along with two trailers, there is a comprehensive commentary track by genre film expert Samm Deighan, who goes into the careers of the cast members and Chang in great detail ("One of the things I really do love about a lot of these movies is you have a lot of female action stars. Something that I think is one of many ways in which Hong Kong cinema was really ahead of Hollywood is the fact that women are allowed to take on these more action-centric roles. They're of course also allowed to be really formidable villains. You also have plenty of female heroes."), places the film in the context of the genre, discusses the virtual subgenre of Asian one-armed hero films, points out the dynamics of the specific fight scenes and explains that it is because the fight scenes are so elaborate and varied, and are presented with such a grand theatricality, that this is her favorite film in the series.

The second film on the platter is a reworking of the first film, *The New One-Armed Swordsman*. Chiao returns in the 1971 feature, but in a different role, as the daughter of a village blacksmith. David Chiang is an accomplished swordsman who is hornsogged into cutting off his arm by the villain. He goes into retirement, but never really loses his skills as he works as a waiter in a restaurant in the same village where Chiao's character lives. The villain continues to grow his power and set his sights on eliminating other competent swordsmen, and eventually enough bad things happen that Chiang's character is forced out of his funk and grabs a sword again. It is, like *Return*, primarily an action movie. The scenes with Chiao are refreshing, but they are not part of the core entertainment as they were in the first feature. But the fight scenes are best of all. Gory as all get out (a sympathetic character gets cut in half by the villain), the inventive choreography is not just superbly staged, it is also shot with great clarity and precision, so that each fight is wholly engrossing and exciting from beginning to end. While Chiang is not as charismatic as Yu, his performance is good enough to carry the drama and his acrobatic skills are admirable—he does not embarrass himself with exaggerated expressions when the slow motion kicks in. Running 103 minutes, the story works well enough and the fight scenes are exhilarating.

As is the color transfer. In all of the movies, the scenes shot on a soundstage look fantastic. In *Return*, the scenes shot on location have nothing wrong with them, but still come off as a bit cluttered. In *New*, the outdoor sequences are continually crisp and effectively detailed, making the entire presentation feel fresh and pristine. The first film still has a magical purity that the others cannot equal, but the image on *New* is flawless nevertheless. The monophonic sound is also strong and clean, and this time the composer lifts a specific melody line from *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*.

Along with four trailers and two TV commercials, there is a commentary track from Shaw Bros. historian Brian Bankston, who focuses on history of Shaw Bros. and of the series, including the litigation that followed Chiang with *Zatoichi Meets the One-Armed Swordsman* (Nov 13), but he also pays attention to the movie and talks about its specific production challenges ("I'm not exactly sure when they changed their system for rain sequences, but in this time period, it was like these gigantic sprinkler things. They would use levers to turn them up and the water would just come out of these sprinklers. It was later on, the mid-Seventies, that they had an actual pressurized rainmaking system."), Chang's artistry, and the film's general appeal.

In the special features on the first platter, Feng Ku, who plays the villain in *New*, provides a 19-minute reminiscence from 2004. He talks about the films, shooting the fight scenes, his costars and Chang.

The next platter highlights two films celebrating female fighters. Pei Pei Cheng stars in the 1971 *The Lady Hermit*, directed by Meng Hua Ho, playing a fighter who has gone undercover as a cook, after losing a fight to a nasty martial arts master, until her wounds can heal. Two younger acolytes figure out who she is and become her loyal followers, their skills improving under her tutelage. When the villains finally learn of her whereabouts, the three must go on the run until they are ready to take on the main bad guy. While the film also has a strong melodramatic component—there is essentially a love triangle between the three protagonists—Ho's direction is not as accomplished as Chang's. For one thing, the costumes are not sufficiently differentiated to enable one to follow the heroes through a high population fight. For another, the narrative is a little fragmented, going off into tangents so that fights can be staged, even though the narrative logic of such digressions makes little sense. Nevertheless, running 103 minutes, the film is a good deal of fun, with many terrific action sequences, including a harrowing sequence on a rope bridge. The fight scenes have energy and a decent amount of blood, while the romantic subplot is highly engaging.

The film looks absolutely gorgeous, especially one sequence set in a tavern that opens with a musical number and girls dancing amid flowers. It's kind of a shame they have to get that red paint splattered over all of it. One of the outdoor sets—a canal in the middle of a village—was also used at the end of *One-Armed Swordsman Returns*, underscoring the film's Shaw Bros. universe. Although a couple of passages verge on Barry again, the musical score overall is quite good, with a strong classical Chinese orchestration that underscores the film's emotional component all the more. Along with two trailers, Asian cinema expert James Mudge provides a decent commentary track, going over the backgrounds of the cast and crew and providing a rewarding dissection and appreciation of the individual scenes as the film progresses. "Chang's excellent in the film. I know she is still young herself, which it's always surprising when I look that up [she was 24]. She really manages to give the impression of being this older, injured, almost sort of world-weary sword master, and she's very convincing in the way she moves, kind of between being stoic and very shifu-like and showing moments of vulnerability and brief glimpses of hope and happiness."

The second film on the platter is truly amazing, particularly for 1972. Yuen Chor's *Intimate Confessions of a Courtesan* has sex and nudity, females smooching other females, and all sorts of things one doesn't normally come across in classic Chinese action features. Shot entirely on soundstages, the film has elegant production designs and heavenly costumes, all of which look fantastic on the gorgeous picture transfer. Running 91 minutes, Lily Ho is a virgin who has been abducted to work in a brothel and subsequently plots revenge against those who have sullied her. She takes her sweet time about doing it, but when she begins, a young police inspector—or whatever they called them back then—tries to stop her from carrying out her plans. The drama is totally valid, and the performances are good fun. There are plenty of fights and lots of blood, but they share equal time with erotic activities, and for western audiences, if not for even Hong Kong audiences, the entire endeavor is an exotic thrill.

The color transfer looks fine, without blemishes or compromises. Along with two trailers and a 2-minute English language opening title sequence that lets you see a bit more of what is going on underneath the lettering, there are two commentary tracks.

One features Rayns, whose talk is both erudite and witty. He shares informed backgrounds about the cast and the crew, as well as the history of the production, and he points out the specifics of Chor's artistry. He approaches the sex scenes with a wonderful dryness that fully reflects his refined British sense of humor while also plunging knowledgeably into the film's Asian antecedents and its similarities to European drama, such as the works of Jean Genet and Josef Von Sternberg. "Rather like Von Sternberg, I don't think that Chor's images have particularly concrete, semiotically readable meanings. There are no strong 'signifieds' in the film, or most of the film. But the film language that he's using, particularly these lateral tracking shots, you know, the gliding camera moving from one part of the set to another, whether or not it's following people or discovering people in a different part of the set, all of those devices contribute to a particular ambiance and a particular rhythm in the film, and that is what I think has the meaning. It would be very hard to define what that meaning is, precisely, because I don't think it has a precise meaning. It's just what the film 'is,' what makes up the film, defines the film's identity, its particular tonality, its particular rhythm, its particular sense of cinema."

On the second track, Deighan speaks specifically about the rise of sexuality in Hong Kong films, and how the film's creators were emboldened to further explorations by its success. She also talks about the revenge narrative and how such a story concept can fog the divisions between good and bad, and she has plenty to say about the performers. Describing the riveting screen presence of the brothel's madam, played by Betty Pei Ti, she explains, "This is really a role that requires a lot of courage, in a sense, because of how openly lesbian she is, and the fact that she has such charisma, such presence, such beauty, such strong martial arts [skills], she is one of the strongest characters in this type of film. She's absolutely amazing in it, but I think what continues to be so astounding about this film is the way that her queerness is treated at face value, with a lot of sensitivity and a lot of respect."

Chor directed six of the films collected in **Shawscope Volume Three**, which are among the best made and most entertaining features in the set, and on the ninth platter, there is a terrific 39-minute overview of Chor's career by Rayns that includes lots of clips and stills from his other movies, as well as a fascinating analysis of his diverse artistry. Additionally, the ninth platter contains a nice 5-minute interview with stuntwoman Sharon Yeung about working on *Courtesan* and an 18-minute analysis of the film's artistic breakthroughs.

The fourth platter contains a single film, a wonderful Saturday afternoon historical battle movie from 1972 running 130 minutes, *The 14 Amazons*, directed by Kang Cheng (with Shao-Yung Tung). When a general is killed and his army is defeated, his wife, his elderly mother (who leads the group), daughters and their female companions organize an attack force with the goal of stopping the enemy invaders before they conquer the rest of the land. Since they are a smaller group, they have to sneak around and come at the bad guys from behind, climbing cliffs, forging abysses (with a human pyramid!) and otherwise traversing difficult landscapes to sustain the element of surprise. The battle scenes are wonderful and there is plenty of gore. Sure, once in a while, a shot is out of focus, the editing gets confusing while it rushes ahead with the story and there are other imperfections, but overall you can sit back with the film and have a great time savoring the fights, the spectacle and the ultimate triumph of good over evil (not to mention, although

they do get help, good hearted women over nasty men...). The all-star cast includes Pei Ti, Ho, Lisa Lu, Yanyan Chen, Ching Li, Ping Ha, Chin-Feng Wei, Paul Chun, Tsung Hua and others stars. In her wonderful interview on the *One-Armed Swordsman* platter, Chiao says that she was thankful for being pregnant and unable to be a part of *14 Amazons* because there was a lot of behind-the-scenes cat fighting among the stars over screen time, blocking and so on.

As we said, here and there, the cinematography has its flaws, but for the most part, the picture quality looks terrific. There are a number of wonderful miniatures, and other attempts at matte shots and special effects that are marvelous simply because they were attempted. The same is true of the sound. The large orchestra performing the musical score was recorded with limitations which may make purists cringe, but there are some terrific sound effects and the music's simpler passages are reasonably strong. Along with three trailers, the *14 Amazons* platter comes with a decent 11-minute introduction to the film; a 16-minute assessment of the film's artistry; and a great 13-minute interview with the stuntwoman, Yeung, about her career and her experiences on the film.

China historian Jonathan Clements supplies a fairly good commentary track, discussing not just the historical situation the film is depicting, but the many different literary and stage adaptations of the tale and how they have progressed in time. He also goes over the long history of the motion picture adaptations, and he points out instances within the film that are drawing on Chinese Opera and other dramatic sources, while also getting into the nitty gritty of the filmmaking itself, including everything from the types of spears being used to the all-star casting. He is also as baffled as everyone else over some of the casting choices, such as the role of a prince that is played by an actress. "He's a man played by a woman, wearing a man's headdress in feminine gold. No idea what is going on there. Shaw Bros. were insisting on using all of their starlets, but also there is a lot of crossdressing in the Opera tradition, and I think they were tipping their hat to that there, as well. Classically, this film isn't called *14 Amazons*. It's called 'The Female Generals of the Yang Family,' or 'Leading the Army at One Hundred,' so the number they're hitting with all these girls is not historical, it's based on how many starlets the Shaw Bros. had lying around in order to make up the number, as far as I can tell." Later on, he adds, "The actress is one of the Amazons of the title, but the character she plays is actually a man. It still confuses me, even now, and if it confuses you, too, then I guess we're in the same boat."

Two men meet in a town square at midnight to face off in a duel, but as they are just beginning to exchange sword blows, assassins attack them and they have to team up to not only fend off the assassins, but find out why they are being attacked in Chor's 1976 *The Magic Blade* on the fifth platter. Lung Ti and Lieh Lo star. For most movies, that would be enough of a premise to carry the entire film, but the 101-minute feature goes on from there in several different directions, with many inventive fights, a decent amount of character development and a surprisingly coherent conclusion considering that most of the film plays more than anything else like a dream. Ti's character is actually decorated with a stubble beard and a poncho in a good part of the film, to evoke Spaghetti Westerns. The movie has just a touch of blood and a touch of nudity, but that is enough to keep a viewer invested in the fates of the protagonists, despite the eccentric settings. It is the mix of surrealism and focused action that makes the movie both captivating and stimulating. The film would be highly enjoyable in any context, but it is also an ideal shift in tone from what has come before it in the collection.

The picture is a little soft at times, but that may be the best the transfer could elicit from the cinematography. Otherwise, the sets are colorful and hues are rich, with accurate fleshtones. Along with two trailers, Deighan steps up for another commentary, going over the contributions of the cast and crew, the appeal of the way the film plays out, and her affection in particular for an evil supporting character, 'The Devil's Grandma,' played by Ha from *14 Amazons*, that she wishes could have been spun off into a movie all of her own. On the ninth platter, there is a broad 21-minute audio-only interview with Ti (played over images from the film) from 2003 about his career and martial arts films; a 13-minute interview with Chor about his career and martial arts films; a nice 15-minute interview with costar Li, who was also another *14 Amazons* ensemble player, about how she brought a feminine touch to the martial arts world; an 18-minute interview with stuntman Wah Yuen about his career and his cringe-worthy near misses with disaster; a 16-minute interview with screenwriter Sze-to On about his early days writing movies for Shaw Bros.; and an interesting 14-minute appreciation of Chor's artistry and the rise of martial arts features in the Hong Kong market ("In the early Cantonese films of the Fifties and Sixties, it was at a time when Cantonese was spoke very slowly, both in films and in everyday Hong Kong life because the rhythm of life was slower. It's a little bit like watching old Hollywood films or watching old French films. People talked differently back then. The rhythm of speech was different and so was the editing, because editing is always driven by our speech patterns. One reason why martial arts films took off so quickly was because film, as a whole, was not able to keep pace with life. When Hong Kong society [became] a more faster society, films were not able to keep pace with it. People like King Hu and Yuen Chor came along, speeded up the movies that really reflected the rhythm of life in Hong Kong. That's one of the reasons why boxoffice numbers jumped tremendously with those films. I don't think it's only because of martial arts. I would argue that it's also because of the rhythm of the films that was realized by the martial arts.").

### Shawscope (Continued)

*One-Armed Swordsman* is the best film in the collection, but our favorite film in the collection is Chor's 1977 *Clans of Intrigue*, a full-fledged murder mystery. Ti is a martial arts expert accused of murdering the heads of three different clans. Claiming he is innocent, he is given a month to prove he didn't do it, and sets out to investigate the murders and clear his name. Not only is there a Least Likely Suspect, the suspect's Least Likely status is reinforced at a critical moment in the third act. All of that would be great and would make a fully entertaining film, but like its partner on the platter, *Magic Blade*, it is also progressively abstract and eccentric in very glorious ways. Shot mostly on a soundstage, the sets and costumes are exquisite, and this time the cinematography backs them up consistently, even in the darkest sequences, so the image is always sharp and perfectly colored. Over the course of 100 minutes, Ti's character essentially pieces together the elaborate backstory that led to the murders while facing an increasing number of martial arts challenges for a variety of reasons, from mere mistaken assumptions to desperate attempts by the murderer to prevent his progress, all in exotic locales that have many hidden traps and challenges.

For much of the movie, it appears that the entertainment will be executed without gore or sex, but while the violence remains somewhat discreet, not only is there plenty of nudity near the end, but more lesbian encounters to spice up the proceedings. Indeed, two versions of the film are offered (although why anyone would choose the other version is baffling), the second one running about 2 minutes shorter and leaving out the sauciest smooching. A warning says that the restored footage for the longer version is of lesser quality, but you could have fooled us, although we weren't really paying attention to the intensity of the hues at that point. There is no English track, but there is a Cantonese track in addition to the Mandarin track.

Along with three trailers, there is another commentary by Mudge, which is better than his talk on *Lady Hermit*. He speaks extensively about the backgrounds of the cast and supplies yet another overview of Chor's career, but he also pays specific attention to the film as it advances and points out some of Chor's less obvious touches. "All the plot shenanigans aside, the final scenes also give us some excellent action and some quality choreography. And the immediate thing we see in the fights, which is different to the other action in the film, is that it is brightly lit, whereas most of the previous set pieces, pretty much all of them, have taken place in the dark and the shadows, and at night, which is very much the case in the action scenes in Chor films in general. He does have a love for obscuring these fights to a degree, or at least putting them into context of the scenery. In *Clans of Intrigue*, we can see, as well, maybe, that having these earlier scenes in the dark and the shadows also reflects the fact that at those points we don't necessarily know what's going on or even the true identities of some of the characters. It's all very mysterious in the way it's shot, but by this stage in the film everything's come to light. We've moved on from shady mysteries to these mad revelations, and so thematically, these fight scenes make sense, as well."

Remember Wallace Shawn's character in *The Princess Bride*, trying to out-think his opponent but ultimately out-thinking himself instead? Well, the entire 105 minutes of Chor's 1977 *The Jade Tiger* on the sixth platter, which also stars Ti, is like that, taking game theory to its ultimate ridiculousness, but in an exceedingly entertaining manner. On the day that Ti's character is to be married, his father is brutally murdered, so the wedding gets put off and he leaves to infiltrate the clan responsible and extract his revenge. Of course they know he's coming, and he knows they know and so on, and yet he still arrives in disguise, aided by spies and counterspies in each clan. The film's immediate plot turns occur in flurries that match the frantic sword fights, and that is the fun the film has to offer. Unfortunately, it takes things to a point of nihilism that not every viewer will be happy with. Additionally, while none of these films are even vaguely realistic, most at least attempt to follow an internal logic, but here, it takes a couple of days for the hero to journey to the evil clan's lair, but when the evil clan gets lured to his clan's headquarters, and then they learn that they have been tricked, they are back at their own place in just a couple of minutes. Sorry, that's a deal breaker.

There is no English language track. The picture is again gorgeous, as are the set decorations and costumes. While some of the images are a touch soft from time to time, it is usually deliberate and quickly forgotten when another crisp image, with such an amazing array of meticulously differentiated and compellingly shaded hues, appears. Along with a trailer, there is a commentary by Chinese film expert Ian Jane, who speaks steadily throughout the film but never really addresses a specific scene. He also barely touches on the film's artistic qualities, beyond providing a fairly detailed analysis of Yung-Yu Chen striking musical score. Most of the time he reads appreciations of the film from other critics, biographical summaries of the careers of Chor and the cast members, and the film's own publicity materials. He also provides a thorough history of the film's dissemination. "The movie was also released on Region Three-locked DVD and VCD in Thailand using the same artwork as the Celestial editions, but with both Thai and Mandarin language options, and subtitles in Thai, Chinese and English."

Both films on the platter have increasingly complex narratives in comparison to the films on the earlier platters as if, like the martial arts combats themselves, every new one that comes along has to add a twist or an embellishment that the previous ones didn't have. A similar but less depressing exercise in game theory and plot confusions, Chor's entertaining 1977 *The Sentimental Swordsman*, the companion film on the platter and one of the best movies in the collection, begins with the hero, played by Ti, returning to his home after a decade of wandering the hinterlands after his girl

married a different guy. There also seems to be a masked bandit lurking about, and the thrust of the plot in the 103-minute film is the attempt by everyone involved—including a bunch of visiting martial artists—to capture the bandit, and yes, everyone suspects the hero, who has to clear his name. There is again a sequence where the hero takes several days to journey to a monastery (and he can't eat anything along the way, because poisoners are after him), and after the business is finished, everyone returns quickly to home base, but there is just enough of an ellipsis that it is acceptable, especially since the movie speedily moves on to the next confrontation and escalation of suspense. What seems most notable, however, is how carefully and meticulously the hero's interactions with the female characters are. There is a dichotomy between the film's romantic scenes and its martial arts scenes, and both are thrilling.

Some of the outdoor shots, including the final image, look off colored or waver between colors a little, but the soundstage footage looks gorgeous, as usual. There is one garden set that is so lovely you feel frustrated when a fight that begins there crashes through a wall into a different venue, and alternately thrilled when another fight ends up back in the garden. There is no English language track, but there is a Cantonese track in addition to the Mandarin track. Along with three trailers, there is a commentary with Asian film expert David West that touches on the film as it unfolds (he points out that when a woman passes behind a transparent screen, it indicates that she has things to hide) but takes up most of the time going over the biographies and backgrounds of Chor and the cast. At another point he jokingly complains that the film, at a critical moment, is distracting him from the biographical narrative he is providing.

After the pair of very entertaining but complicated features, it is a relief and utterly relaxing to turn to the opening film on the seventh platter, Sun Chung's 1978 *The Avenging Eagle*, which is just a basic revenge film with a little male bonding for flavor. Not only is the plot made perfectly clear, with the help a lengthy flashback, but each story turn is telescoped well in advance. No matter. The fights are furious, the stars—Ti, again, and (Alexander) Sheng Fu—not only give terrific performances, but they have exhilarating charisma (especially if you've watched not only these but the other *Shawscope* collections), and it is more than enough to hold one's interest in the 93-minute feature (a minute of lost footage has been restored). Again evoking Spaghetti Westerns, Ti's character was a member of a bandit team, but abandoned them because his conscience was getting to him. The bandits, in groups, try to track him down and either kill him or bring him back to their leader. Fu's character happens along, helps him in the first fight and then ends up following through as the two trick and trap the bandits until it is time to confront the leader.

A lot of the film is shot outdoors, but even the soundstage sets are not as attractive as they were in the Chor films. The color transfer looks absolutely fine, but the concentration is on staging the fights (which are sometimes conducted in slow motion or even step printing) and not on how pretty everything looks. The focus is more uneven, as well. There is an additional Cantonese track, three trailers and an alternate 3 minutes of opening and end credits in English. Asian film expert Frank Djeng provides a good commentary track, going over the backgrounds of the cast and the director, discussing the origins of the story as a TV series, and celebrating the ideal casting of the two stars. On the ninth platter, there is an enjoyable 9-minute interview with the film's villain, Ku Feng, and a nice 7-minute interview with costar Eddy Ko.

Starting out like *Dirty Harry* but ending more like *The Gauntlet*, Kuan Tai Chen, who has a kind of Carl Weathers thing going, plays the title character in the 1980 *Killer Constable*. Unforgiving when confronting criminals, he is assigned to track down the perpetrators who robbed a treasury and to retrieve the gold they stole. Directed by Chih-Hung Kuei, the fight scenes are very intense and the film's style is an interesting mix of very cramped shots—despite the widescreen image—and then shots that step back momentarily, letting you breathe, as it were, before choking off the visual information again. There are touches of drama (there's even a blind girl!) to also provide pauses between the fights, but however interesting a secondary character becomes, that character is not around for long. The film plays as if the script had been twice as long as the movie's 98-minute running time, and jumps from one highlight to the next (the beats at the end also feel compromised by these decisions), but the fights are so exhilarating, the imagery is so engrossing and Chen is so kickass that the film is really everything fans could hope for in a gnarly swordfight movie—blood, blood and more blood.

The colors are bright and fleshtones are accurate. The image is deliberately soft at times, especially around the edges, but when it does sharpen, the picture looks crisp. Along with a 2-minute English credit sequence and three trailers, there are also three commentary tracks.

On one track, Djeng goes over the backgrounds of the cast and the crew, and provides other production details (he points out passages in the musical score that are lifted from Jerry Goldsmith and John Williams), but he also spends a bit more time than he normally does talking about the narrative and pointing out some of the differences between the film and regular Shaw Bros. features. "Gone are the typically bright, primary colored indoor sets and costumes one kind of expects from a Shaw Bros. production. Instead, we have this rather bleak looking film, with wonderful atmospheres, but also, sometimes, brilliant colors, and then, of course, we have the non-stop rain, the raging fire, and fog prominent throughout the film."

On another track, Rayns supplies his usual blend of insight on the careers of the filmmakers and how the film is positioned in the pantheon. "I saw this film on first release and it didn't do particularly well. I don't think it even played the full week that it was scheduled to be in the theaters for on the Shaw circuit. However, by 1981 it was winning prizes in local film awards. The film has acquired not just a cult reputation, but a reputation as one of the best Shaw Bros. ever, actually, which I personally agree with." He talks about the cast and crew, and the production (Chen lost a finger during a fight scene because they were using real swords), and provides an excellent cinematic deconstruction of one of the fights. He also has a lot to say about Kuei, who only made one martial arts feature in his varied filmography, and how his career was mirroring the Hong Kong film industry at the time. "He's kind of respectful of the old traditions of the genre, while at the same time conscious that they've been pushed aside by changes in the last decade or more, so one of the ways he's defining this film as being different from the norms of the genre is by looking back to what it used to be like in the Sixties as opposed to what it used to be like in the Seventies."

Finally, film enthusiast Brian Bankston provides the most detailed report on the film's difficult production, starting with Kuei's on-and-off relationship with Shaw Bros., which continued during his work on the film, and the many other obstacles that had to be surmounted (he provides the most thorough description of the finger incident), while praising the final result in equal detail, as did the other two speakers. He also identifies another passage in the musical score that belongs to Max Steiner, and he often allows his enthusiasm for the film to show through. "For the people that say the choreography is not great, I think it's fantast—oop! Got a leg there. Whoa, cut his leg off. The strikes are very brutal, they're very raw, they're straight and to the point. There's no fancy, it's not really fancy stuff. It's just striking and slashing."

On the ninth platter, a complete presentation of the Korean version of the film, *The No-Myung Sword*, is presented, taken in part from a cropped video cassette source, which is merged, where appropriate, with the fully letterboxed footage from the collection transfer, all of which is overlaid with the wobbly Korean audio track. The film runs 105 minutes, trimming some of the violence, but altering the story significantly and adding quite a few conversation scenes to explain what is going on. The cropped scenes that do not appear in the standard version of the film have the same actors, but construct a simplified and more direct narrative, one that even has a happy ending! While there are still confusions here and there, the presentation does allow you to revisit the movie's best sequences in order to savor Kuei's staging, the heady performances and the impressive production designs. Otherwise, it is a worthwhile curiosity that is a most welcome addition to the set's extras. The 34 minutes of specific Korean version footage are also presented in the special features accompanying *Killer Constable* on its platter.

Every **Shawscope** collection seems to include a totally wacky film. In the first set, it was **The Mighty Peking Man**, and in the second set, it was *The Boxer's Omen*. For this collection, there is the 1982 *Buddha's Palm* on the eighth platter, which, following a tradition that goes back to the silent days in Chinese action films, has the characters shooting animated rays out of their palms at each other, in addition to the swordplay (the hero has a green lightsaber) and all sorts of other crazy implements. There is a flying buzz saw, a gigantic telescoping foot, a zit on the face of a diminutive fighter that spews out acid when squeezed and all sort of other deadly stuff. Directed by Taylor Wong, there is also huge puppet animal, reminiscent of **The Neverending Story** (the animal also supplies voiceover narration to help speed the plot from one location to the next), and one wildly weird scene after another. We have to admit that this is the one film where we shifted over to the English track, because trying to read subtitles and also keep up with all of the stuff going on was too much to take in at one time (that said, the English dialog does diverge significantly from the subtitled, notably with the film's final lines). With the help of some flashbacks, one eventually pieces together the story, in which the hero meets a blind martial arts master, grabs a valuable golden egg in a free-for-all that cures the blindness, and becomes the master's disciple (thus learning the rays from the palm thing). He also meets another master, who teaches him more stuff, and then meets two lovely sisters, who have a female master that appears to be at odds with his original master. Hence, a lot of fighting, and this goes on for a while until they all figure out that there is a greater villain stirring the pot. Running 97 minutes, the film is utterly ridiculous, so don't watch it if people you respect are going to walk in on you in the middle of it—you're better off going with *Intimate Confessions of a Courtesan*—but if you are by yourself, or have very young company, then by all means, go for it. The film may be ludicrous nonsense, but the wondering what is going to happen next never lets up.

The colors do not have the crispness of the classic Shaw Bros. productions, because by this time there were cost saving measures in place, but the movie is colorful as all get out, so the image is still quite a treat, and the cinematography is in focus, most of the time. There is an additional Cantonese track, a trailer, a minute-long presentation of English language credits where the film is entitled *Raiders of the Magic Palm*, and a breathless commentary track from Chinese film expert Dylan Cheung, who provides a gung ho talk about the series of early Sixties films that the movie resurrected in its derivation, and the other sources that preceded and superseded those films. He goes into detail about the backgrounds of the cast and the crew, but he spends most of his time not just pointing out the characters, but explaining how the characters are the same or different than the characters in the other programs that were reworking the material. Once in a while, his references get a little confusing as he reels them off, but for the most part, it is an engaging talk that achieves a secondary goal—you not only enjoy watching the movie again, you wish you could watch its many variations and sequels—as it deconstructs the craziness.

The final film, *Bastard Swordsman*, directed by Chun-Ku Lu, is appropriate in its pairing with *Buddha's Palm*. While the narrative sticks to classic martial arts tropes about rival clans, the fights in the 1983 production are completely unrestrained wire-and-animated-rays clashes. Like male birds who evolve with such fancy plumage to attract their mates that they can accomplish little else, so to did the martial arts films get to the point where everything was about how wild the fighting was, defying not just the laws of physics, but the laws of nature, gravity, human endurance and common sense. Nevertheless, the 97-minute film is totally entertaining. Norman Chu is a servant in one clan who is secretly being trained as a martial artist by a mysterious masked figure. The leader of the clan is challenged to a duel by another clan and loses, but is given time to prepare for a second chance. During that preparation period, however, a group of masked fighters come in and slaughter the clan's leaders. Although everyone assumes the other clan is behind it, on the orders from the masked teacher, the servant makes his way to the other clan, discovering revelations about his own past as he prepares for an ultimate battle. Thanks to the wirework, most of the fights take place in midair, but even when they remain on the ground, they are continually inventive and exhilarating. The creators write themselves into a corner at the end, so not every character's story is wrapped up, but there is a general satisfaction with the spectacle of the final battle and the film, while a long, long way in elegance, depth and intelligence from *One-Armed Swordsman*, has enough emotional underscoring to validate its exuberant entertainment.

The picture sometimes drifts in and out of focus, something one assumes comes with the original cinematography, since otherwise the hues are bright. When the image is sharp, it is invigorating. There is no English track. Along with a trailer, Djeng supplies a good commentary track, explaining that the film is based upon a popular television show ("Everything presented so far was pretty much a replication of the plot line from the original TV series. The TV series, like the film, also has multiple plot points going on at the same time. Even though we're really watching a much condensed version of the story as compared to the TV series, the film doesn't rush in its narrative, it doesn't rush the story. But it never drags, either."), going over the legacies of the cast and the crew, providing specific translations of the various Chinese idioms surfacing in the dialog ("She says, 'After forty-nine stances, they'll die for sure.' In Chinese, they always don't just say, 'forty-nine.' They always say, 'After seven seven forty-nine stances.' So, it's like, you have multiples. 'Seven times seven is forty-nine.' In [the] martial arts world, they never just say the numbers, they always tell you the math first."), and deconstructing both the drama and the fight scenes ("They're attacking them at the same time here, see, so it's very exciting to watch. Gone are the so-called 'assembly fighting' where earlier, like in the Seventies, remember, even in Bruce Lee films, what I like to call the 'assembly fighting,' where the stunt people are just waiting in line to fight your main characters, but here, no, look, they're all going at them together with their trademark Wu Tang sword formation.").

The final platter in the set is a CD carrying a whopping 79 minutes of music from the various films. Some of it is made up of basic suspense riffs, and we really could have done without the tracks from *Buddha's Palm*, which are way off the tone and era set by the other cuts, but for the most part, the primary themes to the different movies (nothing originating from Barry or other filching shows up) have a grand theatricality to them that gets you in the mood for the showiness of the films themselves, particularly since the stereo mix, while not elaborate, brings a dimensionality to the music that the actual monophonic presentations on the BDs are sorely missing. And as for those suspense tracks, the sub-woofer action is pretty good in a couple of spots, as well.

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Ti (with a goatee, which gives him a kind of Steven Seagal vibe) also stars in the terrific 1979 Shaw Bros. production, **The Kung Fu Instructor**, a Celestial 88 Films Blu-ray (UPC#760137161578, \$35). The jacket text compares the 104-minute film to *Yojimbo*, but the narrative is no more about the Rojos and the Baxters than it is about the Capulets and Montagues. Yes, it is about a crowded town divided in the middle where one clan punishes the other clan if they step over the line, but the similarities end there. The more evil of the two clans hire—disregarding the title here, he is more accurately—a pole fighting instructor, played by Ti, but once Ti's character gets there, he finds the group he is supposed to teach too rude and boorish to learn anything. On the other hand, he meets an eager student from the other clan who is both skilled and has the right mindset, and after some more conflicts, they leave the town together and train on their own until they are ready to come back and clean the place up. Directed by Chung, his approach to the fight scenes are even better than in *Avenging Eagle*. There are isolated close-ups at key moments, slow motion at ideal turning points and the camera always seems to capture the action perfectly. Chung is efficient with all aspects of the film, which is one of the reasons it is such a pleasure to watch. When an important secondary story point threatens to extend the running time, it is presented with just a quick montage of stills so they can get back to the action. The film has no sex or gore (when the pole comes crashing down on the legs of a fighter, Chung cuts to a previous moment where it had been crushing a clay pot, communicating quite clearly what has happened to the bones in the leg), but the fighting scenes are exhilarating, the performances are expressive. Even though the story never follows through on the premise suggested by the jacket promotion, its blend of male bonding and social justice is fully satisfying and engaging as it plays out.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. Even the outdoor scenes are brightly colored and sharp, and the soundtrack sequences are equally pristine. The image looks terrific. The film is in Mandarin with optional English subtitles, and also comes with an alternate English language track, a trailer and a 2-minute montage of promotional stills.

### Unblemished 4K

Not a single blemish appears on the Universal Pictures Home Entertainment Criterion Collection two-platter 4K Blu-ray release of Howard Hawks's 1932 **Scarface** (UPC#715515304016, \$50). There is not a mark or a speckle to be seen. Yes, the squared full screen black-and-white image has a natural softness associated with its age, a softness so pervasive that it creates a noticeable gap in quality between the 4K presentation and the standard Blu-ray presentation. The standard BD looks like it is about to dissolve into grain at any moment, while the 4K image is so sharp that you almost forget the grain is there, and are instead mesmerized by Hawks's camerawork—the film opens with a couple of long takes, the first leading to the assassination of a gangster, and then the next traveling across the newsroom that is deciding how to report the murder—and the gritty performances, which are dated, perhaps, in their ethnicity, but captivating in their maturity. Paul Muni is the title character—Hawks underscores the mark on his face with a visual 'X' motif throughout the film, some readily obvious and some hidden like Easter eggs—working his way up the organization as he takes over the bootlegging business and everything else in an unnamed Chicago-like city (there is a scene that replicates the St. Valentine's Day massacre). George Raft plays the second in command, and Boris Karloff is the most indelible of the rival gangsters (he gets gunned down in a bowling alley, but he has such a commanding screen presence that you could easily spend a whole movie just watching him bowl). And since this is Hawks, the actresses, Ann Dvorak and Karen Morley, may be peripheral to the central narrative but represent the very core of the film's deeper exploration of masculine impulse and desire. Running 95 minutes, the film follows a familiar gangster movie template that is older than Shakespeare, but its popularity defined how engaging and reliable that template can be. Crossing crime with lust, and precision filmmaking with visceral action, and freed from the impediments of distracting flaws by the 4K delivery, the film is a steady, Tommy gun blast of continual entertainment.

The monophonic sound is reasonably strong for the film's age on both presentations. There are optional English subtitles. The standard BD also has an excellent 17-minute deconstruction of Hawks's use of sound in the film and his progress as sound recording becomes more sophisticated, and a looser 38-minute conversation about the film between Bill Hader and crime novelist Megan Abbott that goes over the film's history and a number of its attributes. Finally, after censors freaked out over the film, a revised ending was shot (Hawks was not involved) where justice is applied not in a flurry of lead but with a stern lecture from a judge, followed by the gallows. Running 13 minutes, the alternate ending has also been included. The judge looks straight into the camera as he reels off his condemnation, and after a couple minutes, you start shaking your head and pointing your finger, "It wasn't me! It wasn't me! It was Tony!"

### Fabulous colors

Technicolor was the spoiled child of Hollywood, and no more so than during its youth in first decade of its existence, the Thirties. During the Thirties, Technicolor cinematography was pampered, with so-called Technicolor experts on the set and in the labs, overseeing every application of every hue. It was annoying for everyone else involved, but the efforts are still paying dividends nearly a century later. Technicolor movies from the Thirties, if mastered properly on a decent Blu-ray, are drop dead gorgeous, so much so that it hardly matters what the movie is, because it is the colors themselves that have you transfixed to your screen, marveling that such hues could ever exist in real life and wondering how you can arrange to get a hold of them when actually, the closest you can come is to obtain a Blu-ray and play it every day on a wall screen, for show. It beats a boring painting of your grandparents.

A movie from the Thirties that perhaps your grandparents enjoyed, the MGM production directed by W.S. Van Dyke and starring Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy, **Sweethearts**, has been released by Warner Bros. as a *Warner WB Archive Collection* Blu-ray (UPC#840418317006, \$22), and whether or not MacDonald and Eddy are your thing, the colors in the film are so fabulous from one corner of the screen to the other that the experience of watching the 115-minute film is absolutely thrilling from the first frame to the final text apology that closes the picture, explaining that the film really isn't Victor Herbert's operetta, it just stole a few of the songs for its own purposes. Even MGM was worried that only grandparents would be interested in the feature, so they canned Herbert's convoluted tale of Flemish royalty and mistaken identities, creating in its place a backstage musical comedy. You see and hear Herbert's songs, mostly in the correct costumes and stagings, but otherwise, not a whiff of the plot, as the film is about the marriage between the show's two stars, and a scheme by the Broadway producer, played by Frank Morgan, to keep the two from going off to Hollywood. Even then, it takes a while for the narrative to get up to speed—the story only really starts working during the final half hour—but it is enough to justify the entertainment. Some of the songs are fairly nice, Ray Bolger has a terrific tap number... in clogs!, and not a moment passes when there isn't a new shade or hue that you have never in your life seen before. Not only does the squared full screen picture have accurate and detailed fleshtones—everything considered, the makeup applications are quite good—but there is not a single frame in the film that is without perfection, unless you count MGM's own mistakes. During a climactic scene, we couldn't take our eyes off of Morgan's tie, which has subtle but noticeable stain on it, midway on the left side. We hope some costume department underling got fired over that one.

The monophonic sound is also as good as recording equipment allowed at the time. You won't want to turn it up too loudly, but if you feel like blasting *On Parade*, nobody is going to cringe. Pounded on your door, maybe, but not cringe. There are optional English subtitles; a deftly abridged 30-minute *Screen Guild Theater* radio performance of **Sweethearts** from 1946 with MacDonald, Eddy and Morgan; a pleasing 18 minutes of audio-only pre-recordings for those of you who can't get enough of the songs; a 3-

minute excerpt from a gorgeous color short, *Pirate Party on Catalina Island*, with some celebrity shots and a musical number; a 1938 color *Merrie Melodies* cartoon running 7 minutes, *Count Me Out*, about a country bumpkin who self-trains to become a boxer and then enters a prize fight against a big bruiser (or seems to); another 1938 color *Merrie Melodies* cartoon running 8 minutes, *Love and Curses*, lampooning stage melodramas and the Gay Nineties; and a lengthy trailer promoting MacDonald and Eddy.

### Antique Mama

Designed as an antique film, George Stevens's 1948 RKO Radio Pictures nostalgic drama, **I Remember Mama**, has become even more antiquated in terms of pacing and attitude with the subsequent passage of time. Set in 1910, it depicts a family raised by a pair of Norwegian immigrants in San Francisco. The first half of the film is specifically about how they cope when one of the children has to have an operation on his leg, and then the second half is sort of a follow up after several years have passed. World War I is never mentioned. The film, released in the modern Blu-ray format by Warner Bros. as a *Warner WB Archive Collection* title (UPC#840418310809, \$22), runs 134 minutes. The latter half of the film has several lovely emotional payoffs, certainly enough to justify the movie's existence, but for today's viewers, accustomed to the hustle and bustle of the modern world, the presentation of the characters in the film's first half requires patience and an affection for a manner of motion picture making that has long since passed.

The film's production designs are impressive, including the depiction of San Francisco before automobiles clogged its streets. The opening shot of the squared full screen black-and-white film is quite soft and blurry. It begins in an attic, with an author, played by Barbara Bel Geddes, introducing a story she has written. Then, as she begins to read it aloud, the camera moves down the stairs, and it is only when it settles upon the family gathered around the kitchen table (with Bel Geddes remarkably transformed into a much younger version of herself) that the image becomes crisp and contrasts become clearly detailed. It is not a bad transfer, one discovers, but a film where the focus is on the past. Irene Dunne does a solid job as the sharp-witted and determined mother, carrying not just the accent but a real sense of a life having been lived in optimistic struggle. Oskar Homolka and Philip Dorn have principal roles. Rudy Vallee has a brief but rather surprising and effective part as a doctor, and Cedric Hardwicke and Edgar Bergen are also featured. The monophonic sound is clear and reasonably strong. There are optional English subtitles and a trailer.

### Lemmon and Allyson

The opening credits state the film is based upon a short story by Samuel Hopkins Adams, but it doesn't take long to realize that the 1956 Columbia Pictures production, **You Can't Run Away from It**, released on Blu-ray by Sony Pictures Home Entertainment (UPC#043396638129, \$25), is practically a scene-for-scene widescreen color musical remake of **It Happened One Night**. Directed by Dick Powell, June Allyson plays the spoiled heiress running away from her father because he objects to her relationship with a gigolo and Jack Lemmon is the reporter who recognizes her on a bus, tags along to get a story, and falls in love. The musical part is half-hearted and the songs evaporate in a moment, even an irritating one delivered by Stubby Kaye on the bus. Lemmon, who scored his first over-the-title billing with the film (although secondary to Allyson) makes the part his own in his usual dynamo manner. The weak link in the feature is Allyson, who is badly miscast and couldn't look spoiled if she tried. Directors often put their imprints on their actors—Robert Montgomery takes on Alfred Hitchcock's look and ticks in **Mr. and Mrs. Smith**, and Jack Nicholson calls forth Stanley Kubrick in **The Shining**, to cite just a couple of examples. Well, Allyson has Powell's movement and expressions throughout the film. She mugs her cheeks when she grins, she tilts her head, she bobs her upper torso. Once you start seeing it, you can't not see it. Fortunately, the reliable romantic comedy plot takes hold, and that, plus Lemmon, is enough to capture your attention during the 95-minute feature as it builds to the especially satisfying final act.

Charles Bickford plays the father, with Jim Backus, Henny Youngman, Dub Taylor and Jack Albertson showing up in smaller parts. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The cinematography is somewhat bland and workmanlike, but the transfer is bright and sharp. The monophonic sound is okay. There are optional English and French subtitles, but they must be activated manually.

### Suzuki action

Imagine if Douglas Sirk had made a yakuza movie, and you will have Seijun Suzuki's glorious 1965 action melodrama, **Tattooed Life**, a Radiance Films Blu-ray (UPC#760137161882, \$40). We reviewed a really nice looking Home Vision DVD in Apr 21, but not even that presentation can approach the crisp and rich hues delivered by BD playback, not to mention the substantial enhancement to the film's magnificent monophonic audio track. Since it is also a movie that improves upon multiple viewings, we were more than happy to sit through its 87 minutes again, and again. Hideki Takahashi and Kotobuki Hananomoto are brothers who duck out from the police and from the responsibilities they owe the organized criminal gang that they belonged to after the gang tries to eliminate them to cut down on witnesses to an assassination. They make their way to a construction site in Hokkaido and manage to join the group working on a tunnel. Hananomoto's character, the younger brother and an artist at heart, becomes enamored with the wife of the construction company owner. The film follows the personalities of the workers and management at the construction site, and their conflicts, until the past catches up to the two brothers.



Suzuki tends to leap ahead in his plot points, and trusts that you catch up to him once things play out, which is true, but it can seem frustrating at first until you start to trust him. But what he constructs with the film is a visual opera. The story is set in the Twenties and Suzuki manages to find locations that suit the era, flitting back and forth between them and soundstage sets, not for the convenience of the narrative, but for the expressionism accentuated at particular moments of emotional exchange or reflection. Played out to Masayoshi Ikeda's magnificent orchestral musical score—which is the primary beneficiary of the improved audio track—the film reinforces every idea, from honor and admiration to brotherhood and responsibility, with actions and images that not only intensify these concepts for the characters, but relate their experiences to what life holds in store for everyone. Even though Takahashi and Hananomoto play brothers, the film still mixes in a whiff of homoeroticism to further the subliminal churning as the conflicts lead to their eruption. Whether it is Suzuki's unique abundance of colored lights, or his whirlwind editing of progressive shapes and designs, or the lovely pastoral settings that cut from location to soundstage, his filmmaking underscores not just the emotions of the characters, but the emotions a viewer experiences taking everything in.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The film is in Japanese with optional English subtitles, and comes with a trailer, a wonderful 11-minute interview with Suzuki about his career (“If everyone made films the same way, it would be a bore.”), and a terrific 12-minute interview with art director Takeo Kimura talking mostly about the early days of working with Suzuki.

Suzuki biographer William Carroll supplies a rewarding commentary track, focusing almost entirely on Suzuki, his filmmaking style and a deconstruction of the movie and the narrative as it progresses. “You could say he’s a director who relies heavily on editing to create startling juxtapositions, and there are plenty of examples of that even just here in this film, but there are also lots of places where he uses very long takes, as we’ve been seeing. I think in general it’s both the synthesis of a lot of these seemingly opposite stylistic tendencies in his work and a kind of formal playfulness. ‘Whatever you expect him to do, he’s going to do the opposite of that,’ is really what defines Suzuki as a filmmaker.”

### Teen comedy kung fu

The first half of the Celestial Pictures 88 Films Blu-ray presentation of the 1982 Shaw Bros. production directed by Hsia Hsu, **Kid from Kwang Tung**, is a teen comedy about competitive pranks between two rival clans. After some opening hijinks in a classroom, there is a wonderful sequence depicting a fight between a boy in a chicken suit and a group of kids in a centipede costume. Not only is it expertly staged, but there is a genuine humor in its premise and execution. Later, there is another good comedy sequence involving zombies, especially if you are familiar with **The Shadow Boxing** (Oct 24), which took the same gag to even greater extremes. The point is that while the situation and tone may seem tiresome for viewers not dialed into the specific cultural references and comedy, it is worth tolerating, because in the second half of the 99-minute feature, things get serious and people start dying. An evil warlord (there is still humor—the warlord engages in one fistfight without letting go of the black cat he is petting) barges into town, and after a lot of death, two rival students receive emergency training from their teacher and then team up to defeat the bad guy. The fight scenes are energetic and creative, and wirework is minimal. Yu Wong and Tak Yuen star, with Kam Chiang, Sharon Yeung and Kar-Yung Lau.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The color transfer is excellent and the image is sharp and spotless. The only time it goes soft is when there is an optical coming up. The monophonic sound is reasonably strong. The film is in Cantonese with optional English subtitles, and there is also an adequate English dubbed track. Along with a trailer, there is a 2-minute montage of publicity stills.

### There's a killer on the road

C. Thomas Howell is the driver and Rutger Hauer is **The Hitcher** in the abstract 1986 thriller produced by HBO and TriStar Pictures and released as a 4K UltraHD Blu-ray by Warner Bros. (UPC#840418310755, \$25). Directed by Robert Harmon, the 97-minute feature begins as an atmospheric suspense film, with Howell's character driving across Texas at night, in a rainstorm. He starts to feel drowsy and gives Hauer's character a lift in part just help stay awake. The conversation becomes creepy fairly rapidly and as soon as he can, Howell's character discharges Hauer's character from the car. Hauer's character turns out to be a serial killer, however, and continually shows up in the proximity of Howell character, often taunting him as other people around them die. By the time the sun rises, the police are involved and think that Howell's character has something to do with the deaths, but at that point, Hauer's character begins toying with him and the film becomes a full fledged action feature with chases, explosions and gunfire. Jennifer Jason Leigh plays a helpful waitress. The film was a video store rental mainstay in its day, as viewers responded to Hauer's weirdly seductive villainy, Howell's puppy dog vulnerability and all of the fireworks, not minding that Hauer's character is more of a charming Michael Meyers or Jason Voorhees than a Ted Bundy, showing up everywhere Howell's character goes, without discernible logic.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. Warner also released a standard Blu-ray (UPC#840418310762, \$22), and the two releases are so close in quality that only viewers with extra large screens will find value in the 4K release. The cinematography is a little soft at times, conceptually, but in the bright daylight, both releases have crisp images. The 4K presentation has slightly more detail and color definition, and subliminally, it will make your heart race a little faster during the action scenes, but the standard BD is plenty of fun. There seems to be even less difference between the 7.1-channel Dolby Atmos audio tracks on the two discs. Even though the sound mix comes from what is now the Stone Age in audio mixing, it

has enough separations and bass manipulations to show you a good time and keep things exciting. Both releases have optional English subtitles and the same special features, a trailer, a good 41-minute interview with Harmon sharing details of the film's production and a less satisfying, sporadic commentary track featuring Harmon and screenwriter Eric Red. While they do talk throughout the movie, there are often lengthy pauses between each comment, and much of what Harmon says is presented more effectively in the interview. Red says that the movie was inspired by The Doors's *Riders on the Storm* (which in turn was inspired by another movie) and that is why Hauer's character is even named 'Ryder.' They share stories about the production and what they wanted to achieve. Harmon says that he shot one scene on the bus as it was literally taking them to their next location, which is an inspired piece of cost consciousness, and points out, during a particularly lovely landscape shot, why the film is in widescreen. “It's areas like this that made me so anxious to shoot the film in anamorphic, in 2.35 ratio, as we did, because these kinds of locations just stream out for it, really.”

### Too good to be true

Too much should not be revealed about the nature of Zoë Kravitz's revenge thriller, **Blink Twice**, an Amazon Studio MGM Blu-ray (UPC#883929825752, \$35), because a strong component of the entertainment is discovering what is going on as the heroine does. Naomi Ackie plays a catering waitress who is invited to an island resort for a party being held by a wealthy tech entrepreneur played by Channing Tatum. Everything at the party seems too good to be true. The men are considerate, the women dress in white all the time, but otherwise keep their clothing or bathing suits on, the food is delicious and the excursion seems like a luxury no one would want to see end. But of course, it is not. The 102-minute film—which takes its time savoring the initial premise while dropping no more than, you realize later, very obscure hints about what is to come—is not only a rousing, violent tribute to female empowerment, but can even be presented as a metaphor for women in abusive relationships. In any case, one just hopes that the true nature of the film is not obscured so much by its marketing that potential fans will overlook its presence.

Christian Slater co-stars, with Kyle MacLachlan and Geena Davis in smaller parts. The film does not start up where it left off if playback is terminated. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The image is bright and glossy, and the 5.1-channel DTS sound has a pleasing surround presence. There is an alternate audio track that describes the action (“A worker wipes a machete. The elderly woman stuffs a dead yellow snake into a cloth bag.”), alternate French, Spanish and Italian audio tracks, and ten subtitling options including English.

### The games people play

Patience is both required and rewarded when it comes to the 2018 New Line comedy thriller, **Game Night**, a WB 4K UltraHD Blu-ray (UPC#840418307083, \$25). Jason Bateman and Rachel McAdams are a married couple who have bonded because they both enjoy playing games. They have a 'game night' every week with like-minded friends, and then something wild happens that places them in the middle of a mob scheme. Running 100 minutes, the film has to take its time, allowing you to get to know the characters, so that the humor in their responses to a crisis will be all the more amusing. Since the film does not give away any of its cards up front, you have to go along with the romance and tolerate the generation-specific references and gags that the thirtysomethings in the cast, which includes Billy Magnussen, Sharon Horgan, Lamorne Morris and Kyle Bunbury, toss at one another. It is worth it. Directed by the team of John Francis Daley and Jonathan Goldstein, even when the action begins, there is a need to go along with some of the stuff that is happening, but as the violence and action scenes accelerate, so do the laughs, and it really does become a very funny and energetic film, especially during the last act. Kyle Chandler, Michael C. Hall and Jeffrey Wright have inspired bit parts.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The image is smooth and sharp, and the 5.1-channel DTS sound is equally crisp. All of the wide location shots are processed to first look like they depict pieces on a game board before somehow transitioning into reality. The precision of the 4K playback aids in the timing and accentuation of the humor and the excitement of the action scenes, as well as making the effort to get to those moments a little more tolerable. There are optional English subtitles, a good 4-minute promotional featurette that has a lot of behind-the-scenes footage and celebrates the ensemble cast, and 7 minutes of cute bloopers.

Another comedy about grownups unable to let go of their childhood pleasures, New Line's 2018 **Tag**, also another WB 4K UltraHD Blu-ray (UPC#840418310779, \$25), is based upon a true story (not only are there clips of the real people over some of the end credits, but there is also an enjoyable 5-minute featurette about them in the supplement) regarding a group of friends who spend the month of May every year playing tag. Directed by Jeff Tomsic, the film is set during a particular month where the only friend who has never been caught is getting married and is thus sure to be at a given place at a given time. The others decide to team up to get him. How much of that part is true is dubious, but it gives the 100-minute film its narrative structure. There is another strong ensemble cast, including Ed Helms, Jon Hamm, Jeremy Renner, Annabelle Wallis, Rashida Jones, Isla Fisher and others. A blend of slapstick, character comedy and friendship pathos, the film is not as flat out funny as parts of **Game Night**, but it has some amusing moments and enough star power to hold one's interest if one can tolerate the spectacle of grown men (and women) acting like children. Most adults prefer to think that such things only happen with others.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The picture quality is not as compelling as the picture on **Game Night**, but that is because the cinematography is more utilitarian. The same is true of the 5.1-channel DTS sound, which has a functional but uninteresting mix. There are optional English subtitles, 6 minutes of mostly funny deleted scenes and 8 minutes of cute bloopers and outtakes.

### Kowalski classics

Two entertaining Fifties horror films produced by Roger Corman and directed by Bernard L. Kowalski, and several iterations of the films, have been collected on the two-platter *Special Edition* Blu-ray set from Film Masters, **Night of the Blood Beast** (UPC#76013716291, \$30). The films, the special features and even the commentaries all have optional English subtitles.

A pilot crashes after venturing into the upper edges of the atmosphere and several scientists, male and female, investigate the crash site, which is conveniently near their otherwise isolated station (in Griffith Park, yeah, but there aren't any other people around, so okay) where they were tracking the flight in the 1958 **Night of the Blood Beast**. When they get there, the pilot is dead, but his body is still in excellent shape. Although his heart is not beating, he still has measurable blood pressure. They take him back to the lab, which is then attacked by some kind of creature looking like a sports team mascot that has been dragged through a muddy swamp. After the creature takes a time out, the dead pilot sits up and starts talking to the group, sharing what he thinks the creature is actually thinking. Running 62 minutes, the film is silly, sure, but it has the right amount of suspense and sci-fi intrigue, and is effectively paced so that you don't have time to ponder its silliness, at least not much. Ed Nelson stars, with John Baer, Georgiana Carter, Angela Greene, Michael Emmet and Tyler McVey.

The black-and-white picture is presented with two options, in a squared full screen format, and letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. However, not only does the letterboxed presentation mask off picture information from the top and bottom of the image, it even shaves off a tiny bit from the sides. The image is in very nice shape most of the time. There are passages where it wobbles a bit and quite a few hidden splices, but that does not negate how pleasing the presentation is. To that effect, there is a 3-minute side-by-side restoration comparison that demonstrates how the film usually looks (we take that back—even the bad side of the comparison looks much better than how the film usually looks). Also featured is a trailer, a 2-minute montage of memorabilia from the film and the film on the second platter, *Attack of the Giant Leeches*, and a great 7-minute silent (with projector sounds and subtitles) 8mm version of **Blood Beast**.

Fifties sci-fi historian Tom Weaver provides a rewarding commentary track, speaking thoroughly about the history of the film's production, the backgrounds of the cast and crew, the controversy (which led to litigation) over the credits for the script, and a celebration of the film's artistic details and how they have pleased audiences over the years. "The reason I talked about Sputnik for 3 minutes at the beginning of this commentary is I don't think a lot of monster [fans] realize how quote-unquote important it was to 1950's sci-fi movie history. Within a couple of days of that October 1957 event, forty-three films involving satellites and spaceships were announced for production, so we have Sputnik to thank for the existence of a number of science-fiction favorites. Roger Corman always liked to look to the headlines for movie ideas." As with his commentaries on other features, he not only includes a few interview recordings, he also has actors read from printed interviews with members of the cast and the crew.

Finally, the platter contains a 92-minute episode of **Mystery Science Theater 3000** from 1996 that tackles not only **Blood Beast**, but an amusing color musical short from 1956 entitled *Once upon a Honeymoon* that is bizarre enough on its own to make the episode worthwhile. As for their take on **Blood Beast**, there are a few witty quips, but it probably plays best when the film is not so fresh in your mind.

The 1959 film on the second platter, *Attack of the Giant Leeches*, is even better. A wonderful mix of Southern melodrama and monster horror, the film, which runs just 63 minutes, teases you with the monster in the swamp at first, but then settles into a story about a hot-and-bothered wife to a good ol' boy store owner and another young guy who is seeing her behind his back. The film plays out the story nice and steamy like. It is only when the husband uncovers the two at a make out spot next to the lake and is about to shoot them that the monster decides he wants in on the picnic. The hero, a wildlife inspector played by Ken Clark, has to figure out what is going on, why the store owner, etc. have gone missing, and why all of the gators have disappeared from the lake. The performances are decent, the monster isn't on screen long enough to seem overly ridiculous, there's even some decent suggestions of blood, and for atmosphere and suspense, the film delivers everything you expect from it.

The black-and-white picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1, and the framing looks well balanced. While the image is not always as sharp as the image on **Blood Beast**, it looks decent in well-lit sequences and only becomes murky in the dark or underwater, as might be expected. There are fewer splices, as well. The monophonic sound is fine. Along with a trailer that has a bit of footage unseen in the film, there is a terrific 27-minute profile of Kowalski, who had his greatest successes in television from the Sixties through the early Eighties, and a nice 2-minute montage of photos from the career of costar Yvette Vickers.

There is also a surprisingly good 1992 episode from **Mystery Science Theater 3000** that opens with the first chapter of the Republic Pictures serial, **Undersea Kingdom** (Sep 90) before segueing into a reasonably complete respooling of *Giant Leeches*. It comes from a time when the series was still bubbling over with creative energy. The jokes are often sophisticated (there is a reference to **Fitzcarraldo**), but more importantly, they are often witty, as if a real effort went into coming up with funny comments. Even the skit from between the movie's segments is funnier than usual.

Weaver also supplies another good commentary for **Giant Leeches**, sharing the histories of the cast and the crew again, pointing out his reactions to the film as a child and its scattered shortcomings now, reminiscing about Corman, who gave Weaver an interview about the movie shortly before he passed away, and speaking at length about Vickers and her career, and her tragic, lonely end—it was a number of months before someone investigated the mail that had piled up in her mailbox and discovered she had passed away.

Kowalski also directed the dark but impressive 1970 Avco Embassy western, **Macho Callahan**, a StudioCanal Kino Lorber Incorporated KL Studio Classics DVD release (UPC#738329255497, \$15). David Janssen, with a full beard, and Jean Seberg, whose hair gets chopped down to her normal pixie cut in the second half, deliver exceptional performances, and Kowalski comes up with things we have never seen in a western, before or since. In one scene, a group of men try to ambush Janssen's character at night on the main street of town. They use a horse-drawn cart to distract him, with a couple of killers in the cart, but Janssen's character ends up shooting them all. During the sequence, one of the horses tied to the cart gets shot and falls down dead, and for the rest of the scene, which goes on for a little bit, the horse's corpse is there on the street, with the dead gunmen. Following an amazing and gnarly sequence set in a Confederate prison, and an escape, Janssen kills Seberg's newlywed husband in an impulsive showdown after a misunderstanding. Seberg's character issues a reward, but also starts chasing after him and his partner, played by Pedro Armendariz, Jr., herself. When she catches up to them she muffs her chance to shoot him and after exchanging a number of bloody blows, he rapes her. It is not a rape like Clint Eastwood's lust fantasy with Marianna Hill in **High Plains Drifter**. It is entirely about dominance and violence, without eroticism. While it is tastefully shot, Kowalski makes it very clear what is happening, and there is blood all over both of them when it is over. But then, over the remainder of the 99-minute film, they fall in love anyway, only to have a large posse, hungry for the reward money, following their trail. If you take into account the lengthy opening, the film is really an odyssey across the violent Southwest, and Kowalski brings to it the same intelligence, imagination and care that he brought to his horror features.

Clearly influenced by the Spaghetti westerns, the action scenes are terrific and the performances sell every nuanced progression in the relationship between the two protagonists. Bo Hopkins also has a significant supporting part, with David Carradine and Lee J. Cobb in briefer roles, along with James Booth, Anne Revere, Diane Ladd, Matt Clark and Richard Anderson. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. For the most part, the colors are drained and dusty, but when there is an indoor sequence with brighter hues, it is clear that the film has been carefully transferred, and that the occasional grain, soft shots and a horizontal light flair in one scene are part of the original cinematography. Generally, the image looks terrific. The monophonic sound is fine, and while Pat Williams's musical score could have been a little more aggressive, what is there is pleasing. Once in a while it is difficult to make out the mumbled dialog, but there are optional English subtitles. Along with a trailer, westerns enthusiast Alex Cox supplies a commentary track, talking about the film's status as a founding 'neo-western' entry, and positing it in the progress of both American and European westerns at the time. He suggests that Janssen is, "The least attractive [although the beard looks great, obscuring his normal, sad sack countenance], most unpleasant western hero of them all," but we would offer that it is Seberg's character, not Janssen's, who is the hero of the film. He provides thumbnail profiles of the cast and the crew, but soon settles into repeating the narrative as it unfolds, although once in a while he offers a production insight ("One of the sad things that drew American producers and directors to Mexico was that you could get away with greater levels of animal cruelty than you could in the United States. And so quite often, there is a cockfight.") and he does go into admirable detail contemplating the perhaps impossible storytelling challenge of depicting a relationship that begins with rape but leads to affection.

### Go fix a kite

It is only at the halfway point, when one of the people depicted onscreen starts talking straight to the camera about his life, that unsuspecting viewers will realize **All That Breathes**, a Sideshow Janus Films Criterion Channel Blu-ray (UPC#715515296915, \$30), is a documentary and not a fiction film. The camerawork throughout the 98-minute feature is not just steady, it is elegant, and the editing is so controlled, it takes a while to discover that the four men who are running a hospital for wild birds in the center of New Delhi are not characters but are actually running the place. The film has the aesthetic beauty of a drama. It opens on an amazing—you wonder how it was staged and only later realize that it wasn't—tracking shot at night across an empty lot where scores of rats are scurrying about and tending to their business. Fortunately for the squeamish, as the film properly begins, the camera stops looking down and starts looking up. The men care for kites—the birds, not the toys—that have been injured in the urban wild, and receive grants from wildlife societies (and, presumably, income and donations from the film) to care for them and nurse them until they can carry on again on their own. On the one hand, the men calculate that the city's kites help clean landfills and other outdoor waste by many tons every day. On the other hand, shouldn't they just allow the laws of nature to take their course, since the skies remain filled with birds regardless of their efforts? In any case, the personalities of the Muslim men, their specific efforts to retrieve and repair the birds, and their observations of animal behavior are transfixing, while in the background, the Indian political climate becomes increasingly hostile to Muslims, providing the film with a strong dramatic undercurrent and a distressing counterpoint to their success.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The image is silky smooth and colors are precise. There is an excellent 5.1-channel DTS track that conveys the neighborhood and environmental sounds with a constant rear channel presence and also enables the intricate separation effects in Roger Goula's ornithologically inspired musical score. The film is in Hindi with optional English subtitles and comes with a trailer and an 18-minute interview with director Shaunak Sen, who explains how he wanted to achieve 'cinematic non-fiction' as he provides rewarding reflections on what he thinks he has accomplished.

## The power of Powell and Pressburger

If you are aching to dive into the films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, but you only have a couple of hours to spare, then you can turn to the Cohen Media Group and Kino Lorber Blu-ray release, **Martin Scorsese Presents Made in England The Films of Powell & Pressburger** (UPC#738329267902, \$30), and get your fill, although undoubtedly, once you have finished, you'll want to stop everything and watch all of their movies in full. Running 133 minutes, the film is a reasonably systematic portrait of the life and career primarily of Powell, although Pressburger certainly gets his due during the course of it. Scorsese doesn't just narrate the film, he presents himself as a guide, sharing his own biographical details and inserting lengthy clips from several of his own movies to demonstrate the influence Powell and Pressburger had on him (you can see an even greater influence in the films of Francis Coppola, but no clips are forthcoming). After the introduction, Scorsese basically works his way chronologically through Powell's most important films, deconstructing the strength and appeal (or rare shortcoming) in each one. The only exception, surprisingly, is **The Thief of Bagdad**, which Pressburger did not work on. It gets a mention during the introduction, but in the chronology, Scorsese jumps over it, going straight from **Blackout** to **49<sup>th</sup> Parallel**. Nevertheless, the documentary is a captivating journey through the positively glorious films the two men collaborated upon, as anyone with a decent collection of Blu-rays will attest. Not only are the films deeply complex and meticulously constructed dramas, but they are visually and aurally magnificent accomplishments. Directed by David Hinton with clear input from Scorsese and editor Thelma Schoonmaker (there is no writing credit for the film), the clips are superbly organized and continually riveting, while Scorsese's commentary is insightful, enthusiastic and definitive. Listen to what he has to say about **I Know Where I'm Going!**: "Now this is a film that you show to someone you care about, as a way of possibly trying to say something that you can't put into words. Share the experience, so to speak. It's a film that seems to cast a spell over many romantic relationships. This is a film about Love as a force of nature that can knock your life completely off course."

The clips are presented in their correct aspect ratios and Scorsese's appearances are letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1. Most of the clips are on par with their DVD and Blu-ray transfers in terms of image quality, and there is never a moment where they don't look fantastic, except when Scorsese demonstrates how they used to look on television. The monophonic sound on the clips is carefully transferred to the DTS audio track, and there is a mildly stereophonic original musical score bridging the clips during the biographical passages. There are optional English subtitles, and a trailer.

## In praise of cosplay

You put on the news and you see so much anger and even hatred everywhere that you can really feel like all the good in the world has evaporated, but then you come across a documentary like **Behind the Bucket**, an MVDvisual DVD release (UPC#760-137159315, \$15), and your faith in the humankind is restored. The 'bucket' in the title is what the **Star Wars** cosplay enthusiasts in the film call their helmets. As one might suppose, **Star Wars** cosplay is a hobby that has spread throughout the world, and it has developed such an elaborate organization that various clubs or 'garrisons' have linked together in 'legions.' The 2024 film is specifically about a garrison (the film is subtitled, *A Garrison Story*) in Illinois—Joliet now holds a lucrative annual **Star Wars** parade—and the charity work that the participants mix in with their conventions and other get-togethers. Not only is the documentary a welcome, benign respite from the increasingly divisive and opinionated world that the Internet has magnified and acerbated, but we guarantee that you cannot get through the film's 85-minute running time with dry eyes. Yes, the footage from the conventions is great fun, and the players being interviewed are fascinating, but it is the visits those players make to the children's hospitals and goodwill gatherings which make you realize that, rather than being in regression or otherwise stuck at a certain early level of maturity, these cosplayers have found a way to channel their passion and happiness into a truly rewarding endeavor. When the little girl will not go to her cancer treatment unless the Storm Trooper holds her hand, you'll never snicker at grownups in costumes again.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The image transfer looks fine and colors are sharp whenever the lighting allows. The stereo sound is centered, but the accompanying musical score has a viable dimensionality. There are optional English subtitles and a trailer. Ultimately, the film also serves as a commercial for the legion—it is made very clear in a segment near the end how to find out more about the organization and how to sign up if that is your desire—but by that point in the film, they've earned the privilege to do so.

## DVD news

**THE PERFECT HOLIDAY GIFT:** Don't forget that our collection of nearly 17,000 DVD and Blu-ray reviews in book form as a PDF file on CD-ROM, *DVDs*, would make the ideal holiday gift for any physical media enthusiast. You can get it for \$24.95 by writing to [DVDLaser@rocketmail.com](mailto:DVDLaser@rocketmail.com) or to *DVDs*, PO Box 382, Glen Cove NY 11542. Mention this promotion, and the shipping is on us! Also, please do keep us in mind if you are sharing holiday gratuities. As we have mentioned previously, we have lots of reviews ready to go, but are less and less capable financially of putting out a twelve-page newsletter except during a handful of months in the year. Any additional funds would go directly to enabling a larger newsletter more often...

**CRITERION CORNER:** The Criterion Collection is releasing Jean-Luc Godard's notorious **King Lear** (also known as *Re Lear*), which will come with an audio recording of the 1987 Cannes Film Festival press conference, featuring director Jean-Luc Godard and interviews with Richard Brody, author of *Everything Is Cinema: The Working Life of Jean-Luc Godard*, Molly Ringwald and co-screenwriter Peter Sellars. Nicolas Roeg's **Performance** will be in 4K format and will include *Donald Cammell: The Ultimate Performance* (1998), a documentary by Kevin Macdonald and Chris Rodley; *Influence and Controversy: Making Performance* (2007), a documentary about the making of the film; *The True Story of David Litvinoff*, a new visual essay by Keiron Pim, biographer of dialogue coach and technical adviser David Litvinoff; *Performers on Performance*, a documentary featuring James Fox, Mick

Jagger, Anita Pallenberg, and others; *The Two Cockneys of Harry Flowers*, a program on the dialogue overdubbing done for the U.S. version of the film; and *Memo from Turner*, a program featuring behind-the-scenes footage. Joan Micklin Silver's **Crossing Delancey** will be in 4K and feature a program on the making of the film with Amy Irving, Peter Riegert and screenwriter Susan Sandler, and an audio interview from 1988 with Silver. Gus Van Sant's **Drugstore Cowboy** will be in 4K and will have a commentary featuring Van Sant and Matt Dillon; *The Making of Drugstore Cowboy*, featuring interviews with Van Sant and members of the cast and crew; interviews with Kelly Lynch and cinematography Robert Yeoman; and deleted scenes.

**NEW IN BLU:** The following titles were recently released on Blu-ray—*Acid Bath 15*, *Glitch Ditch 10*, *Glitch Ditch 11*, *Glitch Ditch 12*, *Mind Melters 64*, *Mind Melters 65 (Acid Bath)*; *Attachment*, *A Discovery of Witches Complete Trilogy*, *The Found Footage Phenomenon*, *Murdoch Mysteries Season 17*, *Orphan Black Echoes Season 1 (AMD)*; *2/Duo (Arbelos)*; *Malanova (Ariztical)*; *Moth*, *The Omicron Killer*, *Pale House*, *The Whispering Man (Bayview)*; *Holocaust Cannibal (Bill Zebub)*; *In Memoriam (Bleeding Skull)*; *And Who Taught You to Drive?*; *Discount Workers*, *Hi Ai*, *Holy Cow*, *My Stuff*, *Neuland*, *Raving Iran*, *Transit Havana*, *Walking under Water*, *Waterproof (Blue Water)*; *Carl Barron A One Ended Stick*, *Carl Barron Drinking with a Fork*, *Carl Barron Live*, *Carl Barron Skating Rink for Flies*, *Carl Barron Walking Down the Street*, *Carl Barron Wompo Street*, *Hungry Ghost Diner*, *Isaac's Dream*, *Sweet Rhythm*, *That's Not My Dog!*, *Your Love Is Mine (Bounty)*; *Best Supporting Actors*, *Country Rain*, *Future*, *Hotel Limbo*, *The Karate Princess (Burning Bulb)*; *Abducted (Canadian)*; *Beaten to Death*, *Corpse Mania*, *The Ghost Dance*, *Hollywood 90028*, *Horrible High Heels*, *Junk Films*, *The Tenant*, *The Warrior*, *The Warrior and the Blind Swordsman / The Warrior and the Ninja (CAV)*; *Frankie Freako*, *Golden Harvest V.1 Supernatural Shockers (Cinedigm)*; *Dangerous Game (Cinematographe)*; *Funny Girl*, *Paper Moon*, *Ryuichi Sakamoto Opus*, *Scarface (Criterion)*; *Dude Bro Party Massacre III (Dekanalog)*; *Bezel (Epic)*; *Power of Grayskull The Definitive History of He-Man and the Masters of the Universe (ETR)*; *Kid-Thing (Factory 25)*; *Coma*, *The Reflecting Skin (Film Movement)*; *Laurel & Hardy Year Two (Flicker Alley)*; *The American Question*, *Auld Lang Syne*, *Citizen Weiner*, *Did I?*, *Escaping Ohio*, *Feather Christmas*, *The Fix*, *Healing Waters*, *In Flight*, *Kitty To Coopers-town*, *The Last Day of Retrograde*, *Lead and Copper*, *Okie*, *Portraits*, *Ranger*, *Still Life*, *Veselka (Gravitas)*; *The Last Breath (Image)*; *Devil's Men (Indican)*; *Karnal*, *Plastic (Kani)*; *Battle Commandos*, *The Boss*, *California*, *Cattle Drive*, *The Court-Martial of Billy Mitchell*, *Forbidden Fruit The Golden Age of the Exploitation Feature V.17*, *The Fright*, *Harrison's Flowers*, *The Italian Connection*, *The Lonely Man*, *Martin Scorsese Presents Made in England The Films of Powell and Pressburger*, *Merchant Ivory The Documentary*, *Mountains of the Moon*, *No. 1 of the Secret Service*, *On the Road with Bob Hope and Bing Crosby*, *1000 Convicts and a Woman*, *Prey for Rock & Roll*, *The Proud and the Profane*, *Revenge of the Zombies*, *Roseland*, *Seven Chances and Sherlock Jr.*, *Triumph of the Spirit*, *The Visitors*, *Wolfman's Got Nards (Kino)*; *Ash and Dust*, *Dark Cloud*, *Gingersnap Christmas*, *Gleahan and the Knives of Industry*, *The Red Book Ritual (Leomark)*; *The Crow*, *The 430 Movie*, *The Killer's Game*, *1992*, *Reagan (Lionsgate)*; *Strange Darling (Magenta)*; *Dance First*, *Murder Party*, *Yoshiki Under the Sky (Magnolia)*; *Fudoh: The Next Generation (Media Blasters)*; *The King of Queens Complete Series*, *Ultraman Blazar Complete Series (Mill Creek)*; *Fear Dot Com*, *The Snowtown Murders (MPI)*; *All Haunts Be Ours A Compendium of Folk Horror V.2*, *Blue Christmas*, *Charley Chase at Hal Roach The Late Silents 1927*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Daiei Gothic Japanese Horror Stories*, *Dario Argento's Deep Cuts*, *Facets of Love*, *Invasion*, *Infinite Santa 8000*, *Japan Organized Crime Boss*, *Le Beau Mec*, *Night of the Blood Beast*, *Salt of the Earth*, *Santa Claus*, *Scrimshaw V.3*, *Silent Bite*, *A Simple Plan*, *Slap the Monster on Page One*, *Super Spies and Secret Lies*, *The Sword*, *Tomie*, *2020 Texas Gladiators*, *Village of Doom*, *Zyzyx Road (MVD)*; *The Forest Hills (My Way)*; *Alien Love (Nathan Hill)*; *Solstice (Nitestar)*; *Once within a Time (Oscilloscope)*; *I Love Lucy Complete Series*, *Leonardo da Vinci A Film by Ken Burns*, *South Park Not Suitable for Children*, *Star Trek Prodigy Season 2 (Paramount)*; *Family Life*, *Left Right Center*, *The Man Who Had Power over Women (Powerhouse)*; *Night of the Missing (Precinct 84)*; *Art Thief*, *Campton Manor*, *Christmas at the Holly Day Inn*, *The Great Escape*, *Green Light*, *Gut Pile*, *Gypsy Moon*, *He Dreams of Giants*, *Hell Hath No Fury*, *Here to Be Heard The Story of the Slits*, *Hurt by Paradise*, *Ibiza Dark*, *Ingress*, *Marbles and Bullets*, *Night Shoot*, *A Prelude to Fear*, *The Private Eye*, *Rage*, *Royal Façade*, *S.D.I.*, *Skelly*, *Skinford Death Sentence*, *Werewolf Santa*, *Wickedly Evil*, *Zebra Girl (Rising Sun)*; *Followers (Scream Box)*; *AfrAid*, *Fraggle Rock Back to the Rock Season 1*, *Frank Capra at Columbia Collection*, *It Ends with Us*, *You Can't Run Away from It (Sony)*; *Delirium (Syndicado)*; *Godzilla Minus One (Toho)*; *Genie*, *Speak No Evil (Universal)*; *Night (VHShitfest)*; *Beetlejuice Beetlejuice*, *Blink Twice*, *The Complete Thin Man Collection*, *Doctor Who The Jodie Whittaker Years*, *House of the Dragon Season 2*, *Humoresque*, *Looney Tunes Collector's Choice V.4*, *A Man Called Shenandoah Complete Series*, *Must Love Dogs*, *Planet Earth Trilogy*, *Sweethearts*, *Trap (Warner)*; *You Gotta Believe (Well Go)* [Give Me an A (XYZ)]; *Swallowed (Yellow Veil)*; *About Cannabis & Cancer*, *Alpine Zoos & You*, *Anxious America*, *Brexit The Will of the People*, *Bullybusters*, *Cannabis v.s. Cancer*, *Divine Astrology*, *Dogman Tales*, *Life After (Zapruderflix)*

**NEW IN 4K:** The following titles were recently issued in 4K format—*Corpse Mania*, *The Tenant (CAV)*; *Bones and All*, *Born on the Fourth of July*, *The Dark Crystal*, *Dragon The Bruce Lee Story*, *Hush*, *Krampus The Naughty Cut*, *Labyrinth*, *The Last Unicorn*, *Rush (Cinedigm)*; *Funny Girl*, *Godzilla*, *Paper Moon*, *Scarface*, *The Seven Samurai*, *The Shape of Water (Criterion)*; *Arabesque*, *Bug*, *Circus of Horrors*, *The Eiger Sanction*, *The Fright*, *Hunted*, *Play Misty for Me*, *Two Mules for Sister Sara*, *The Visit (Kino)*; *The Crow*, *The Killer's Game (Lionsgate)*; *Fudoh The Next Generation (Media Blasters)*; *Elvira Mistress of the Dark*, *Invasion*, *A Simple Plan*, *Zyzyx (MVD)*; *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie*, *Star Trek The Motion Picture*, *We Were Soldiers*, *White Christmas*, *ZAZ The Collection!* (Paramount); *Frank Capra at Columbia Collection*, *Little Women (Sony)*; *Godzilla Minus One (Toho)*; *Gladiator*, *Last Christmas*, *The Sugarland Express (Universal)*; *Beetlejuice Beetlejuice*, *Blazing Saddles*, *North by Northwest*, *The Terminator*, *Trap (Warner)*; *Twilight of the Warriors Walled In*, *You Gotta Believe (Well Go)*

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Table with 4 columns: BDs, (The Films of Powell & Pressburger) p11, (The Jade Tiger) p6, (The New One-Armed Swordsman) p4, Shawscope Volume Three p4, Sweethearts p8, Tag 4K p9, Tattooed Life p8, The Terminator 4K p2, You Can't Run Away from It p8, DVDs, Behind the Bucket p11, Deadpool & Wolverine p3, Macho Callahan p10

Current Attractions

- The following titles recently appeared for the first time: Abduction of the Innocent (Wild Eye), About Cannabis & Cancer (Zapruderfix)\*, Adam the First (Electric)\*, The Adventures of Jane (Sinister) AfrAd (Sony), Alien Love (Nathan Hill), All Happy Families (Freestyle), All Shall Be Well (Strand), Alone in the Night (Sinister), Alpine Zoos & You (Zapruderfix)\*, The American Question (Gravitas), The American Vice President (Paramount), Amityville Turkey Day (SRS), And Who Taught You to Drive? (Blue Water)\*, Andromeda Nebula (Sinister), Anxious America (Zapruderfix)\*, Apartment 7A (Paramount), Apex Predators 2 The Spawning (Wild Eye), Art Thief (Rising Sun)\*, Ash and Dust (Leomark), Auld Lang Syne (Gravitas)\*, Bad Actor (Decal)\*, Bad Lieutenant Port of Call New Orleans (SRS), Barbie & Kendra Crash Joe Bob's Drive-In Jamboree (Wizard), The Beast That Killed Women (Sinister), Beetlejuice Beetlejuice (Warner), Best of Dutch Mantel V.1 (Team)\*, Best of Mid America Wrestling V.3 (Team)\*, Best Supporting Actors (Burning Bulb), Between the Temples (Sony), The Big Show (Alpha)\*, The Binding (Breaking Glass)\*, Blink Twice (Warner), The Blood Rose (Sinister), Bloody Pleasure (Sinister), Blue Christmas (MVD), A Bluegrass Christmas (Mill Creek), Brexit The Will of the People (Zapruderfix)\*, Buddyboy (Sinister), Bullybusters (Zapruderfix)\*, Campton Manor (Rising Sun)\*, Cannabis v.s. Cancer (Zapruderfix)\*, Carl Barron Drinking with a Fork (Bounty)\*, Carl Barron Live (Bounty)\*, Carl Barron One Ended Stick (Bounty)\*, Carl Barron Skating Rink for Files (Bounty)\*, Carl Barron Walking Down the Street (Bounty)\*, Carl Barron Wampoo Street (Bounty)\*, Cat and Keet Season 1 (Dreamscape), Cat and Keet Season 2 (Dreamscape), Charley Chase at Hal Roach The Late Silents (MVD), Christmas at the Holly Day Inn (Rising Sun)\*, Christmas at Xander Point (BMG), Christmas Bloodbath (Glamboy)\*, A Christmas Carol (Electric)\*, A Christmas Carol (MPI), Christmas Cowboy (Vision)\*, Christmas Island (Cinedigm), The Christmas Letter (BMG), Christmas on Cherry Lane (Cinedigm), Citizen Weiner (Gravitas), Classified (Sony), A Coffin from Hong Kong (Sinister), Cold Harvest (SP)\*, The Cost (Electric)\*

- Country Rain (Burning Bulb), The Crow (Lionsgate), Curly Scent (Freestyle)\*, Dance First (Magnolia), Dead Money (Samuel Goldwyn), Decade of the Dark (MPI)\*, Defying Destiny (Alpha)\*, Delirium (Syndicado)\*, Devil's Men (Indican), Did I? (Gravitas), Discount Workers (Blue Water)\*, Discovering Who Is This Jesus? (Dreamscape), Divine Astrology (Zapruderfix)\*, Doctor Jekyll (Lonestar)\*, Dogman Tales (Zapruderfix)\*, Dogon Theory of Creation (360), Double Identity (SP)\*, Dreama Team (Freestyle), Escaping Ohio (Gravitas), The Fairly OddParents Season 9 (Paramount)\*, The Fairly OddParents Season 10 (Paramount)\*, Fancy Like Walker Hayes (Virgil), Fantomas against Fantomas (Sinister), Fazi (Alpha)\*, Feather Christmas (Gravitas)\*, Finding Rin Tin Tin (SP)\*, Fittest on Earth Final Showdown in Madtown (Gravitas), The Fix (Gravitas)\*, Food and Country (Kino), Food Energy Water (Dreamscape), The Forest Hills (My Way), Found Emulsion (Wild Eye), The 4:30 Movie (Lionsgate)\*, Fraggle Rock Back to the Rock Season 1 (Sony)\*, Friends & Family Christmas (Cinedigm), Fruit Ninja Frenzy Force (Dreamscape), Genie (Universal), Gingersnap Christmas (Leomark)\*, Girl on the Run (Sinister), Glitch Ditch 10 (Acid Bath), Glitch Ditch 11 (Acid Bath), Glitch Ditch 12 (Acid Bath), God's Not Dead In God We Trust (Pure Fix)\*, Godzilla Minus One (Toho), Goebbels and the Fuhrer (Sam Goldwyn)\*, Good Grief (Dreamscape), The Great Escape (Rising Sun)\*, Green Light (Rising Sun)\*, Guy Manly Super Spy (Level 33)\*, Gypsy Moon (Rising Sun)\*, Haut Out the Holly Lit Up (Cinedigm), He Dreams of Giants (Rising Sun)\*, Healing Waters (Gravitas)\*, Hell Hath No Fury (Rising Sun)\*, Here to Be Heard The Story of the Silts (Rising Sun)\*, Hi Ai (Blue Water)\*, The Hidden Way (Alpha)\*, History Kids Famous Explorers (Wonderscape), The History of Cybernetics (360), Holiday Twist (BMG)\*, Holy Cow (Blue Water)\*, Hotel Limbo (Burning Bulb), Hounds (Indican)\*, Hounds of War (Decal), House of the Dragon Season 2 (Warner), How to Kill Your Neighbor's Dog (SP)\*, Hungry Ghost Diner (Bounty)\*, Hurt by Paradise (Rising Sun)\*, I Like Movies (Freestyle), Ibiza Dark (Rising Sun)\*, In Flight (Gravitas)\*, In Water (Cinema Guild), Infinity (Dreamscape), Ingress (Rising Sun)\*, Iron Fist The Giants Are Coming (Sinister), Isaac's Dream (Bounty)\*, It Ends with Us (Sony)

- It's Coming (Freestyle)\*, Journey into the Beyond (Sinister), The Karate Princess (Burning Bulb)\*, Kill Switch (SP)\*, The Killer's Game (Lionsgate), King of Kings Chasing Edward Jones (Freestyle)\*, Kitty To Cooperstown (Gravitas)\*, Lady in White (Sinister)\*, Lany Zbyszko (Team)\*, The Last Breath (Image), The Last Day of Retrograde (Gravitas)\*, The Last Outlaw (Alpha)\*, Last Shadow at First Light (Indiepix), Le Beau Mlec (MVD), Lead and Copper (Gravitas)\*, Leonardo Da Vinci A Film by Ken Burns (Paramount), Letters to Santa (Cinedigm)\*, Lies and Illusions (SP)\*, Life After (Zapruderfix)\*, Life and Me (BMG), The Listener (Sinister), The Little Rascals Complete Collection (Classic Fix), Liverleaf (SRS), Lore (Lonestar)\*, Luna, Chip & Inkie Season 1 (Dreamscape), Luna, Chip & Inkie Season 2 (Dreamscape), Luther vs. Rome (Dreamscape), Mad about the Boy The Noel Coward Story (Kino), Malanau (Arizical), The Man Outside (Sinister), The Man Who Thought Life (Sinister), Marbles and Bullets (Rising Sun)\*, The Marlow Murder Club Season 1 (Paramount), Martin Compston's Scottish Fling (Dreamscape), Martin Scorsese Presents Made in England The Films of Powell and Pressburger (Kino), Master Spy (Sinister), Mayor of Kingstown Season 3 (Paramount), The Mechanic (SP)\*, Merchant Ivory The Documentary (Kino), Merry Birthday Happy Christmas (BMG), Mind Melters 64 (Acid Bath), Mind Melters 65 (Acid Bath), Moonflower Murders (Paramount), Murder in a Red Jaguar (Sinister), Murdoch Mysteries Season 17 (AMD), My Christmas Guide (Cinedigm), My Father's War (Dreamscape), My Stuff (Blue Water)\*, Mystery on Mistletoe Lane/Catch Me If You Claus/To All a Good Night (Cinedigm), Neuland (Blue Water)\*, Night of the Blood Beast (MVD), Night Shoot (Rising Sun)\*, 1992 (Lionsgate)\*, Ninja (SP)\*, Oh! Those Most Secret Agents! (Sinister), Okie (Gravitas)\*, On the Wandering Paths (Film Movement), Once within a Time (Oscilloscope), 100 Hearts (Castletown)\*, Orphan Black Echoes Season 1 (AMD), Paid to Love (Alpha)\*, Parish (AMD), PBS Kids Barnyard Buddies (Paramount), The Peacekeeper (SP)\*, Piper (Freestyle)\*, Port of Escape (Sinister), Portraits (Gravitas)\*, Pot Luck (Sinister)\*, A Prelude to Fear (Rising Sun)\*, Puzzle (Sinister), Rage (Rising Sun)\*, Ranger (Gravitas)\*, Raving Iran (Blue Water)\*

- Reagan (Lionsgate)\*, A Real Job (Film Movement), The Red Book Ritual (Leomark), The Revenge of the Crusader (Sinister), Ricky Morton (Team)\*, Riding Tornado (Dreamscape), Robert Gibson (Team)\*, Roseland (Kino), Royal Façade (Rising Sun)\*, Ryuichi Sakamoto | Opus (Criterion), S.D.I. (Rising Sun)\*, Sadisterica (Sinister), Sally of the Sawdust (Alpha)\*, Samson in the Wax Museum (Sinister), Sandokan against the Leopard of Sarawak (Sinister), Santa Claus (MVD), Saving Christmas (Vision)\*, School of Fear (Sinister), Science Kids Biggest and Baddest Tornadoes (Wonderscape), Sea Change The Gulf of Maine (Paramount), Sealed with a List (Cinedigm), Secrets of Sacred Architecture (Dreamscape), Seeking Mavis Bacon (Decal)\*, Siesta Z Season 1 (Dreamscape), Siesta Z Season 2 (Dreamscape), Sigfrido (Sinister), Silent Bite (MVD), Skincare (MPI), Skinford Death Sentence (Rising Sun)\*, Snuff Queen (MVD), Solstice (Nitestar), Someone Like You (Mill Creek), South Park Not Suitable for Children (Paramount), Space Shuttle (360), Space Station (360), Speak No Evil (Universal), SpongeBob SquarePants Season 14 (Paramount), The Stalking (Wild Eye), Star Trek Prodigy Season 2 (Paramount), Stealing Jokes (Freestyle), Still Life (Leomark), Strange Darling (Magenta)\*, Stranger in the Family (Sinister), A Sudden Case of Christmas (Cinedigm), Sweet Rhythm (Bounty)\*, Tales of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Season 1 (Paramount)\*, That's Not My Dog! (Bounty)\*, The Titans (Sinister), Tobor and the Atomic Submarine (Sinister), Tomorrow I'll Wake Up and Scald Myself with Tea (Sinister), Tramp Tramp Tramp (Alpha)\*, Transit Havana (Blue Water)\*, Trap (Warner), Turning Point (Leomark), Turtles (MPI), 20000 Species of Bees (Film Movement), Twilight of the Warriors Walked In (Well Go), The Twisters (Greenfield), Ukrainian Women (Dreamscape), Village of Doom (MVD), Walking under Water (Blue Water)\*, Wall of Death (Sinister), Waterproof (Blue Water)\*, Werewolf Santa (Rising Sun)\*, What Happened Then? (Sinister), Why Do We Even Work (Dreamscape), Wickedly Evil (Rising Sun)\*, Yoshiki Under the Sky (Magnolia), You Gotta Believe (Well Go)\*, Your Love Is Mine (Bounty)\*, Zebra Girl (Rising Sun)\*, Zzyzx Road (MVD)

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

- The Story of Bookworm Gogo, → Transformation, → The Watches Season 1, → From Film Movement: → Close Your Eyes, → From First Run: Much Ado about Dying, → Touristic Intent, → From Freestyle: → The Ghost Trap, → Samson, → My Last Nerve, → Beyond Bars, → The Effects of Lying, → Allswell in New York, → Daruma, → From Full Moon: → Fittest on Earth Final Showdown in Madtown, → From Ignite: The Story of G.I. Joe, → From Indiepix: Affat, Everything Will Be Alright, → Tito Margot and Me, → From Intellectual: Joy Christmas with the Tabernacle Choir, → From Ketchup: Hellboy The Crooked Man, → From Kino: Daytime Revolution (John Lennon), The Critic, Fancy Like Walter Hayes Starring Jerry As Himself Only the River Flows Never Look Away, → The Quest Everset, → I Could Never Go Vegan, → Soundtrack to a Coup D'Etat, → Carville Winning Is Everything Stupid, → Separated, → Master Crimes, → From Leomark: → You Me and Christmas Makes Three, → From Lionsgate: Never Let Go, Ancient Aliens Season 20, White Bird, Crust, Cursed in Baja, A Biltmore Christmas, → Time for Her to Come Home for Christmas, → Miracle in Bethlehem PA, → A Merry Scottish Christmas, → Falling in Love in Niagara/A Whitewater Romance, → From Classicflix: Angel Complete Series V.1, → From Cover: → Terrorifer 3, → From Criterion: The Beast, Evil Does Not Exist, The Mother and the Whore, → King Lear (Godard), → From Dark Arts: Snuff Queen, → From Decal: → Monster Summer, → Rumours, → From Deepkopp: The Conversation (WWII), → The Post, → Ikonophile Z, → From Dreamscape: → Arthur and the Minimoys Season 1, → Arthur and the Minimoys Season 2, → Arthur and the Minimoys Season 3, → Bible Land Passages, → Climate for Change, → Extraordinary Ecosystems, → Heavens to Betsy, → The Incredible Journey: Daniel, → The Insanity of God, → She Has a Name

- The Connection Severed From Paramount: Criminal Minds Evolution Season 17, Paw Patrol Rescue Wheels, South Park The End of Obesity War Machine World War II Transformers One, Blue Bloods Final Season, Blue Bloods Complete Series (71 platters), Seal Team Final Season, Seal Team Complete Series (30 platters), → Voices American Historia The Untold Story of Latinos, → Dracula's Hidden Kingdom, → PBS Kids Birthday Bash, → Lions of the Skeleton Coast, → Smile 2, → From Pure Fix: → Average Joe, → From Relativity: The Apprentice, → From Sandpaper: Sleepaway Camp II, Unhappy Campers, Sleepaway Camp III, Teenage Wasteland, The Pope of Greenwich Village, River's Edge, Mulholland Falls, → Heavy Traffic, → The Land That Time Forgot, → Cast a Giant Shadow, → From Shoreline: → The Rise of OnlyFans, → Lichtenberg, → From Sol Deo Gloria: → The Domino Revival, → From Sony: The Forge, → The Outrun, → From SRS: Mother Mortis, The Maker of Monsters, Killin' Time, → Dariuss, → Nundead, → Killcast, → The Last Amityville Movie, → Flesh Eaters, → From Strand: → High Tide, → From TLA: → Sunflower, → From Universal: The Wild Robot, → Piece by Piece, → From Virgil: The Quest Everest, I Could Never Go Vegan, → World Series Champ, The 2023 World Series (Texas Rangers), → To Dye For The Documentary, → From Warner: → Doctor Who 60th Anniversary Specials, Joker: Folie A Deux, → From Well Go: Ghosts of Red Ridge, → Bangkok Dog, → Duchess, → Get Fast, → A Legend (Jackie Chan), → From What Were We Thinkin': → Slice of America Charred in the Florida Sun, → From Wild Eye: Space Sharks, Dariuss, → From Wonderscape: Space Kids Science in Space, → From Nowonw: → Hermeticism and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, → Monsterland 3, → Gladiator The Real Story, → Dracula's Drive-In Atom Age Vampire