

THE DVD- LASER DISC NEWSLETTER

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A sci-fi DVD blockbuster

Both versions of James Cameron's 1989 underwater sci-fi adventure, **The Abyss**, have been bundled with an elaborate collection of special features in the 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment release, **The Abyss Special Edition** (2000008, \$35). In order to placate nervous Fox executives who wanted a more flexible theatrical running time, Cameron cut his initial 171 minute version down to 145 minutes. To do that, however, he didn't just trim walks down hallways and such. Instead, he removed an entire story component, including integral parts of the film's climax, elaborate special effects sequences and the film's **Day the Earth Stood Still** moral. As a result, while the original theatrical version is an impressive and exciting film, it seems utterly dry and pointless after one has viewed Cameron's original version. On the other hand, Fox presents both versions of the film in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. Yet Cameron's shooting style is such that his full screen framings are just as viable as his letterbox framings, and when one compares the two formats on LD (Apr 93, May 93), the scenes of action and spectacle are better served by the letterboxed image, but the romantic and dramatic scenes sometimes work better in full screen. Hence, the DVD might have been more valuable if Fox had dropped the theatrical version altogether and included the full screen version in its place.

Anyway, both movies are presented on a single-sided dual-layer platter. We assume this was accomplished by programming the longer version to jump over parts for playback of the shorter version, since there would not otherwise be enough room on the DVD for both films. There are anomalies in the playback of the standard theatrical version, not that anyone is going to watch it often enough to care. In chapter 5, for example, the dialog goes way out of synch, while lip movements match precisely on the longer version. The picture on the standard version also tended to freeze in places on the copy we viewed, though we could detect no consistent correlation between the freezing and the cuts, and we doubt it is an encoding problem. A jacket insert details every piece of footage added to the longer version.

The picture quality on both presentations is identical, as is the sound. The image is fabulously crisp, with gorgeous, rich hues and a precise stability in all lighting conditions. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital soundtrack is outstanding. The film's audio mix is so elaborate that even today, ten years later, few blockbusters can match it. The DVD's Dolby Digital track is almost as good as the LD's Dolby Digital track (Dec 96). Although tones on the LD are a bit sharper in places, and the surround and sub-woofer channels are a bit more detailed, the two tracks are almost indistinguishable.

The films have optional English and Spanish subtitles, and a third subtitling option that provides facts and insights about the making of the film. So long as these facts stick to the actual production, they

are quite good, providing many insights on how effects were accomplished, how various other components, such as the cinematography and sound, were achieved, and pointing out subtleties in various shots and scenes. When the comments turn to trivia, however, they become more haphazard, such as the statement, in reference to a line of dialog, "*Roger Ramjet* was a popular military cartoon hero from 1950s television." Wrong, *Ramjet* was syndicated in 1965. A large cast & crew profile section and a good collection of production essays are also included. A DVD-ROM function presents the complete shooting script, with the film playing in one window and the storyboards in another.

And all that is just on one platter. On a second platter included with the DVD, there is an excellent 60 minute documentary, which also appeared on the LDs, about the many problems and conflicts that occurred during the shoot, as well as a behind-the-scenes look at how the film was put together. The documentary is not captioned. A standard, 10 minute 'making of' featurette is also included, along with several trailers. Another complete version of the shooting script is presented, as is Cameron's original story treatment, all 773 storyboards, an enormous collection of design sketches and production photos (you can spend days going through them), and an elaborate production essay that incorporates many of these components. The cast & crew segment is also repeated. Three simple computer games are offered on DVD-ROM.

Ed Harris and Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio star in the story of an 'underwater mining station' that has a close encounter with alien beings. Seen in its completed form, the narrative has a cohesive momentum and a deft dichotomy of scope between the intimate romantic story of the two heroes and the global impact of the alien visitation. The special effects are mesmerizing and the action scenes are exciting. It is a major film that had the bad luck to be misrepresented when it was first presented to the world, but has since earned its rightful place as a sci-fi classic thanks to initial distribution of the LDs and the now widespread distribution of the DVD.

Old politics, modern war

A highly entertaining and rousing funny action-adventure film, David O. Russell's ***Three Kings*** is also an important drama that re-writes history, revealing to the American populace what really happened at the conclusion of the Gulf War. History is written by the victors, but Russell's film, by the very nature of its popularity, will obligate future historians to acknowledge the incompleteness of America's humanitarian victory and contemplate the moral ambiguities of its efforts, ambiguities deftly symbolized by the amoral efforts of the movie's heroes.

George Clooney, Mark Wahlberg and Ice Cube portray American soldiers, sneaking into Iraq shortly after the ceasefire and trying to take possession of Iraqi war booty for themselves, who become trapped in a de facto civil war between pro and anti-Saddam Hussein forces. The film is not perfect. The last third seems overly labored as it works its way to a traditional and somewhat pat movie conclusion, though that is less noticeable on multiple viewings. Russell has conceived an exhilarating and inventive style for the film, deftly using a 'new' look to reflect the idea that the Gulf conflict was a 'new' type of war. The movie may even be more exciting for its unique visuals and cultural revelations (a soldier captured by the enemy can still surreptitiously call home on a cell phone) than it is in rescuing the heroes from their predicament, but its integral, gut-busting and often gross humor is the key to its success, leaving the viewer eager to find out what will happen next at every step.

Warner Home Video's DVD release (17862, \$25) opens with a warning that the washed out colors and step-printed movements in the movie are artistically deliberate and not a flaw in the transfer. The presentation looks great. It is in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback, though because of Russell's approach, this is one movie that even works when you watch it 'squeezed.' Russell and cinematographer Newton Thomas Sigel actually changed the look of the movie at a couple points to reflect changes in the experiences of the characters, so that while the first part of the film is drained and grainy, later scenes are solid and colorful.

Like almost everything else in the movie, the film does not have a normal sound mix. There are not the expected colors to gunshots and explosions that one hears in a blockbuster, and the dialog sounds more like a street interview than copiously preserved speech. Nevertheless, the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital track is highly engaging, with plenty of subwoofer and surround activity. The 115 minute film comes with optional English and French subtitles, production notes, production photos, a 'hidden' TV commercial and a trailer.

If **Three Kings** does change how we look at history, then the DVD is its documentation. The film is accompanied by two commentary tracks, several featurettes and elaborate DVD-ROM materials. While most of the features focus on the production of the film, some do explore the meanings of the war quite extensively. One commentary track features Russell by himself, responding to unheard prompts. He did extensive research while working on the script and discusses at length the complicated political situation that existed both before and after Hussein invaded Kuwait. He appears to think that America was wrong for not supporting the anti-Hussein forces, but on the second track, producers Charles Roven and Edward L. McDonnell take a more balanced view, pointing out that while the rebels were clearly wronged by the false sense of encouragement they received from the Americans, the nature of the international military alliance and expenditure limits, both in American lives and money, prevented the U.S. from going beyond the liberation of Kuwait.

Russell also talks extensively about his stylistic choices, his narrative choices and his experiences during the shoot. Knowing that the film would be unusual and risky, Warner tried to trim the shooting schedule on him, so he maintained a second 'secret' script and went a couple weeks over schedule on his 'official' script, actually coming in two days under his own original estimates. He explains how the special effects were achieved, talks about Wahlberg's request to be electrocuted and points out that he had just been joking with the Newsweek reporter who wrote that a real corpse had been used in one of the shots.

Roven and McDonnell also talk about staging the production (which was shot, quite impressively, in the American Southwest, using, apparently, every Iraqi immigrant living in Phoenix), but they are able to say a little more about Russell's talents and the film's artistic achievements. Both Russell and the producers talk about the screening given to President Clinton, nerve-wracking experience that ended well.

There is a standard 20 minute featurette that contains many cast member interviews and lots of location footage. In a 10 minute piece, production designer Catherine Hardwicke provides a complete tour of the 'Iraqi village' set and explains why each aspect of it was chosen. Another 7 minute segment features Sigel, who explains how the cinematography was executed, although Russell also covers the subject extensively in his talk, and there is an amusing 2 minute segment with Ice Cube, who pretends he is the most important cog in the production.

Russell, apparently, takes a camcorder with him wherever he goes, and 14 minutes of footage from that is also featured, including phone messages about getting the green light, other phone messages when actors turned down parts, the hiring of another actor (on camera), shots of storyboards, rehearsals, what his apartment looks like and many other fascinating details. The DVD also has 6 minutes of deleted scenes with commentary. Most of the scenes would have stretched out the film unnecessarily, although all are very inventive sequences.

The DVD-ROM segment contains a lot of factual information about the war and more publicity materials about the film. There is also a replication of a map used in the movie. Selecting points on the map can bring up outstanding 360-degree views of the film's locations, as well as clips from the movie at those locations and the original design schematics. Another option looks at one of the big special effect sequences, with integrated displays of footage, script and storyboards to show how the scene was constructed. Not only do these sequences make excellent use of the DVD-ROM format, they continue the sense of modernist design that Russell instigated.

The Birds is good!

We once thought that the Universal LD release of **The Birds** (Aug 86) was pretty nice, but it looks like absolute junk compared to Universal's fabulous *Collector's Edition Alfred Hitchcock Collection* DVD (20275, \$30). For one thing, the DVD presentation is letterboxed, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. In comparison to the cropped LD, nothing on the letterboxed image is lost on the top and bottom of the picture, while picture information is added to the sides. While it is usually just decoration, some of the imagery dropped from the cropped version includes bird-themed designs and other pertinent figures. The color transfer is also vastly improved over the now grainy, over-saturated LD. Fleshtones look gorgeous and other hues are crisp and precise. Business suits that look bluish on the LD are a pure grey on the DVD, and are so crisp you can make out the pinstripes in a long shot.

A quality picture transfer is exceptionally important on Hitchcock's 1963 thriller, because the drama takes a while to accelerate and can seem dated if a viewer is not fully attentive. With the picture looking

so stunningly fresh, it is a lot easier to tolerate the gradual romance, and accept the film's evocative but ambiguous conclusion. For fans who already enjoy the feature, about birds attacking people in a small town on the California coast, the DVD is an utter delight.

Rod Taylor and 'Tippi' Hedren star, with Jessica Tandy, Suzanne Pleshette and Veronica Cartwright. The story, about an heiress chasing after an attractive bachelor who still lives with his mother, has the format of a comedy but no outward humor. In his previous films, birds often were used by Hitchcock to represent parents, particularly the way in which parents harangue and otherwise torment children, and these metaphors are embellished quite elaborately in a movie entirely about birds attacking people and children. Oddly, Hitchcock 'discovered' Hedren, took her under his wing and gave her the part, lied to her until the last minute about what would be required of her in the scene where she is attacked, and then bombarded her so horrifically that she ended up in the hospital for a week. Hence, while the drama used as the background for the bird attacks may at first glance seem vacuous and contrived, it is actually reflecting some very deep and strange psychological conflicts and is worthy of extended multiple viewings.

The monophonic sound is also in excellent condition. The film's 'score' was an electronic manipulation of bird noises, which sounds crisp and pure on the DVD's audio track. The 120 minute program also has a French audio track, optional English subtitles, a cast-and-director profile section, Hitchcock's very funny trailer, two terrific newsreel promotional segments, a great collection of production photos, a storyboard segment and some production notes.

More extensive supplementary features include an 80 minute or so (it isn't time encoded) retrospective documentary; 20 minutes of fascinating screen test footage showing Hedren working with Martin Balsam (she has to kiss him. Ewww.) and conversing with Hitchcock off camera; and script excerpts detailing two scenes that did not make it into the film—an elaborate ending, from screenwriter Evan Hunter, that just has more of what had already happened, and a scene that was shot, showing Hedren and Taylor's characters getting to know one another. The latter is accompanied by stills.

The documentary is super, going into all aspects of the production, including the special effects, the bird wranglers and the musical score. Taylor (who looks like Walter Cronkite now!) has amusing reminiscences about first meeting Hitchcock. Hunter talks about formulating the script and how surprised he was that Hitchcock didn't use his ending. Hedren is interviewed extensively and talks freely about both the highs and the lows of the shoot. For better or worse, the film did make her a star, and she knew that is what would happen when she was working on it.

To the moon

An Oscar-nominated documentary about the NASA moon trips, **For All Mankind**, has been issued by Criterion Collection (FOR040, \$40). Blending the footage from all the flights into one trip (Criterion has conveniently provided identifications for the different flights and the astronauts as a subtitling option), the 79 minute program is an adept blending of history and filmmaking artistry.

The soundtrack combines voiceover interviews with the astronauts, a Brian Eno score, and some really incredible blastoff sound effects. To this end, the DVD's audio presents the 1989 film's soundtrack remastered for 5.1-channel Dolby Digital, which has more distinctive separations than the LD's standard stereo track (Aug 89), although we still prefer the punch of the LD's audio at blastoff time. The picture quality of the NASA archival footage looks terrific, with deep, rich blues and clear details, though there are scattered speckles and mild variations from one source to the next. The program also has standard optional English subtitles, a collection of audio-only clips from many different NASA flights, a further collection of NASA film clips, and a collection of paintings by astronaut Alan L. Bean, accompanied by a Bean commentary that introduces the paintings but also references his experiences on the moon.

Additionally, a new commentary track, recorded in 1999 by filmmaker Al Reinhart and astronaut Gene Cernan, has been provided for the movie itself, replacing a similar but less specific interview with Reinhart that was featured on the LD. Reinhart does not talk elaborately about putting the film together, but he covers the basics, discussing how much of the footage had never been touched before he got to it and describing his thought process behind the film's structure.

We never get tired of hearing astronauts talk about their experiences, and Cernan's comments are no exception. Like most astronauts he speaks about the moon in almost spiritual terms, something we suspect the next generation of space travelers, having grown up with photos of the earth on the walls of their

bedrooms, will be less inclined to feel so deeply. He provides many fascinating little tidbits about the moon flights, an interesting perspective on the roles of the astronauts (their accomplishments were as a team, rather than as individuals), a clear description of the emotions he felt at the time and he feels now about the experience, and, like anybody with even the tiniest bit of imagination, his frustration with the scaling back of America's space program. If this DVD helps fire people's enthusiasm for getting back to the moon again, then it will be a valuable release, indeed.

Popular murder thrillers

A dandy ghost story about a man being compelled to uncover a murder, **Stir of Echoes**, has been released by Artisan Entertainment (10197, \$30). Kevin Bacon stars as a blue-collar family man who gets 'the shining' one night after he is hypnotized at a party, and starts seeing a deathly looking teenage girl floating about his house. The film has one or two frightening moments, but those sorts of thrills are secondary to its play of atmosphere, narrative and character. Bacon's improvements as an actor over the last decade have been remarkable, and it is his performance here, as a tormented innocent, that keeps the viewer completely involved with the mystery and the supernatural flourishes. The film isn't perfect—there are nuances in a number of relationships that could have benefited from another ten minutes or so of embellishment—but it is still a terrific thriller, and it is clever enough to remain creepy and exciting on multiple viewings.

The picture is presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The color transfer looks fine. Darker sequences are solid and nicely detailed, and fleshtones are accurate. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital soundtrack is super, with ghostly whispers in surround and lots of power when things get threatening in the material world. The 94 minute program is captioned, though with scattered typos. There is a large cast & crew profile section, production notes, a bunch of TV commercials, a trailer, a music video by Moist, a brief 2 minute piece with behind-the-scenes shots and interviews, and 5 minutes of silent behind-the-scenes footage.

The director, David Koepp, provides a good commentary track, telling all about the production and providing a lot of practical filmmaking advice. While talking about the screenwriting possibilities presented by marriage, he explains, "Movies are really obsessed with 'new love' because new love is romantic, new love is exciting, new love is sexy. But new love really isn't that dramatic." He also mentions many of the movies he lifted shots and ideas from, tells about the good suggestions Brian De Palma gave him, shares the advice he got from Steven Spielberg (don't worry if child actors paraphrase their lines) and yes, a stand-in actually allowed Koepp to poke a needle through his hand for the film's most squirm-inducing shot.

A murder thriller that is only slightly less fanciful than **Stir of Echoes**, **The Bone Collector**, has been released by Universal (20716, \$27). A killer in New York is committing the sort of elaborate, diabolical murders one only sees in the movies and never in the news reports, and Denzel Washington is a paraplegic forensics expert, confined to a bed, who leads the investigation. Angelina Jolie is a rookie cop with a knack for forensics who is assigned to help him. The whole thing is rather absurd, but it still makes for an exciting, fully involving procedural, with enjoyable star performances (Ed O'Neill, Queen Latifah and Michael Rooker co-star) and plenty of suspense.

The picture is presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The color transfer looks fine, with accurate fleshtones and complete stability in the darker sequences. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital track sounds great, but there is a DTS track that is even better. On both, there are instances of left and right channel dialog, and plenty of surround activity, but the DTS track has clearer details and more forceful tones. The 118 minute feature also has a French audio track in standard stereo, optional English subtitles, production notes, a large cast-and-director profile section, trailers for the film and for the forthcoming and rather uninteresting thriller, *Skulls*, and a good 22 minute featurette. The menu takes an annoyingly long time to come up. A DVD-ROM function contains more text essays that could just have easily been presented as a regular DVD function.

The film's director, Phillip Noyce, provides a commentary track. Reading from a prepared text, he gives a thorough explanation of how the film was put together and why he made many of his choices, both in front and behind the camera. He also talks about his career, about the personnel he worked with, and

about films in general. Among other things, he reveals that the villain, whose identity remains guarded until the end of the film, was actually embodied by several different major cast members, to tweak the viewers' subconscious.

Capers

Without much fanfare, an old and beloved genre, the caper film, was revived in 1999 with two successful features that have now been released on DVD, **The Thomas Crown Affair**, which comes from MGM Home Entertainment (907452, \$25), and **Entrapment**, which comes from 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment (4112309, \$35). Both movies have more in common than their 113 minute running times and the casting of actors who have played James Bond in the leads. Although they take divergent paths, both are initially about male thieves being seduced by female insurance investigators, and both even have the same lines of dialog when the heroes invite the heroines to their private sanctuaries. Since a friend complained that **Entrapment**, the faster moving of the two films, was 'slow,' we doubt this revival will have a lasting resonance, but we are just giddy about the opportunity to watch a splashy, high tech double bill depicting one of our favorite movie subjects, stealing things.

The better of the two movies is **Thomas Crown Affair**. Directed by John McTiernan, who seems to continue to grow as an artist, Pierce Brosnan and Rene Russo star in the remake of the old Steve McQueen and Faye Dunaway film, about a rich guy who robs stuff for kicks. There is a longstanding and recognized psychological correlation between sex and thievery (stolen any kisses lately?), and even more adeptly than the first film, **Thomas Crown Affair** plays out the dual meaning of the title's concluding word. The film, set in New York City with a brief sortie to Martinique, is a very witty, snazzy romance about rich people you wish you could be, and it is elegant escapism. Fans will delight in the way that allusions to the first movie are slipped into the film (Dunaway even has a small role), but almost all viewers will respond to the emotional sparring as both the hero and the heroine attempt to determine how sincere each other's affections are.

The menu, set to blaring alarms, is annoying. The picture is presented in letterboxed format on one side, with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback, and is in cropped format on the other side, although the cropping is so severe there is little use for it. Contrasts lack a touch of detail here and there, but otherwise the color transfer looks fine, with bright, crisp hues and accurate fleshtones. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound is outstanding, with many terrific separation effects and a wonderful dimensionality. There is an alternate French audio track in 5.1 Dolby, optional English and French subtitles ("La tête de qui poursuivez-vous?" "La vôtre.") and trailers for both the old and the new production. McTiernan also provides a commentary track, sharing a lot of minor trivia about the film and his thinking behind it. He doesn't talk constantly and he doesn't provide a consistent overview, but almost everything he has to say is quite interesting. He got the idea for the thermal scan gimmick, for example, when he found that thermal imaging didn't work when he was trying to shoot **Predator** in the hot jungle.

An elderly but still game Sean Connery is the thief in **Entrapment** and Catherine Zeta-Jones is either an insurance cop trying to bust him or a fellow thief who wants his assistance on some elaborate jobs in Kuala Lumpur, where much of the film was shot. Contrary to our friend's admonitions, or after the deliberately languorous **Thomas Crown**, the film, directed by Jon Amiel, zips through its narrative rather quickly. Again, there is emotional tension as the two heroes attempt to discern the truth behind one another's motives, but there is less eroticism and the romance is somewhat shallow. On the other hand, there is a lot more action, and the capers and the chases are quite spectacular.

The picture is presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. The color transfer looks great, with bright, sharp hues and accurate fleshtones. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound mix is not as elegant as the sound on **Thomas Crown**, but it is fully loaded, with a good bass and lots of energetic separation effects. There are optional English and Spanish subtitles and a trailer. A special edition version will be appearing in the near future.

Bats is here

The kind of movie **Lake Placid** was making fun of, **Bats** is an efficient but predictable creature

thriller. The product of military research, the title animals have been imbued with an 'intelligence and omnivore' virus, which they can apparently pass along to other bats. Fortunately, they're all hanging out in one big cave, so if you can just get a giant cooling unit down there and turn it on, it should be no problem. Lou Diamond Phillips, Dina Meyer and Leon star in the 91 minute program, which has been released on DVD by Columbia TriStar Home Video (04510, \$25) and is identified as the 'R-rated director's cut.' It wastes no time getting the heroes up to speed and putting them in peril, and the bat attack sequences are lengthy and elaborate. Nothing in the story really makes much sense, but if you like seeing little winged creatures terrorizing a Texas town and going for jugular with every bite, this is your film.

The picture is presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The picture looks fine, even in darker sequences, with bright, glossy colors and reasonably accurate fleshtones. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound is really good, with lots of distinctive separations and a great deal more power than the standard stereo track. The 5.1 track is also said to include Dolby EX Enhancement. The 91 minute program has an isolated musical score in 5.1 Dolby, optional English subtitles, a cast-and-director profile section, a 5 minute featurette and a trailer. Conceptual artwork and mechanical drawings for the bats (they didn't want to use real bats because real bats are too cute) are also included, although close-ups on the mechanical drawings would have been helpful. There is a storyboard comparison for two sequences running about 5 minutes in total, and a simple breakdown of the special effects in another two sequences, running about 8 minutes.

On a commentary track, the director, Louis Morneau, and Phillips talk about various aspects of the production, including anecdotes about the shoot, descriptions of the special effects, and stories of the problems they encountered as they went along. Shot in a town in Utah, they chose the absolute wrong time to film, trying to make what is mostly a nighttime movie during the longest days of summer and in the middle of the area's rainy season. They also laugh a bit about the movie's presumptions, and Phillips has an amusing story about how hard it is to contact last-name-less Leon at a hotel.

Gaga over Bava

Image Entertainment has embarked upon an outstanding effort to present the films of the masterful Italian horror filmmaker, Mario Bava, in a format worthy of Bava's artistry with *The Mario Bava Collection*. Not only have the films been transferred with great care, but most are accompanied by a number of pleasing special features, including commentary tracks by genre enthusiast and Bava expert, Tim Lucas.

Not to be confused with Bava's **Black Sabbath**, **Black Sunday** (ID5942AODVD, \$25), also known as *La Maschera Del Demonio* or *The Mask of Satan*, is a 1960 black-and-white possession thriller, set in a castle, about a witch trying to come back to life. The gore is wonderful, and while the story treads in what is now familiar territory, it still seems reasonably fresh and unlabored, with captivating images and terrific atmosphere. The dynamic black-and-white cinematography is also quite effective, giving the film the veneer of an older work that effectively counter-points its modern horrors. The narrative has a few loose ends, but it builds tension adeptly and sustains an engaging mood.

The Italian production, starring Barbara Steele, was originally released in America with substantial cuts and a different musical score. Although dubbed in English, the 86 minute presentation is said to be the definitive version. A scene that was apparently inserted with some randomness in Italian prints of the film is described in one of the supplements, as is the justification for not having included it.

The presentation is windowboxed, with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. Although contrasts are a little soft in places, the picture quality is very satisfying and is free of significant wear. The monophonic sound is okay. A trailer for the film, as *Mask of Satan*, is included, along with a silent 2 minute montage of advertising materials, a biography of Bava and filmographies for Bava and Steele. Lucas has a few minor gaps in his commentary but covers his subject thoroughly, providing backgrounds for all the major players and production crew members, a history of the film's production and distribution, descriptions not only of how the special effects were achieved but how many of the striking camera movements were accomplished, and insightful comments upon the film's artistry.

Bava's **Baron Blood** has been issued as a *Mario Bava Collection* title by Image (ID5939AODVD, \$25),

with a transfer that looks identical to the Elite Entertainment LD (Sep 95). The picture on the DVD is sharper and colors are better detailed, but the intensity levels and tones of the colors look the same. Fleshtones are bland and other hues are a little light, though the image is solid and sharp. The presentation is in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. The monophonic sound is a bit uneven. The English dubbing is flat and the music sounds warped at times. There is no captioning.

This is the 100 minute version originally conceived by Bava and not the American release, which was substantially shorter and had different music. Nevertheless, it is not one of Bava's better films. Joseph Cotten and Elke Sommer are top billed in the story of a couple who unleash a ghost and then are unable to make him go away. Shot in a magnificent Austrian castle, the imagery is often striking and some of the thrills are enjoyable, but the story isn't all that interesting and the pace of the performances is leaden. Accompanying the movie are a trailer, ad materials and profiles of Sommer, Cotten and Bava. An elaborate jacket essay about the film is also included.

A very enchanting Bava thriller about ghosts and witches, **Kill, Baby...Kill!**, has been released by VCI Home Video (DVD8217, \$25). Also known as *Operazione Paura*, the 1966 feature is set around the Turn of the Century in a small, isolated European town with winding streets, ruined castles and forbidding mansions. A coroner is called in to perform an inquest upon a woman who has supposedly committed suicide, but soon learns that he has stepped into the middle of a curse that is being leveled at the entire town. The films of Bava and the films of Federico Fellini traveled in different circles, but they shared many production facilities and personnel. There are a number of sequences within **Kill, Baby...Kill!** that are very Fellini-esque, particularly those involving the ghost of a little girl. The performers are attractive, the story is reasonably interesting and the film's style has a captivating, dream-like tone.

The film is presented in full screen format, but from the windowboxed opening credits, it is clear that such a presentation is appropriate, and on some monitors, you can make out the rounded corners of the original frames. The colors are somewhat pale and murky, with weak fleshtones and indistinct contrasts—and we salivate over how much more powerful the film might be if it had a fresh transfer—but as that seems to be the state of most of Bava's films, the presentation is tolerable. Speckling and other overt wear on the source material is limited, and artifacting is fleeting. Contrary to some reports, the film is dubbed in English and is not captioned. The monophonic sound is passable. The program runs 83 minutes and is accompanied by a Bava profile and filmography.

Bava's 1971 slasher whodunit, **Bay of Blood**, also known as *Antefatto, Ecology of a Crime, Reazione a Catena, Carnage and Twitch of the Death Nerve*, is available from Simitar (7654, \$15; the film's own title card calls it *A Bay of Blood*). When an elderly woman is murdered, her estate becomes available to waterfront developers, intent upon eliminating the competition. Most of the action takes place at the estate, where vacationing teens and rivals with interest in the estate meet enchantingly gruesome deaths—anticipating **Friday the 13th**, two naked teens are impaled with a spear while locked in amorous embrace. It is difficult to tell some of the male actors apart without multiple viewings, or to keep track of who is responsible for each murder, but the editing is wonderful (one cut shifts from a man's hand caressing a woman's torso to another man's hand grabbing an octopus) and the camera moves are consistently stimulating. Like most of Bava's films, the movie improves considerably the more often you watch it.

The letterboxing on the program is inconsistent, but usually measures about 1.66:1. Contrasts are weak, colors are a little murky and it is difficult to make out details in the darker areas of the screen. Fleshtones are pale, though the performers also appear to have spent little time in the sun (when one blonde teen goes for a nude swim, her skin looks ultra-white). Other colors are brighter, however, and overall, the presentation seems tolerable. The 80 minute film is dubbed in English. The monophonic sound has no high end and volume levels are inconsistent. The program is not captioned. The chapter encoding and jacket guide are paltry.

Nazis

Stories of martyrs may be cherished by those the martyr represents, but others feel less emotionally connected to either the cause or the sacrifice. However horrific the Holocaust was and however much it means to a viewer, it will take a very deep identification with the characters and their predicament to feel anything but apathy for Robin Williams in **Jakob the Liar**, a Columbia TriStar Home Video release (02844, \$28). Stripped of all inklings of his normal manic persona, Williams' character is not even a hustler. He's just an optimistic victim who has a brief run of good luck. At its best, the film has the atmosphere of a folk-tale, but it seems compelled to remind you in its conclusion that the Nazis were no folktale, and so the film's gloomy atmosphere eventually gets the better of it. Williams portrays a Jew living in a ghetto—not a camp—in the final months of World War II. He manages to pick up a couple pieces of moderately fresh information about the status of the war and soon a rumor is circulating that he has a radio. Finding that his news seems to boost the spirits of those around him, he begins embellishing the facts, allowing others to believe the radio rumor is true. It is an honorable film, and the first half, as you learn details of what the ghetto was like (by then, everybody had their own apartments, because so few people were left) and take to the personable nature of Williams' character, isn't bad. But from the start, the story is in a corner it cannot escape from and, unlike Roberto Begnini's far more emotionally clever **Life Is Beautiful**, it has no shift in tone. Williams being unable to do his shtick becomes a metaphor for the entire film.

The picture is presented on one side in letterboxed format, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback, and in full screen format on the other side. Either presentation seems workable. The colors are deliberately greyish and the transfer appears accurate, with fully detailed hues. The image is usually sharp, though some sequences appear deliberately softer. There is a 5.1-channel Dolby Digital track, bringing a bit more dimensionality to the music and incidental sound effects. Edward Shearmur's nice musical score has also been isolated in 5.1 Dolby. The 120 minute feature has optional English subtitles, a cast-and-director profile section and a trailer. The director, Peter Kassovitz, provides a commentary track as well. Speaking in heavily accented English, he talks a bit about the production and its conception, but his insights are limited. There is also a brief 'making of' featurette that over-emphasizes the film's comical elements.

Sam Peckinpah's 1977 tale of German soldiers fighting Russians in the Crimea, **Cross of Iron**, has been released by Hen's Tooth Video (4065, \$30). At the time it was produced, Peckinpah's unique style was exhilarating, and the film seemed to break new ground in exploiting the dark but poetic possibilities of the violence of war. Now that Peckinpah's techniques have been co-opted by every filmmaker with a gun, the movie takes longer to achieve an emotional impact, but it remains an effective and striking action drama. James Coburn is terrifically engaging as the hero, a corporal who gets the job done but despises all officers. Maximilian Schell is his chickenhearted commander and James Mason is Schell's commanding officer.

Since the violence in the film is no longer unique and the presentation of German soldiers as heroes no longer gives one pause, the male bonding and macho sentimentality of the first half become a bit tiresome, but in the second half, when Coburn's platoon is trapped behind enemy lines and must work its way back to safety, the movie turns into a spellbinding, rhapsodic expression of excitement and violence.

Or it would, if the transfer were better. The picture is cropped, and although the movie was not a widescreen production, even the mild trimming from the sides upsets Peckinpah's carefully orchestrated images and rhythms. The colors are reasonably bright and fresh-looking, and fleshtones are actually quite good, but the image often looks a little smeary and there are fleeting artifact errors. The dialog is unaffected, but the music on the monophonic soundtrack is consistently warped, to a point of irksome distraction. The 128 minute program is not captioned and is accompanied by a brief montage of German lobby cards.

Kevin Brownlow's clever 1964 film about the Nazi occupation of Britain, **It Happened Here**, has been released by Milestone Film & Video and Image Entertainment (ID5926MLSDVD, \$30). Pauline Murray portrays a nurse who is coerced into joining the ruling party so she can keep her job, only to witness a

number of horrors being perpetrated in the name of medicine. Shot in black-and-white on a miniscule budget, the film is a deftly structured blend of mock-documentaries and fleeting personal moments. Several films and novels have dealt with 'what if' scenarios involving Germany ruling England, but none has ever been as thoroughly convincing. By keeping the scope small and the focus on the psychology of collaboration, the filmmakers manage to slip all sort of delightful speculations into the background while maintaining an unnervingly realistic tragedy in the foreground. It is a fantasy you'll never forget.

In that the rougher the image looks, the more convincing it becomes, the picture quality is fine. It is presented in full screen format, which is appropriate, and varies in quality from one sequence to the next, though the wear is never distracting and the presentation is always coherent. The monophonic sound is also a bit weak, but understandable. The 96 minute program, said to contain 7 minutes of footage that was not part of the film's original theatrical release, is not captioned.

Nazis are also central to **The Odessa File**, a 1974 adaptation of a Frederick Forsyth bestseller vaguely based upon real circumstances. Jon Voight, who looks the part but can't sell the accent, portrays a young German journalist in the early Sixties investigating the hidden identities of former SS officers. Forsyth's book was written—and, for that matter, the film was produced—before the Holocaust was as widely discussed in literature as it is today, so the atrocities it describes lack the impact they might have seemed to possess at one time. Ronald Neame directed the film, which has the compelling forward momentum of a bestseller but a less accomplished emotional resonance. Oh, and by the way. The film's musical score was written by Andrew Lloyd Webber. Now, for the mid-Seventies, it was probably a hip score, but today it induces nothing but giggles at the most tense moments, since he re-employed much of the composition in his Broadway scores and so every time the chords sound off, you start looking for Nazis with whiskers and long tails.

The film has been released by Columbia TriStar Home Video (03299, \$25) in letterboxed format on one side, with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback, and in cropped format on the other side. Although the widescreen images are not particularly dynamic, the cropping still upsets the rhythm of the drama and often looks awkward. The colors are reasonably bright, but the picture still looks soft or hazy in places and the image seems a bit worn at times. Fleshtones are passable. The monophonic sound is okay if you can tolerate Webber's score. The 128 minute program has optional English and Spanish subtitles, a cast-and-director profile section and a trailer.

Although the jacket cover claims that **Voyage of the Damned** runs 136 minutes, the Artisan Home Entertainment Pioneer release (DVD51135, \$25) actually runs the full 158 minutes of its original theatrical presentation. Sadly, what they give, they also take away. After the film's opening credit sequence, which is letterboxed at 1.85:1, the rest of the movie is cropped, making many shots look cramped or awkwardly framed. Although the colors aren't bad and the fleshtones are workable, the source material has many speckles and the image is soft in places. There is some displacement artifacting, and the music on the monophonic soundtrack sounds warped in several instances throughout the film. The program is not captioned.

The 1976 production, directed by Stuart Rosenberg, is a reasonably interesting look at an embarrassing historical event, about a boatload of Jews deported from Germany right before World War II who are not allowed entry to any of the boat's ports of call, even in the U.S. The film has a laughably large cast, so that one is often distracted from the drama by the stars who pop up in every bit part with a line of dialog, but when it gets down to the nitty-gritty, the actors deliver and the film becomes reasonably involving. Standouts in the cast include Max Von Sydow as the ship's captain, Jonathan Pryce as a young Jewish militant and Faye Dunaway as one of the calmer passengers. Other cast members include Oskar Werner, Malcolm McDowell, Orson Welles, James Mason, Lee Grant, Katharine Ross, Jose Ferrer, Julie Harris, Wendy Hiller, Ben Gazzara and a good dozen more recognizable faces.

The History Channel and Image Entertainment have issued an excellent series of hour-long documentaries about WWII called **Secrets of War**. Utilizing recently declassified information, interviews with elderly veterans, comments from historians, discreet re-enactments or film clips and rare archival footage (there are home movies, for example, of a female spy as she prepares to go off on her mission), the programs provide new and better detailed insight upon intelligence gathering activities and the technological advancements that occurred during the War. The fate after the War of key personalities in each episode is also covered. All of the programs, which are narrated by Charlton Heston, have decent picture transfers and a dimensional musical score. They are not captioned. The chapter encoding and jacket guides are limited and the menu requires somewhat redundant prompting.

Four episodes are presented on **Secrets of War: Spy Games of World War II** (ID5520DCDVD, \$30). The best of the four is probably *Rommel's Engima*, which tells in a very well-organized fashion the tricks and counter-tricks going on in the African desert as the British and German forces positioned themselves for their final blows. Among other things, you get the complete story of the 'Key to Rebecca' incident, and how both sides used an Egyptian belly dancer to their advantage. Many of the tricks used in the desert are discussed from a different perspective in the enjoyable *Tools of Deception*, which is about camouflage, dummy equipment and other sleights of hand, the object being to 'make your weak points look strong and your strong points look weak.' The way these tricks were utilized is combined with a fairly decent background on the build up to D-Day in *D-Day Deceptions*. The latter also discusses not only the use of Patton as a decoy, but the elaborate deceptions the Allies used to pretend they were going to invade Norway, causing the Germans to retain a ridiculous number of troops in the region for no purpose. Overall, the deceptions were so successful the Germans sent more troops into Calais after the Normandy invasion than were there before.

The highest rank intelligence officer in the German command was apparently not enamored with the Nazis and often worked against their best interests according to *German Intelligence in WWII*. He apparently finessed Franco to prevent the Germans from using Spain as an access to take Gibraltar. Other events and the various assassination attempts on Hitler's life are also discussed, as well as the assassination of Germany's second highest intelligence officer and a German-American who pretended to be a German spy in New York, passing along false information and corralling scores of enemy agents. Perhaps the most fascinating segment, however, is about an apparently successful attempt by the Germans, using skilled Jewish prisoners, to counterfeit British currency—they used it, among other things, to ransom Mussolini.

One of the best episodes in the series is *The Ultra Enigma* on the two-episode collection, **Secrets of War: Intelligence** (ID8735DCDVD, \$20). The Enigma machine, of course, was the German code machine that, unknown to them, the Allies cracked early on. The show not only explains quite clearly how it was done, but also details the several variations of the machine that different branches of the German military used, and how each version was eventually decoded. One of the heroes in the story is Alan Turing, though after applying his genius to the decryption of codes and the development of the first computers to fight the Nazis, he committed suicide rather than face Britain's harsh anti-homosexuality laws. The irony of this is not lost on the filmmakers. The companion episode, *Women Spies in World War II*, provides a bit of history on how women have been used for intelligence gathering, including a thumbnail sketch of Mata Hari, and then goes into clear detail about how they were employed by the Allies during the War, in everything from exchanging sexual favors for access to enemy intelligence, to operating radios or running a large portion of the French Underground. The material is more episodic than the *Enigma* program, but it is still quite interesting.

Go Yeoh!

Bond girl Michelle Yeoh stars in what Dimension Home Video is calling **Supercop 2** (18309, \$30). Directed by Stanley Tong, Yeoh is a Chinese cop in the 1993 feature who visits Hong Kong to assist in the investigation of mob activities. It turns out her former partner is one of the leaders of a gang planning a bank heist. The film has a slick veneer and a focused, action format. The fight scenes and stunt sequences are super, and Yeoh is fantastic, leaping and kicking her way through bad guys with an unstoppable energy. Jackie Chan has a cameo appearance, entirely in drag, in one sequence. The picture is presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. The picture quality is

excellent, particularly for a Hong Kong feature, and the film is indistinguishable from a Hollywood production in terms of crisp hues, rich fleshtones and sharp contrasts. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound is not as revved up as some Hong Kong re-mixes have been, but there are some good separation effects. The English dubbing isn't bad, either. The 94 minute program can be supported by optional English subtitles.

Reunion comedy

The amusing story of two intelligence-challenged, Bill-and-Ted-type women ("Oh, my God, I hate throwing up in public." "Me, too!") who return to their hometown, **Romy and Michele's High School Reunion**, has been released by Touchstone Home Video (17378, \$30). Mira Sorvino, Lisa Kudrow and Janeane Garofalo star in the uneven but often uproarious 1997 comedy. The performances are marvelous, and while the narrative gets a little wacky toward the end, the film is too funny to chastise. The picture is in letterboxed format, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The color transfer looks okay and the image is sharp. The volume on the music is set a little high on the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital track, kind of overpowering the dialog and sound effects at times, but otherwise the audio presentation is adequate. The 92 minute program has an alternate French language track, optional English subtitles, a trailer and a 3 minute featurette.

You had to be there

Okay, here's the story with **Aloha, Bobby and Rose**. You had to see the 1975 road film in a drive-in on a warm summer night when it first came out, perhaps with a messy barbecue roast beef sandwich in your lap and someone affectionate, with their own roast beef sandwich, at your side, as the film's pop songs wafted through the theater's lot with the false stereophonic echo of a couple hundred outdoor speakers. Directed by Floyd Mutrux, many sequences within the film were meticulously edited to the movie's pop music score—mostly Elton John songs and notably *Bennie and the Jets*, but Emerson Lake & Palmer, The Temptations and others, as well—and if the mood was right, it didn't matter what else happened in the movie, you got carried away by its emotional style. Heck, you even end up enjoying that godawful *Bennie and the Jets*.

To that end, Anchor Bay Entertainment has done everything they can with the film's DVD release (DV11061, \$25) to recapture the spirit with which it is best viewed. You can't open the jacket and have a warm summer night pop out, and you have to make your own roast beef sandwiches, but they've given the movie a Chase stereo job and 5.1-channel Dolby Digital encoding, imbuing the film and its music with just enough dimensionality to sweep you away. The standard stereo has a bad reverb from the Chase processing, but the 5.1 track is free of it.

The single-sided dual-layer DVD presents the film in letterboxed format on one layer, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback, and in full screen format on the other layer. The full screen format loses nothing on the sides and adds more picture information to the top and bottom of the image, but it is difficult to tell in which format Mutrux composed his shots. Despite the tightness, particularly at the top of the image in some shots, the letterboxed version seems more movie-like and is the more appealing of the two. The colors are fresh, but the film was shot with a substantial haze, with makes everything look soft or downright blurry in places. Details in the fleshtones are lost, as well.

Bennie and the Jets plays in full over the main menu. The 88 minute film is accompanied by a trailer and a profile of the star, Paul Le Mat, though we question its veracity, "Paul Le Mat was born in 1952...He began a tour of duty in Vietnam in 1966..." When he was 14? There is no captioning.

Edward James Olmos and Robert Carradine have small parts in the movie, and Tim McIntire has a somewhat larger role. Le Mat is a garage mechanic with gambling problems and Dianne Hull, her teeth free of Hollywood caps, is a single mother. They meet and have a date one night, kind of forgetting about their problems for a while, but then tragedy strikes and they feel they have to go on the run. Thereafter, they waver between falling more and more in love and feeling the guilt from their abandoned responsibilities. By any sensible measure it is a pointless, depressing film about irresponsible adults learning maturity the hard way, and even its pace when the music isn't playing has that Seventies stand-around-and-hope-that-something-clicks improvisational lethargy, but, like we said, you had to be there, and if you turn up your speakers and take the film for what it is, maybe you will.

John Sayles visits our largest states

As you may have heard, John Sayles's engrossing **Limbo**, from Columbia TriStar Home Video (04094, \$28), has a snotty smart kid ending that optimists will love, pessimists will find depressing and people without imaginations will feel robbed over. We don't wish to go into too much detail except to say that 1) a person should always be optimistic about such things, 2) the more you think about it the more you realize it is a far more satisfying ending than any choice except one that would carry the story along for another hour, and 3) the format of the ending is beautifully anticipated in a diary one of the characters is reading.

The film itself has two distinct parts and is about Alaska, from kind of an outsider's viewpoint. David Strathairn—sort of a Sam Waterston remake—and Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio star in a pleasant, easy going romantic comedy about two adults, both a little apprehensive about life, who find one another. The film is set in a remote but relatively cosmopolitan Alaskan community (it was shot in Juneau), and while Sayles' take on the place is not as coy as **Northern Exposure**, it seems in the same spirit. It is very much like a Robert Altman movie, with oddball characters telling stories that one might very well hear if one hung out in an Alaskan bar for a while. Then in the second half, Strathairn and Mastrantonio are stranded in the wilderness, though again they manage to tell a lot of stories as they cope with their predicament. Some viewers have found the 127 minute film tedious or akin to its title, but it is an exotic and, particularly in the comfort of a home video environment, relaxing adventure.

The picture is presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The color quality is fine and the image is very sharp. Sequences with limited lighting look stable and clear. The sound mix is not elaborate, but the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital track is reasonably satisfying and the music, which is also available on a separate, isolated 5.1-channel track, has a nice airiness. There are optional English subtitles and trailers for Sayles' films. Sayles also provides an excellent commentary track, speaking in meticulous detail about all aspects of the filmmaking process, and about Alaska. He explains why and how different scenes were shot (by Haskell Wexler, whose working methods he describes), how the performers approached their roles, how the narrative works, and one informative piece of filmmaking advice or experience after another, from maintaining continuity without upsetting the performances to coping with the weather. There were, incidentally, only eight days during the entire shoot when it didn't rain. That's Alaska.

Turning to a somewhat drier state, Sayles' **Lone Star**, which has been released by Warner Home Video (C2515, \$20), is a wonderful generational tale of corruption and murder in a small Texas town. Again, Sayles' approach is just vaguely like that of a tourist, soaking up aspects of the region's culture and idiosyncrasies that locals would take for granted. Chris Cooper stars, with Elizabeth Peña, Frances McDormand, Matthew McConaughey and Kris Kristofferson, who also has a key role in **Limbo**. The mystery keeps the story moving, but the film's real appeal is in its engaging array of characters and its evocation of a very specific American place.

The picture is in windowboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The color transfer is excellent, with accurate fleshtones and precisely delineated hues. The stereo surround sound is rarely elaborate, but the audio quality is functional. The 135 minute program has an alternate French stereo audio track, optional English and French subtitles and a trailer.

An awfully big movie

The best thing about Steven Spielberg's **Hook** was the pinball machine it inspired, though by 1991, when the film was released, pinball machines had sadly gone out of style. The machine's beauty was in the way it mirrored the film's production art. It wasn't just a fancy ad for the movie, it was a microcosm of the movie's domain. Actually, the film plays like a nightmare one might conjure after having fallen asleep on a pinball machine. Robin Williams portrays Peter Pan as a grownup without a memory of his days past. He is the typical contemporary harried father of moviedom, a concept that was best realized later by Jim

Carrey in **Liar Liar** and here has an artificial feel, which Spielberg, for all his talents as a director, cannot finesse. Dustin Hoffman is the title character, who kidnaps Pan's children, and Julia Roberts, though dressed like a traditional Peter Pan, is Tinker Bell. So Americanized that there is not one but two important baseball games during the course of the film, kids who had the stamina to make it through the 142 minute feature responded to the anarchism of its flashiest sequences. Williams' character has to 're-learn' how to be a child, and does so by engaging in paintball free-for-alls and skateboarding stunts. Shot on enormous and elaborately decorated sets, the film evokes the pandemonium of a playground, and the viewer ends up feeling like a ball bouncing frantically amid elastic bumpers.

Columbia TriStar Home Video has released **Hook** (03930, \$25) in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The picture quality is solid, with bright, sharp hues and accurate fleshtones. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital track is stronger and better detailed than the standard stereo track on the LD (Aug 92). The film's sound mix holds no surprises, but in keeping with the rest of the production, it is grandiose and takes full advantage of one's audio system. There are optional English subtitles, cast-and-director profiles and a trailer.

The classic television production of **Peter Pan**, starring Mary Martin and Cyril Ritchard, has been released by GoodTimes Home Video (0581057, \$20). Taken from a 1960 broadcast, in color, the marvelous program features music by Jule Styne, lyrics by Betty Comden and Adolph Green and choreography by Jerome Robbins. Like the title character, the show has an ageless appeal, with marvelous, stage-hewn performances (Ritchard's eyes are a delight), terrific songs and a narrative adaptation that captures the essential joys of the story without getting sidetracked.

Taking into account the nature of the source material, the presentation looks fine. Colors are subdued, bright hues are a little fuzzy, and fleshtones are pinkish, but contrasts are distinctive and smearing is minimal. The monophonic sound is somewhat harsh, but when held to a reasonable volume, it sounds okay. The 101 minute program can be supported by optional English or Spanish subtitles ("Si crees, estás donde estás, da palmadas y ella te oirá.").

An excellent silent film production of **Peter Pan** has been released by Kino on Video (K140, \$30). The 1924 Paramount production was based closely upon creator James M. Barrie's play, though they do get outdoors for the pirate ship scenes and generally display a little more flexibility than a stage show could offer. Directed by Herbert Brenon with cinematography by James Wong Howe, the film stars Betty Bronson as Pan with Ernest Torrence, Mary Brian and Ester Ralston. The competence of the production allows the strength of Barrie's work to shine, and it is an ideal blending of humor, adventure and fantasy. Indeed, having been created in Barrie's era (he even worked on an early version of the script), what antiquity the production has seems no more than an additionally quaint aspect that is on par with the Indians, mermaids and toadstool chimneys. The Tinker Bell special effects, on the other hand, are almost as good as those used for Julia Roberts.

The picture looks great. It is windowboxed and the indoor scenes have a mild yellow-brown tint. The source material is in fine shape and details are reasonably clear. There is a serviceable monophonic musical score by a small orchestra. The film runs 102 minutes and movement is smooth. Additionally, the film is accompanied by an extensive interview with Ralston, who reminisces about making Pan and about her experiences in Hollywood. 2 minutes of the interview are accompanied by video, while the remaining half hour is audio-only, but her stories are super (Louis B. Mayer hit on her, and then got royally annoyed when she ducked him). There is also an extensive production essay and other background notes, along with a nice collection of still photos.

A box of the Duke

One of Artisan Entertainment's bundling of its Republic Pictures films, **John Wayne Collection** (10026, \$45) features three lesser known but quite entertaining Wayne films (all set in the pre-Civil War era),

In Old California, *The Fighting Kentuckian* and *Dark Command*, each presented within the boxed set with its own jacket and catalog number, though the films are not available individually.

In Raoul Walsh's *Dark Command* (10030), from 1940, Wayne is an illiterate vagabond who is elected sheriff in a Kansas town, beating out the man teaching him to read and write. Disappointed that he can't make more out of his life, the teacher, played by Walter Pidgeon, turns to crime, branching out into terrorism when the Civil War arrives. Wayne eventually hunts him down and, by the way, they share the same girl, played by Claire Trevor. Roy Rogers also appears, as Trevor's brother, and Gabby Hayes is Wayne's sidekick. The slightly episodic film has a stimulating moral conflict and some good action scenes.

By all sensible artistic measures, *Dark Command* is a better film than William McGann's *In Old California* (10029), from 1942, but *California* is more enjoyable. Wayne portrays a pharmacist who sets up shop in Sacramento before the Gold Rush. The local bully, however, doesn't like him, because the local hot girl does, and his business is almost shut down before something valuable is discovered at Sutter's Mill. Because he's a businessman and not a gunslinger, there is a Zen-like quality to Wayne's hero, not turning to violence until he absolutely has to, but then getting the job done when he must. Where *Dark Command* worries you with ethical decisions, *In Old California* just takes you a long for a frolic, and it is great fun.

Wayne and sidekick Oliver Hardy are Kentucky militiamen amid more refined aristocratic Frenchmen in Alabama in *The Fighting Kentuckian*, spoiling a crooked land deal. It takes a good 40 minutes for the plot to surface, and Wayne even has several voiceover sequences as he tries to make up his mind about courting the heroine. Some viewers may feel a bit antsy with the many songs and drunken brawls and other dated activities that are spread through the film, but once the plot kicks in the show becomes reasonably appealing, and the romance is also effective, voiceover quandaries and all.

All three films are in black-and-white. On all three, the monophonic sound is a little scratchy but passable. All three have captioning and very rewarding production notes. The picture on *Dark Command* is in reasonably good shape. Contrasts are decent and wear is limited. The film runs 94 minutes. The picture transfer on *In Old California* also looks good, but wear on the source material is more widespread. Not only are there many scratches and speckles, there are also a number of disruptive splices in the 88 minute program. The 102 minute *Fighting Kentuckian* looks okay. Contrasts are a little soft, but wear to the source material is minimal. In addition to the production notes, *Kentuckian* has a nice collection of production stills.

Desire

A delightful comedy about an elderly British writer who becomes infatuated with a young American movie star, **Love and Death on Long Island**, has been released by Universal (20728, \$25). Almost a satire on **Death in Venice**, John Hurt and Jason Priestley star in the 1996 film, in which the viewer, privy to the real desires of Hurt's character, can find great amusement as he masters the challenges of American living and weasels his way into the star's company. There is no sex in the film, unless one counts the faux teen comedies Priestley's character is seen appearing in, and displays of affection are limited to a few fleeting moments, but the longing in Hurt's eyes and his guarded expressions are utterly charming, and the film works because, regardless of his absurdly impossible goal, you're rooting for him every step of the way.

The picture is presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The color transfer looks fine, with solid hues and accurate flesh-tones. The stereo surround sound has a limited mix but is adequately presented. The 94 minute program has optional English subtitles and is accompanied by a trailer.

A reading

Three actors sit at a table reading what in essence is a radio play, though, once in a while, they pretend to vaguely interact with one another in **The Designated Mourner**, a First Look Pictures Image Entertainment release (OVED6875DVD, \$25). Mike Nichols, Miranda Richardson and David De Keyser star in the 94 minute program, which was written by Wallace Shawn and directed by David Hare. It is Shawn's piece, primarily, and Nichols, just reading the words, often takes on Shawn's tone of voice. De Keyser's character is a famous poet, Richardson is his daughter, and Nichols, who has the most lines, is the daughter's husband. The play begins with the usual resentments and secrets, but it progresses into something a

bit more abstract, about political persecution. Those expecting another sweet **My Dinner with Andre** will likely be disappointed by the frank sexuality that is often a hallmark of Shawn's writing and by the confusing, obscure turns the narrative takes in the second half. The acting is problematic, and seems less consistent than what is described in the critic blurbs on the jacket cover. Shawn's dialog is overly realistic, which always comes out sounding phony when let loose in dramas for longer than very brief spurts. The performers give it their all, but it is probably impossible to pull off an entire reading of the work without sounding self-conscious at some point, and there are plenty of moments where one or another of the performers strikes a false note during the course of the program. On the other hand, the work is so unusual and so intelligent that viewers desperate for intellectual stimulation in what is generally a lowest common denominator world should find the program rich with cerebral nutrition.

Neither the picture nor the stereo sound quality is really relevant, though there are no significant flaws in either. It should be noted that while the lighting is a very tricky combination of oranges and yellows, the transfer handles it with aplomb. The program is not captioned and the chapter encoding is paltry. Prompted by an interviewer, Shawn provides a commentary track, talking about all aspects of the play and its creation, including the similarities to the environment he grew up in when his father was running *The New Yorker*. He actually designed the lead character with Nichols in mind, but was still surprised by the level of fluency Nichols brought to the role. He explains the narrative, though it is also easier to pick up what is going on with multiple viewings, and discusses states of being, such as fear and cowardice. More so than on most DVDs, because of the nature of the program, those who want to watch it in the first place will want to listen to the commentary track as well, since it is equally rewarding.

Vampires go west

We would be hard pressed to name many big budget blockbuster movies that have better separation mixes than **From Dusk till Dawn 3 The Hangman's Daughter**, a Dimension Home Video release (18271, \$30). The film's standard stereo surround soundtrack is fantastic, and the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital track is glorious. There is a constant, full dimensionality, with meticulous, distinctive separation effects. When the heroes hang out in a cave, for example, the echoes of their voices change in pitch depending upon where they are standing. Every sound effect reinforces the film's playful atmosphere.

We liked the movie a lot more than we liked the first sequel (Nov 99), even though parts of the story are incoherent and plot strands are left dangling everywhere. Like the other **Dusk till Dawn** movies, the film presents a number of criminally-inclined characters engaged in various conflicts, and then has them all arriving at a bar in the desert, where something happens that makes them forget their petty differences. In **3**, which is technically a prequel, the film is set in the Old West, bringing a zest to the opening action scenes and a fresh atmosphere to everything else. Michael Parks, Marco Leonardi and Temuera Morrison star.

The picture is presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The outdoors scenes in the beginning have strong yellow tones, which tend to look a little soft in places. Overall, the color transfer is satisfying, but it takes some getting used to at first. The 94 minute program has optional English subtitles. There is also a deleted scene that runs under a minute and was apparently intended as a coda for the film's end, bringing sense to the movie's opening title card.

All over the place

What looks like a beginner's film, with bad acting, bad cinematography and weak continuity, **Leaving Scars**, is available from Vista Street Entertainment (9707, \$25). Lisa Boyle stars as an actress being chased by villains after a friend gives her a computer diskette to hold and is then promptly rubbed out. The story mixes knowing portraits of Hollywood corruption with standard crime thriller clichés, and once all the parts of the plot are in place it has enough forward momentum to work its way through the narrative, but only the most tolerant viewers will be able to stick with it to the end. Many of the performers are stiff and look like they're reading their lines from a hidden script even when they aren't. At one point a character gets his arm cut off, but a little while later he is seen talking on the phone with barely any sweat on his brow. The most taxing aspect of the film, however, is its cinematography, which is occasionally out of focus and is often very grainy. Even when the grain is gone, bright hues look fuzzy and fleshtones are pinkish.

One assumes the picture transfer hasn't added to the many ills already present on the source material, but there is some minor digital artifact smearing when the image gets particularly murky. The sound is erratically stereophonic, but the replication is good enough that you are very aware of when the dialog has been looped. There is a minute montage of publicity stills and a trailer. The 94 minute program is not captioned and is accompanied by a commentary track from the director, Brad Jacques, and the producer, Marc Johnson. Even they wonder why the film's is being put out on DVD, but they talk about the production (much of the film was shot in Boston, pretending to be L.A.) and the challenges of super-low budget filmmaking.

Sidney Poitier, hero

Two of the films that made Sidney Poitier the first black boxoffice star have been released by Columbia TriStar Home Video, **To Sir with Love** (03296, \$25) and **Guess Who's Coming to Dinner** (05419, \$28).

Of the two, the 1966 **To Sir with Love** has proved to be more enduring. Poitier portrays an engineer who takes a temporary teaching assignment in a lower class London neighborhood while waiting for a better job to come through. When he finally gets a handle on communicating with the teenagers in his class, however, he not only finds his calling but touches the hearts of his students, guiding them, as the film's famous title song says, from crayons to perfume. Directed by the novelist, James Clavell, it is a formula film but an infectious one, its emotions genuine enough to have survived the Sixties fads that color its milieu.

The picture is presented on one side in letterboxed format, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback, and in full screen format on the other side. The full screen image loses nothing on the sides. It adds picture information to the top and bottom in comparison to the letterboxed image and often has a nicer framing. Colors are reasonably strong. The image is a little hazy much of the time, but otherwise the presentation is viable. The monophonic sound is okay and the 105 minute program has optional English, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Korean and Thai subtitles. There are profiles of Poitier and Clavell, and trailers for Columbia's Poitier movies, including *Brother John*.

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner, from 1967, survives on star power, as Poitier portrays the potential son-in-law to a wealthy couple, portrayed by Katharine Hepburn and her famous paramour, in his final performance, Spencer Tracy. The film is all talk, a blend of situation comedy and drama, as everybody comes to terms with the idea that black people and white people can get married if they want to. As an added drama, Tracy was dying—the producers couldn't even insure him—and so you hang on every scene not because of the film's political content or wit but because two generations of magnificent actors are delivering the dialog with an intense, caring earnestness.

The presentation is letterboxed on one side, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback, and is in full screen format on the other. Here, the letterboxing adds a bit of picture information to each side as it masks picture information on the bottom in comparison to the full screen version, and we found that the letterbox framing drew us more forcefully into the story. The color transfer is very nice, with rich hues and accurate fleshtones, and the image is sharp. The film's original three-channel sound—left, right and center—has been restored in Dolby Digital, bringing a very pleasing dimensionality to the music and dialog. The 108 minute feature has a French audio track in mono, optional English and French subtitles (“‘Je t'ai amené le dernier bulliten. Devine qui vient diner, maintenant?’ ‘Le Révérend Martin Luther King?’”), and the Poitier trailers.

Poitier has the lead male role in the 1960 adaptation of the superb play about a black family climbing into the middle class, **A Raisin in the Sun**, which is also available from Columbia TriStar (00919, \$25). The opening acts of the drama, depicting the stresses of money problems and living in closed quarters, are so good that it is almost a shame the drama must expand its scope to show what happens when the family comes into some money and chooses to move to a white neighborhood. Nevertheless, the story is captivating and Poitier, who carried over his role from the stage, is outstanding. Holding closely to the play's structure, there are moments where other characters must stand still while one talks and talks. The director, Daniel Petrie, even places Poitier in the foreground during one of these moments, pushing the camera in his face but requiring him to remain motionless and attentive to what is going on behind him. The shot seems to last for minutes, but Poitier never loses his concentration or his believability. Ruby Dee, Claudia McNeil and a very young Lou Gossett, Jr. are also featured.

The presentation is in letterboxed format on one side, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. Unless one is utilizing the 16:9 enhancement, however, the full screen version is preferable, losing nothing on the left or right and adding substantial picture information to the top and bottom in comparison to the letterboxed version. The black-and-white picture quality is very nice. The image is smooth and contrasts are finely detailed. The monophonic sound is okay and the 128 minute program has optional English, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Korean and Thai subtitles, a cast-and-director profile section and the Poitier trailers.

When Joseph Sargent got kicked off of **Buck and the Preacher** a week into the shoot, Poitier took over the director's reins for the first time, eventually opening up an entire secondary career. Poitier also stars in the 1971 western, with Harry Belafonte. Although the late Sixties and early Seventies had seen a few westerns in which black and white stars were teamed together, we believe this was the first to have exclusively black heroes. Poitier is a wagon master, helping black pioneers find a homestead where the whites will leave them alone. Circumstances turn him into an outlaw, with Belafonte's character tagging along. The narrative has a number of gaps and illogical turns, and the film is a bit disorganized, but the performances are enjoyable and Poitier, who grew up watching westerns in the cinema, seems to be having a good time playing cowboy.

The Columbia TriStar release (01489, \$25) is presented on one side in letterboxed format, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback, and is in full screen format on the other side. On the copy we viewed, the side marked 'widescreen' was actually full screen, and vice-versa. The letterboxing adds nothing to the sides of the image and masks off picture information from the top and bottom, so its only advantage is the 16:9 enhancement. The color transfer looks fine. The image is a little soft, but hues are reasonably bright and fleshtones are accurate. The monophonic sound is quite good, with a near-stereo dimensionality and clarity. The 102 minute program also has an alternate Portuguese track, optional English, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Korean and Thai subtitles, a picture of the film's one-sheet poster and Columbia's Poitier trailers.

Poitier also saddles up in **A Good Day to Die**, a Trimark Home Video release (VM7048D, \$15). He has pretty much the same role, as a marshal helping black settlers, that he had in **Buck and the Preacher**, but to dire consequences, as his character is emasculated by the Klan in a leg-crossing scene about halfway through the 1995 telefilm. The 120 minute or so program (it is not time encoded) has a big cast, including Michael Moriarty, Hart Bochner, Grace Zabriskie, Robert Guillaume and even Farrah Fawcett, and a number of subplots, but Poitier is at its center and is pretty much the only reason to suffer through it. His performance is excellent and his presence lends credence to what is otherwise a junk TV adaptation of a junk novel.

The picture looks okay, with sharp details and accurate fleshtones. The musical score has some dimensionality, though otherwise the show's stereo mix is limited. Although the program is chapter encoded, there is no jacket guide or onscreen chapter guide. There is no captioning.

An absolutely spellbinding 55 minute documentary about Poitier, **Sidney Poitier One Bright Light**, has been released by CenterStage and WinStar TV & Video as an *American Masters Production* (WHE73070, \$25). Directed by former Poitier co-star, Lee Grant, the narrative induces an almost constant flow of goosebumps as it advances across Poitier's path-finding career. "I come from a culture in the Bahamas where we were 90% of the population, which allowed me to go to America with a sense of myself." Later, when the release of his first film, *No Way Out*, was banned in the Bahamas by the British, the anger that erupted led to the overthrow of colonial rule. The program combines full-face close-ups of Poitier and a few associates, as they reminisce about his life and career, interspersed with still photos and film clips. Because of its length, it naturally skims over some details, but it ultimately paints a compelling portrait of a true hero—a man who had the temperament to withstand not only the onslaught of prejudice that greeted his success, but the backlash that followed after he'd opened the door for others. The mere fact that Poitier, in his seventies, can sit for the camera and speak warmly and bemusedly about all that happened, and that he got through all those decades without ever losing his cool, makes the documentary a significant and definitive capstone to his career. Unlike many actors, he is more beguiling as himself than as any part he ever played, and he played some terrific parts.

The picture and mono sound are fine. Some of the film clips are a bit soft, but manageable. A filmography of Poitier's screen acting and director credits is included, along with more testimonials and anecdotes from Denzel Washington, James Earl Jones and Robert Townsend that did not make the

documentary's final cut (you can also hear Grant pitching the questions). There is no captioning.

Before his time

A great black actor who had to travel to Europe to find dignified film roles, Paul Robeson became a star before America was mature enough to accept his talent, and the movies lost an incredible potential because of this prejudice. Two Robeson films have been bundled on one single-sided dual-layer DVD by Kino on Video as **The Paul Robeson Collection: Song of Freedom plus Big Fella** (K151DVD, \$30). Both are musicals, produced in Britain, that take full advantage of Robeson's rich baritone voice, but both also provide him with characters that go beyond easy stereotypes, enabling him to explore a decent emotional range in each performance.

In the first half of the 1936 feature, *Song of Freedom*, Robeson is a London dockworker who is 'discovered' by an opera impresario one evening, as he is singing while strolling home with his buddies. With a little effort, he becomes rich and famous. In the film's second half, which appears to be evoking one of Robeson's best-known roles, **The Emperor Jones** (Dec 93), he and his wife travel to Africa. He becomes king of a tribe and attempts to westernize tribal customs. The film is serious, but lighthearted, and Robeson's character undergoes a continual shift in his perceptions of the world around him as his fortunes change.

Robeson is a dockworker in Marseilles in the 1937 *Big Fella*, who befriends the runaway son of wealthy British tourists. The film is fascinating, because structurally it embraces the format of a Shirley Temple movie, yet it never succumbs to that sort of pandering. In the end, the boy's parents dangle the opportunity in front of the hero to become the boy's nanny, and for a while it looks like he might take the gig, but he ends up doing things his own way. Again, the film is lighthearted, but Robeson projects a character with a full and complicated personality.

The black-and-white picture on the 80 minute *Song of Freedom* looks rather aged, with a soft focus, weak contrasts and a number of scratches. The black-and-white picture on the 73 minute *Big Fella* still has a few wear marks, but the image is sharper and some shots look fairly smooth. On both, the monophonic sound is scratchy but coherent, and there is no captioning.

Another *American Masters Production* from WinStar Home Entertainment, **Paul Robeson: Here I Stand** (WHE73048, \$25) runs a full 117 minutes as it progresses through Robeson's long and fascinating career. Robeson was both a scholar and the best football player in the country in college, and his acting and his singing voice brought him almost immediate success on stage after he gave up trying to crack the white ceiling as a lawyer. In Europe, he found a few film roles that were moderately more progressive than the parts offered him in America, but the thrust of his career appears to have been his singing, since the repertoire was something he had genuine control over. There are fascinating clips in the program as he discusses the relationships between the songs he has chosen, displaying the enthusiasm, intelligence and enlightenment of a musicology professor. Like all of America, he supported Russia during World War II, but then, after the war, he was less inclined to let go of his affection. His statements about the freedoms guaranteed in the Russian constitution seem woefully naïve when it must have been obvious that there were no Asians or Muslims or other minority representatives in the Soviet power structure, not to mention women, but after having been targeted and abused for so long by American hatreds, you can't really blame him for feeling rejuvenated in the isolation Russia offered him. In any case, it seems from the documentary that it was health problems, and not his stubbornness or blacklisting, that pulled him out of the eye of the white media during the final quarter of his life, though he certainly deserved a great deal more recognition and honor than he received in those final years (he passed away in 1976).

The picture quality looks fine and the monophonic sound is decent. The program is not captioned. There is a biographical timeline, a filmography and a lengthy discography.

Female crime spree

Jada Pinkett, Queen Latifah, Vivica A. Fox and Kimberly Elise are four lower-income African-American women who go on a crime spree to get some money in their pockets in **Set It Off**, a New Line Home Video release (N4787, \$25). The 1996 film brought a fresh perspective to the action genre, and is effectively paced to that end, but it is also a valid sociological drama about the effects of poverty and gender

bias. The single-sided dual-layer DVD is presented in letterboxed format on one layer, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback, and is in full screen format on the other layer. The letterboxing masks a bit of picture information off the top and bottom of the image and adds some to the sides in comparison to the full screen version, but provides a more satisfying framing. Darker sequences are a little soft, but otherwise the picture quality looks okay and hues are adequately detailed. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital track has a good amount of energy and some well chosen separation effects. The 123 minute feature has optional English subtitles, a cast-and-director profile section, a trailer, and a music video by Ray J.

So, when the director shouts, 'Action!' does the hero turn and say, 'What?'

The one opportunity Carl Weathers had to see his name above the title, **Action Jackson**, has been released by Warner Home Video (816, \$15). Weathers is a cop trying to bust the city's fancy millionaire businessman who, of course, is corrupt to the bone. The narrative is just kind of strung together, but the 1988 film lives up to its title, with one energetic action sequence after another. It is also, as near as we can figure, the first movie to use the word, 'diss' as the predicate form of 'disrespect.' Craig T. Nelson is the bad guy, with Vanity and Sharon Stone as the prizes. Weathers is enjoyable and we've always been sorry that the feature didn't give him a bigger boost.

The picture is presented in full screen format only, although the framing always seems workable. The colors are reasonably fresh, though the image does look a little soft in places. The stereo surround sound has a modest dimensionality and limited separation effects. The 96 minute program has an alternate French audio track in stereo and English captioning.

Sometimes it's hard to find Ice-T

Ice-T is the hunted and Rutger Hauer is the hunter in the 1994 been-there-done-that thriller, **Surviving the Game**, about rich guys hunting people. The film has the usual satisfactions when the hero starts to get the upper hand, but there is nothing special about its execution and it is a fairly predictable effort.

The single-sided dual-layer New Line Home Video release (N4895, \$25) is presented in letterboxed format on one layer, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback, and in full screen format on the other layer, adding picture information to the bottom of the screen and losing a little on the sides in comparison to the letterboxed image. Either framing seems workable. Some darker sequences are a little weak, but otherwise the picture quality is fine and hues are bright. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has no knockout sequences but is adequate for the material. The 96 minute feature has optional English subtitles, a trailer, and a cast-and-director profile section.

Epic miniseries

A massive ten-episode miniseries about tribal warfare in southern Africa, **Shaka Zulu**, has been released by Trimark Home Video (VN7100D, \$50). Two of the 55 minute episodes appear on each of five sides of three platters, with full opening and closing credits. Set at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century, Edward Fox and Robert Powell are British adventurers assigned to open diplomatic channels with the warrior, Chaka, who united the Zulu tribes. In the principal role, the statuesque Henry Cele has the most screen time, and there is not a moment in all the hours the miniseries runs where you don't believe he's the chief. His chiseled features and steely gaze exude a fierce charisma, yet he handles the emotional moments and the subtler political nuances with great dexterity. The supporting cast is often much weaker and many of the African performers, though their words match the lip movements, appear to have been dubbed, but whether or not Cele was, you never notice it. Physically, he controls the screen.

In the first three episodes, the British make their way to the Zulu capitol and meet Cele's character. The subsequent three episodes are flashbacks, which show his parentage and how he rose to power. The remainder of the story, with a few more flashbacks, is then executed in the final four episodes. The advantages of the miniseries format provide the show with much of its appeal. Not only does the narrative have enough time to explore the hero's entire life and give it a sort of Arthurian resonance, but the details of Zulu culture can also be savored and the logistics of moving characters from one location to another are never

shortchanged. There are moments in a couple of the earlier episodes where the 1986 film seems like an inept non-Hollywood production soaking up South African cash, but even the filmmakers, during the course of their experience, appear to have warmed up to the project, improving as they went a long. There are many fine, tense dramatic sequences, some terrific battles and, despite cost-cutting limits on the period detail, plenty of captivating imagery. The farther the musical score strays from its African roots the worse it sounds, but for the most part, it is invigorating. Trevor Howard co-stars as an inscrutable Cape Town governor, and Christopher Lee appears briefly in the opening episode. Oh, and by the way, for all nine hours, the program is saturated with National Geographic-style nudity.

The DVD has one substantial flaw. From beginning to end, it is littered with noticeable artifacting flaws. The most common flaw is displacement artifacting, in which objects in the image appear disconnected from their surroundings, but there are also more blatant errors, where parts of the screen will completely disintegrate for a blink of the eye, and then return. It is a distracting annoyance.

Otherwise, the presentation is serviceable. The color transfer is okay when the lighting is decent and a touch murky in darker sequences. The monophonic sound is quite strong and near-stereo in quality at times. Contrary to jacket notations, there is no subtitling, although the program is captioned. Side six contains a very good 10 minute historical summary of the real events upon which the film was based, along with trailers for practically every show Trimark has released on DVD.

The Brat Pack goes back in time

The energetic 1993 'Brat Pack' version of **The Three Musketeers** is available from Walt Disney Home Video (17502, \$30). Charlie Sheen, Kiefer Sutherland and Oliver Platt are the title characters, with Chris O'Donnell as D'Artagnan. Rebecca De Mornay, Julie Delpy and Tim Curry are also featured. While it may not be the tightest or the most pleasing version of the oft-filmed tale, it is still loads of fun, with zippy sword fights, great sets and costumes, witty humor and many elaborate action sequences. The picture is presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. The color transfer is sharp, with bright, effectively detailed hues. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital track has lots of enjoyable separation effects and a good, strong bass at appropriate moments. The 105 minute program also has an alternate French language version in standard stereo, optional English subtitles, a 4 minute featurette and a music video.

Sutherland also shows up in **Young Guns II**, A Warner Home Video release (17246, \$20), with Emilio Estevez, Lou Diamond Phillips, Christian Slater, William Peterson and James Coburn. The performances are less mannered than in **Three Musketeers**. Most of the actors do a good job, finding the right balance between spirited humor and serious drama, particularly Estevez who, in retrospect, has never had another opportunity to be as attractively and impishly heroic. The film spends a little more time grinding out its plot than the first **Young Guns** (Jun 98) did, but it is an enjoyable effort and it is a shame they didn't make more movies like it.

The picture is presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. Not as obsessed with casting everything in browns as the first **Young Guns** was, while earth tones still dominate, colors are readily discernible and are sharply defined. We did encounter a very minor artifact ratcheting effect during a couple of fast camera moves. The sound has been remastered for 5.1-channel Dolby Digital, which provides a bit more dimensionality and perkiness than the standard track. The 103 minute program has a French language track in standard stereo, English captioning, a trailer and a 6 minute featurette.

We love more Shakespeare!

Miramax Home Entertainment released a movie-only version of the 1998 Oscar-winning romantic comedy, **Shakespeare in Love**, on DVD (Oct 99) and has now followed it up with a *Miramax Collector's Series* version (18528, \$40). The picture and sound transfer on the new version are identical to the standard release. The image is letterboxed, with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced

16:9 playback. The color transfer looks great, with bright, sharp hues and accurate fleshtones. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has a nice dimensionality and has clearly defined tones. The 122 minute film has an alternate French audio track in standard stereo, optional English subtitles and a trailer. Joseph Fiennes and Gwyneth Paltrow star, with a number of memorable supporting players.

Two commentary tracks accompany the *Collector's Edition*, one by director John Madden and one from many members of the cast and crew, including more comments from Madden.

On his own track, Madden explains a lot of references within the film not just to Shakespeare but to the whole Elizabethan era. He talks about the development of the film, but never goes into the controversy surrounding who wrote the script. He talks a bit about the crew and the cast, his reasoning behind the staging of various scenes, and he identifies the parts of the movie that were brought forward during the editing. He also explains how aspects of the romance were modified after the filming was begun and he began to see how the movie worked. On the whole, though, he remains fairly superficial, never delving too deeply into any aspect of the production.

The cast and crew track splices together comments from each contributor and fills in a lot of detail that Madden overlooks. Again, the controversy over how much Tom Stoppard contributed to Marc Norman's screenplay is not broached, but both talk about developing the story. Norman is very well versed in Shakespeare's biography and art, and shares many insights. *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, was a radical innovation for Elizabethan audiences—it begins in the format of a comedy, about fickle love, but ends as a tragedy. One of the producers, Julie Goldstein, tells an amusing story about one scene in the script that she despised and kept trying to talk Madden into dropping. Gladly, he wouldn't listen to her, and it is now her favorite scene in the film. By itself, Madden's track is run of the mill, but the combination of the two tracks greatly enhances a viewer's appreciation of the film and even of Shakespeare.

Additionally, there is an alternate version of the film's finale, which is not as good, a fight scene with new extensions, a nice little scene about the gathering of actors for an audition and an alternate take of a scene containing a very funny 'in' joke. A 20 minute documentary looks at the film, Shakespeare and other Shakespeare movies, and includes plenty of interviews with the cast and crew. Much of what is said in the documentary, however, is repeated in the second commentary track. There is also a separate, short segment about the costumes that is quite informative. TV commercials, a trailer, a modest list of 'Shakespeare facts' and quick biographical sketches of the other historical characters appearing in the film are also included.

Michael Hoffman's stab at **William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream** is available from 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment (4112308, \$35). Calista Flockhart, Stanley Tucci, Michelle Pfeiffer, Kevin Kline and Rupert Everett are among those featured in the 1999 production, which doesn't take nearly as much advantage of modern filmmaking technologies as we would have liked. It is virtually impossible to perform a rendition of **Midsummer Night's Dream** that is not entertaining, and the film has some wonderful moments, but it is an uneven work, Hoffman seeming to overlook some details as he focuses on others. The film was shot in Italy and is set there, at the Turn of the Century, even though the dialog's references to Athens as the locale have not been altered. Everett and Tucci are super. Flockhart has trouble with the dialog at times, but she never misses a beat physically. Both Pfeiffer and Kline seem miscast, which is particularly odd in Kline's case since one would suppose that the role of Bottom, the weaver who is transformed into a donkey, is something he could do in his sleep. In its best moments, the film captures the glorious humor and enchantment that has delighted playgoers for ages and we only hope that its existence will not deter others from staging it on film again someday.

The picture is presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. The picture transfer looks fine, with lovely hues and a sharp focus. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound has many foresty atmospheric separation effects and a dimensional musical score. The 120 minute program has optional English and Spanish subtitles (“¡Capitán de nuestro bando, Helena se acerca! Y el joven, víctima de mi error, rogándole su amor. ¿Asistimos a esta amorosa farsa? Señor, qué tontos son estos mortals.”), and a trailer. The chapter encoding and jacket guide are okay.

Franco Zeffirelli's wonderful teaming of Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor in Shakespeare's **The Taming of the Shrew** has been released by Columbia TriStar Home Video (01109, \$28). The stellar appeal of the two leads more than compensates for the pesky anti-feminist tone of the play, and the simplicity of the story makes it more readily accessible than many films employing Shakespeare's dialog. One expects Burton to deliver his part well, but Taylor is outstanding, and the scenes the two of them share have layers of meaning, reflecting their off-screen lives, that go well beyond anything Shakespeare anticipated. Like all of Zeffirelli's films, the 1967 production is lusciously designed, and yet the detail and splendor of the sets and costumes do not detract from the briskness of the comedy. There is also an infectious, uplifting musical score, by Nino Rota.

As has been the case in the past, the 122 minute film is missing a smidgen of footage from its pre-credit sequence. The picture is presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. While the image has a mild haze in some sequences, for the most part it looks terrific, with bright hues and reasonably sharp details. The sound on the LD (Mar 93) was remastered in stereo, which served Rota's score particularly well, but the DVD has been left in mono, with alternate Spanish and Portuguese audio tracks and optional English, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Korean and Thai subtitles ("Tu marido es tu señor, tu vida, tu guardian, tu cabeza, tu soberano, el que cuida de ti y por ese bienestar somete su cuerpo a rudos trabajos, tanto en la tierra como en el mar de noche, vela en medio de la tempestad; de día, en medio del frío mientras tú duermes cálidamente en el hogar en seguro y a salvo."). A trailer is also included, along with profiles of Zeffirelli, Burton and Taylor. The chapter encoding and jacket guide are fine.

A teen romantic comedy loosely based upon parts of **Taming of the Shrew**, **10 Things I Hate about You**, is available from Touchstone Home Video (18142, \$30). The film works better than it deserves to, and includes lampoons of high school life (there are some very amusing 'theme' cliques) as well as genuine and reasonably complex character portraits of about a half dozen kids. The film is more about the old 'boy is paid to romance girl, boy falls in love, girl discovers boy's initial duplicity' scheme than it is about anything Shakespeare concocted, but the heroines have a great deal more dimensionality and flexibility than the 'shallow Bianca' and 'shrewish Kat' labels one expects them to get stuck with. The romances are sweet, the humor is pleasant, the rock music score sounds terrific, and none of the film's flaws is annoying enough to get in the way. You have to be young at heart to enjoy it, but that's not asking too much, is it?

The picture is in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. The color transfer looks okay, with bright hues and reasonably accurate fleshtones. The musical score has more separations and more clarity on the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital track, but the rest of the film's mix is uneventful and works well enough on the standard stereo track. The 97 minute feature has an alternate French audio track in 5.1 Dolby, optional English subtitles and a trailer. The film was shot in Seattle and Tacoma. There are bloopers over the end credit scroll. The chapter encoding and jacket guide are okay.

You have to already be familiar, very familiar, with Shakespeare's play to appreciate **Derek Jarman's The Tempest**, a Kino on Video release (K147DVD, \$30). Jarman stages Shakespeare's story, about a nobleman and his daughter living in isolation, in a rather devil-may-care fashion, and it is taxing to follow the narrative from what he has done. Instead, the film's pleasures come from the eccentric readings of individual scenes and the really bizarre sets and costumes. It is a hodgepodge that even jettisons Shakespeare for its finale, turning into an inspired musical number that depicts Elisabeth Welch singing *Stormy Weather*, surrounded by a chorus of sailors. Supposedly set in a castle on an island, most of the movie appears to be taking place in a cluttered antique warehouse, full of rags and wires, which is also what members of the cast wear when they have their clothing on. Jarman's exploration of the play's carnal undercurrent is admirable and stimulating, but his disinterest in the beauty and strength of the play's formal aspects is irritating, and those who don't already know the story will have no idea what the heck is going on.

The picture is presented in full screen format, and the framing looks viable. The image is rather murky, with weak, soft colors and very bland fleshtones. Contrasts are limited. The monophonic sound is tolerable and the 95 minute program is not captioned. A collection of stills is included, as is the film's original presskit (including, for those who need a brush up, a plot summary of the play), and three short silent films by Jarman—*A Journey to Avebury* from 1971, a 12 minute montage of images from the English countryside; *Garden of Luxor* from 1972, an 8 minute collection of vaguely Egyptian images superimposed on a man whipping something and a guy eating flies; and *Art of Mirrors* from 1973, a 6 minute piece, similar to *Luxor*, with people walking mechanically and flicking mirrored light at the camera. All three were apparently shot on Super-8 and are extremely blurry and battered.

Two from Kar-Wai

Two films by the director of **Chungking Express** (May 97), Wong Kar-Wai, **Fallen Angels** and **Happy Together**, have been released by Kino on Video. We didn't care much for **Chungking Express** and these two didn't thrill us, either, but Kar-Wai has many fans and his distinctively styled 'New Wave' films are admittedly intelligent and stimulating. The style of both movies is quite similar, in fact, a seeming pastiche of makeshift camera angles and erratic rhythms that builds to a very clear and coherent emotional flow. We just don't think that there is much more to the films than that, and the style, of itself, is not attractive, while his supporters find genius in the manner that his style and his themes coalesce, and depth in the abstract resonance of his constructions.

The better of the two is **Happy Together** (K119DVD, \$30), about two male emigrants from Hong Kong, played by Leslie Cheung and Tony Leung, living together as lovers in Buenos Aires. The title, of course, is ironic, because their bliss is fleeting. They break up, but then reunite uneasily when one is convalescing from a beating. The 1997 film is reasonably coherent, depicting the jobs one of the heroes goes through as he tries to save money to return home, and showing the leisure activities, erotic and otherwise, that take up what spare time they have. Their problems can be interpreted humorously, but their personalities are annoying and their fates are unsurprising.

The 1995 **Fallen Angels** (K120DVD, \$30) is a more abstract work, in which several of the characters could be interpreted as fantasies in the eyes of one or two of the other characters. Vaguely evocative of **Pierrot le Fou**, one character is a hitman whose bloody gun battles may be a sufficient motive for fans to obtain the title, although there is no context to the action. Another is a woman who plans the hits and longs for the hitman from afar. Another is a mentally-challenged man who lives with his father and breaks open shops in the middle of the night, harassing passers-by until they purchase the goods in the shops. The film's humor is accentuated, while the longings of the characters are the core of the drama. Unless Kar-Wai's style overwhelms you, however, the whole thing can seem pretty silly and innocuous. Leon Lai Ming and Takeshi Kaneshiro star.

Both movies are letterboxed with no 16:9 enhancement. **Happy Together**, which runs 97 minutes, has an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1, while **Fallen Angels**, which runs 96 minutes, has an aspect ratio of about 1.43:1. The picture transfer on both features looks accurate, though on both, the picture quality is deliberately messy, so a fair assessment of how well it has been preserved could only be determined by Kar-Wai himself. On both, stronger hues can look fuzzy, there are a few stray speckles and fleshtones are indistinct, but the presentations are no different from most decent looking Hong Kong productions. Both films are monophonic, although **Fallen Angels** has a near-stereo dimensionality. Both are in Chinese, with permanent English subtitles, and both are accompanied by trailers—in the case of **Fallen Angels**, the trailer looks like it is excerpting an exciting masterpiece, when in reality, the excerpts are the movie.

The artist as intruder

The remarkable films of Peter Greenaway are highly stimulating, intellectual candy. We would be more enamored of him if he didn't maltreat his heroes so terribly and if he could, just once, have a sunny view of things, but the density and beauty of his films are admirable, and they are multiply intriguing, inviting endless repeat viewing if you don't mind feeling dour. Although Greenaway's films are highly original and unique, there are some common themes threading through many of them, one being the artist alienated from the society around him and the other being the positively murderous spite his female char-

acters, who often get the upper hand, have for his male characters. Oh, and most of his movies have lots of great sex and frontal nudity.

Greenaway's breakthrough 1982 feature, **The Draughtsman's Contract**, has been released as a Fox Lorber Home Video *World Class Cinema Collection* title (FLV5196, \$30). Set in Seventeenth Century England, the hero is an artist who wangles a commission to sketch aspects of an estate from the wife of the estate's owner, ostensibly as a gift to her husband. It takes several days to complete each drawing, but objects that were not in the landscape on the first day appear on the second, the husband does not seem to be coming back from his trip, erotic interludes with the wife are part of the deal, and everybody is getting very annoyed at the artist's rude, self-centered attitude. His good fortune eventually comes to an end. To compose his drawings, the artist uses a frame viewer that allows him to break a landscape down in scale, and Greenaway builds an integral link between the artist's viewpoint and his own, reinforcing the viewer's curiosity about what is happening beyond the frame.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. The source material has a few stray scratches, but otherwise the picture looks good, with reasonably bright hues and decent fleshtones. The monophonic sound, including a Michael Nyman score, is fairly strong. The 103 minute program is not captioned.

Greenaway's 1985 feature about two nutty zoologist brothers, **A Zed & Two Naughts** ('ZOO'), has also been issued by Fox Lorber as a *World Class Cinema* title (FLV5195, \$30). Slightly reminiscent of **Dead Ringers**, the brothers share an erotic relationship with their maimed mother-in-law after their wives are both killed in a freak car accident (it ran into a swan), but start going off the deep end anyway. One has a hobby recording time lapse images of decaying animal corpses, which, of course, are intercut with the drama. Using the zoo where the brothers are employed as a setting, Greenaway employs many surreal images of animals to add flair to the proceedings. The cinematography is outstanding, and every shot reminded us of the children's picture book series, *I Spy*, where each photo has dozens of hidden objects. As fascinating and exciting as the images are, however, the drama is ridiculous as all get out. Even if the film is approached as a comedy, it tries too hard to be absurd to score much humor in its surprises.

The picture is again letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1 and no 16:9 enhancement (Nyman did the score again, too). The picture transfer looks super, with bright, deep, stable hues and crisp details. The monophonic sound is strong and the 115 minute program is not captioned. The chapter guide, though woefully incomplete, is very cute, identifying each segment with an animal.

A Japanese woman develops a fetish in which she wants calligraphers to write upon her (her father was a writer), and later she taunts a publisher, who had harmed her father, with a series of works she has written upon the bodies of live men in Greenaway's 1998 effort, **The Pillow Book**, which has been released by Columbia TriStar Home Video (28709, \$28). As rare as that occurrence is these days, the film breaks new ground in the language of cinema, using superimposed images in places to tell two lines of the story simultaneously and forcing the viewer to look through one to see the other. While the narrative is somewhat overwrought, the film is brilliantly constructed and breathtakingly designed, inundating the viewer with ideas, textures and challenges.

We wish, as an addendum or a subtitling option, more of the actual text that appears on the screen in gobs could be translated. While we suspect Greenaway would prefer that we just assume it is brilliant poetry, why must only Japanese viewers know for sure? Ewan McGregor portrays the heroine's lover, and while some of the dialog is in Japanese, Chinese, French, Dutch, and whatever, much of the dialog is in English. Some of the other dialog is subtitled and some is not. The English is closed captioned.

Although a disclaimer appears at the opening of the DVD to explain that the film is 'formatted to fit' the video screen, the framing looks fine. The image alternates between appearing full screen and appearing as a raised letterbox band with other things happening beneath the band, but it always looks complete and impeccably balanced.

The color transfer is okay and is effectively detailed, but there is smearing and displacement artifacting in a number of spots and the image looks a little soft at times. The stereo surround sound is excellent. The mix is terrific, with multi-plane layers of sound that match the density of the images. The audio has lots of dimensionality and plenty of power. Although the jacket cover claims the film runs 128 minutes, it clocks in at 121. There is also a trailer.

The beginnings of horror

Three silent films have been bundled together on the Elite Entertainment release, **The Masterworks of the German Horror Cinema** (EE4376, \$55). Each of the three movies, *Der Golem* from 1920, **The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari** from 1921 and *Nosferatu* from 1922, appears on a separate side, with *Golem* and **Caligari** sharing a platter.

The presentation of **The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari** is not as good as the definitive Image Entertainment release (Nov 97). Although the black-and-white picture on Elite's version is not tinted, it is much fuzzier and less detailed than Image's picture. Image's presentation has more picture information around the edges, and Elite's mono audio track is not as enjoyable as Image's stereo production. The program is a bit sped up, running 52 minutes (Image's ran 72 minutes), and is accompanied by a 3 minute clip from director Robert Wiene's *Genuine*, and some photos and stills.

About a mad doctor who employs a hypnotized servant to commit murder, **The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari** has a striking, fun house set design and is one of the recognized cornerstones of the horror genre, as well as being one of the first movies that used its art design to evoke the severe emotional recesses of the human mind.

Elite's *Nosferatu*, on the other hand, looks better than Image's version (Nov 97). In this case, the tinting on Image's version takes away detail and makes the picture look soft, while the black-and-white picture on Elite's version is very crisp, bringing out details and textures. The mono music and musical sound effect track seems to work pretty well and adds to the entertainment. Again, the film is a little sped up, running 64 minutes to Image's 81 minutes. It is accompanied by some stills and drawings.

Another foundation work, the F.W. Murnau feature was the first adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and is best remembered for Max Schreck's unworldly embodiment of the ratlike title character.

Der Golem appears on DVD for the first time and is presented in real silence, with no score. The 68 minute program is an adaptation of a Jewish legend, about a rabbi who brings forth a monster (kind of a big, hulky brute) to protect the Jews who are being forced to leave their homes. The monster does his job, but things go haywire when problems in the rabbi's personal life affect the monster's behavior. Like **Caligari**, the set designs are striking, and the rabbi's laboratory looks distinctively like the inside of a head. The film had a clear influence on **Frankenstein** and other early monster movies.

The black-and-white picture is a little more worn down than the other two, with fairly soft lines and limited contrasts, making it difficult to see details once in a while. There is also a bit more artifacting here and there. The film is accompanied by a few stills.

Very bad movies

A masterpiece of unintentional comedy and surrealism, Edward D. Wood Jr.'s **Plan 9 from Outer Space**, has been released by Corinth Films and Image Entertainment as part of the *Edward D. Wood, Jr. Library* (ID8504CODVD, \$25). Called the greatest bad movie ever made, the 1959 feature is utterly entertaining as a showcase of inept filmmaking from its first frame to its last, and were we to be stranded upon a deserted island, we would choose it for company before choosing many Oscar-winners.

We reviewed a Passport Video release of the title in Jul 99, but Image's presentation is far more satisfying (for one thing, Passport's version displayed Passport's logo in the lower right of the image throughout the film). The source material appears similar to what was used for the Lumivision LD (Jan 95). The LD has softer contrasts, revealing more detail in the darker areas of the screen, but otherwise the picture on the DVD is much better, with sharper lines, deeper blacks and smoother backgrounds. There is still some wear on the source material and a couple flurries of speckles, but the presentation is viable. The monophonic sound is duller and less detailed than the sound on the LD, but it is passable. There is no captioning.

The 78 minute film is accompanied by a wonderful original trailer ("It is safe to state that the grandchildren of some of the people in this theater will not be born on Earth.") and a marvelous 111 minute retrospective documentary. Although not the most elegantly constructed documentary ever made, the program has interviews with every surviving cast member and many crew members, rare home movies of the enthusiastic Wood at work, tours of the locations and Wood's studios, and profiles of everybody involved with the film. Citing television broadcasts and theatrical revivals as having spread the popularity of **Plan 9**, they fail to acknowledge the significant contribution home video has made to its belated success.

They also suggest it has only been in recent years that fans have begun to embrace 'bad' dramas, but wasn't that what Shakespeare's *Pyramus and Thisbe* was all about? The chapter encoding on the film and the documentary are fine.

Image has also released Wood's other bizarre, heartfelt turkey, his cinematic ode to cross-dressing, **Glen or Glenda?**, as another *Library* title (ID8578CODVD, \$25). Like **Plan 9**, inserts of Bela Lugosi set a tone for the film, which is then disrupted by the narrative at hand. Wood himself appears in the title role, agonizing because he loves his wife's angora sweaters more than he loves her. The film has a number of absurd digressions. Unlike **Plan 9**, it is too focused to sustain rib-clenching laughter from beginning to end, but it is still a gas.

The DVD, however, is gas of a different sort. The presentation runs 68 minutes, some 4 minutes less than the Lumivision LD (Aug 95). Among other things, it is missing a minute of footage from a dream sequence. The picture on the DVD is also substantially cropped on the right and the top of the image in comparison to the LD presentation. True, blacks are deeper and the image is sharper, but that is hardly compensation. The monophonic sound is tolerable and the 1953 film is accompanied by another amusing trailer. The chapter encoding is limited

Lugosi has a much larger part in the *Edward D. Wood, Jr. Library* title, **Bride of the Monster** (ID8600CODVD, \$25), about a mad scientist who wants to create a super-powerful being. Parts of the 1956 film are very silly—there's a fakey giant octopus—but the appeal of the program is in its adherence to the genre conventions and in Lugosi's energetic performance. And, at 68 minutes, it doesn't have time to wear out its welcome.

Although the source material has some minor wear, the presentation doesn't look bad. It is a bit dark, but the image is smooth and the focus is sharp. The monophonic sound is fine and the program is not captioned. A brief, uninteresting trailer is also included.

After **Plan 9** and **Glen or Glenda**, a movie like Wood's **Jail Bait**, another Image *Library* title (ID8601CODVD, \$25), suffers only because it is not as bad. There are grandly amusing moments within the film, about the son of a plastic surgeon who kills a guard in a robbery, such as when the surgeon's voluptuous daughter hangs all over her father during their conversations, but most of the 1954 film is a straightforward crime thriller, and the more competent it seems the more impatient one becomes with it. You can take delight in the awful set design and the almost unbearable musical score (it sounds like a looped recording, but there's always a shift when something important happens), but the standard story of a failed heist is less involving.

The picture quality in the non-stock scenes is a little soft, but contrasts are reasonably clear and the image is effectively detailed. The monophonic sound is tolerable if you can stand the musical score, and the program is not captioned. An interesting trailer is also included with the 71 minute program.

They were called 'Exploitation Films' and, taking on the veneer of an educational program, they brought visions of sex, drug use and other verboten topics to filmgoers who would otherwise be blissfully ignorant of such matters in the early days of sound film. The best-known purveyor of these sideshow-like programs was Dwain Esper, and two hour-long classics from Esper have been released by Kino on Video, **Dwain Esper's Maniac & Narcotic** (K142, \$30).

The films themselves play very much like the movies of Ed Wood. The acting is delightfully horrible, continuity is a matter of luck and the narratives make no sense at all. The 1933 *Narcotic*, which runs 57 minutes, is a biography of an opium addict that Esper knew, a successful patent medicine salesman who lost everything to his vice. Esper includes meticulous details about the preparation of all sorts of illegal drugs, and is equally meticulous when it comes to showing how loose women get when they are high. It's a riot.

Maniac, from 1934, is even funnier, because it conforms, slightly, to the horror genre. The 52 minute feature is about a mad scientist, working in a Hollywood bungalow, sort of trying to put together a Frankenstein-type body until he is undone in a scene drawn from Edgar Allan Poe's *The Black Cat*. Periodically, dated definitions of psychotic conditions appear on text inserts, though you quickly realize they have little to do with the activities depicted on the screen. There is nudity (with a model blatantly substituted for the lead actress in the shot), a great, incoherent scene where two women fight, corpses and some marvelous

false beards. It is a delightful mess.

The picture quality on both programs leaves much to be desired, but that is expected. Although wear is rampant and the black-and-white images are soft, the presentations are coherent and one assumes this is the best source material available. The monophonic sound is also a bit rough and dialog isn't always clear. The programs are not captioned. Both movies are accompanied by a commentary track from historian Bret Wood who talks about the production history of the specific films, analyzes their respective quirks, gives a biography of Esper, and provides an analysis of the exploitation genre and business. Additionally, fascinating documents have been included that show a typical battle Esper had with a censor board to persuade them that his film was educational, along with a clip from an obscure silent film (about Hell) that Esper stole to superimpose upon the background of one scene, an excerpt from the shooting script for *Maniac*, some great photos of Esper and his production team, samples of ads, and an original trailer.

A delightfully bad movie that is based upon what must have been a gloriously bad stageplay, **Devil Girl from Mars**, is available from Corinth and Image (ID8589CODVD, \$25). The 1954 production takes place mostly in the lobby of a British countryside inn. After about 20 minutes of character establishment, a flying saucer lands outside and, subsequently, its one passenger, a no-nonsense female clad in black vinyl, periodically enters the lobby, talks tough, and then goes back to her spaceship so the other characters can digest her latest threats. The acting is really bad and the whole thing is so much fun you want to run to your local community theater group and have them put it on next, instead of *Brigadoon*. Hazel Court and Hugh McDermott star.

The black-and-white picture is in fairly decent shape. There are a few spots of wear, but the image is sharp and contrasts are fairly clear. The monophonic sound is fine. The 77 minute program is not captioned and is accompanied by an enjoyable trailer.

Contaminated with radiation, a man turns into a stiff-looking creature when exposed to daylight in **The Hideous Sun Demon**, a 1959 black-and-white horror flick that has been released by Corinth and Image (ID8586CODVD, \$25). Robert Clarke stars, with Nan Peterson and Patricia Manning. He makes love with Manning one night on the beach, but then runs off in the morning as the sun is beaming over the ocean horizon. Oh, by the way, the film is set in L.A. It's wonder the guy isn't just a monster all the time, since the day-for-night shots are so badly processed you never know when it is supposed to be dark and when it isn't, but the 75 minute feature is good for a few chuckles and makes a fine warm up for a main attraction.

The picture is presented in full screen format only and the source material is in rather worn condition, with several flurries of speckles and many other indications of wear. Otherwise, the picture is reasonably sharp and contrasts are adequately detailed. The mono sound is a little fuzzy, but tolerable. There is no captioning, but the film is accompanied by a wonderful trailer and the jacket contains a nice essay about the movie by Clarke.

Parts of Michael Cimino's definitive 1980 flop, **Heaven's Gate**, are exceedingly beautiful and there isn't really much to giggle over at the first. It is only after the whole 218 minute western is concluded that you look back and see how senselessly misguided the project is, the humor being that some poor fools, once known as the Board of Directors of United Artists, got talked into paying for it and continued to throw good money after bad as the project went awry. Kris Kristofferson stars as a sheriff trying to stop a contract killer, played by Christopher Walken, from murdering immigrant pioneers. Isabelle Huppert, Jeff Bridges and John Hurt also appear, with Joseph Cotten making a cameo appearance in his final screen role. The film contains many promising dramatic ideas and the characters have substance, but there is no spine to the narrative—normally a requirement for a film running 218 minutes—so it just bobs along from one sequence to another to another until most everybody gets shot.

MGM Home Entertainment has released **Heaven's Gate** (908371, \$25) in letterboxed format only,

with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and no 16:9 enhancement, on a single-sided dual-layer platter. The film is often deliberately hazy, with subdued, yellowed colors (to the point, at times, where it looks like a tinted black-and-white), though some outdoor sequences set in the bright daylight are a little sharper and tonally diverse. The presentation has a 5.1-channel Dolby Digital track, but the film's audio mix is early Eighties and surround effects are very limited. Additionally, the audio is never distorted, but it often sounds harsh. There are optional French and Spanish subtitles, English captioning and a trailer. The chapter encoding and jacket guide are reasonably extensive.

It is beginning to dawn on us that Agnieszka Holland's **Total Eclipse** is not just a bad movie, it is a classically bad movie, a potential candidate for the pantheon of badness. Leonardo DiCaprio, always looking freshly bathed, portrays the French teenage poet Arthur Rimbaud and David Thewlis, who looks like he never showered once during the entire production, is his besotted mentor, the poet Paul Verlaine. To begin with, the 1995 film's characters are steadfastly repulsive even if, in DiCaprio's case, they are unaccountably dreamy to look at. At one point DiCaprio's character jams a knife into the hand of Thewlis' character to test his love, and then, later on, Thewlis' character looks back upon the moment wistfully, as if those were the happy times. At the very beginning, Thewlis appears with a long beard and your first reaction is, 'What is this, a disguise?' Then gradually you realize that this is a point in time when his character is supposed to be older, so that the rest of the film can be told in flashback. Both characters are mean to everybody and mean to each other, and insights on their poetry is limited to a few general, often unsupported statements. Spending time with them is a strain, but watching the two actors make utter fools of themselves can be a real giggle fest, particularly on multiple viewing when you know it isn't necessary to take the history the film is depicting seriously.

New Line Home Video has released **Total Eclipse** (N4850, \$25) in single-sided, dual-layer format, letterboxed on one layer, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback, and in full screen on the other layer. The letterboxing loses a bit from the top and bottom and adds a bit to the sides, but either framing seems workable. Many of the indoor scenes are lit in period style, draining details from the fleshtones. The image is crisp, and the outdoor scenes are reasonably colorful. The music's dimensionality is enhanced on the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital track, and there are few stronger atmospheric effects as well, though the sound mix is not exceptional. The 112 minute program has optional English subtitles, a cast-and-director profile section and a trailer.

We doubt the day will ever come when we can find the least amount of enjoyment, mocking or otherwise, in **Very Bad Things**, a PolyGram Video release (4400582772, \$20). A very black comedy, the wrong-headed film just doesn't work and not even the attractive cast, which includes Christian Slater, Cameron Diaz, Daniel Stern and Jeanne Tripplehorn, can save it. A prostitute is accidentally killed during a bachelor party, and as the groom and his friends try to cover up the crime, more bodies pile up. The characters are too shrill and the plot is too relentlessly predictable to achieve the level of satire or irreverence required to make the premise work. There is plenty of overacting going on—Stern will make everybody wince and even Diaz is irritating—but it induces sighs, not giggles. After about 40 minutes of it, we longed to be back in bed with Leo and David.

The 1998 film is presented on a single-sided dual-layer platter, in letterboxed format on one layer, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback, and in full screen format on the other layer. The letterboxing framing is stronger. The color transfer is exceptionally good, with rich fleshtones, bright, solid hues, and a sharp focus. The 5.1-channel Dolby sound has a viable dimensionality and some decent separation effects. The 100 minute program has an alternate French audio track in 5.1 Dolby, captioning, a trailer and a cast-and-director profile section.

Thriller miniseries

The premise of the two-part miniseries based upon a Dean Koontz story, **Mr. Murder**, is ridiculous

as all get out, but gosh darn if the film doesn't get downright exciting once everything is set up and all the characters are in place. Stephen Baldwin stars as a bestselling author whose blood is taken in a mix-up and used in a 'rapid growth' cloning experiment. Pretty soon, an exact look-alike—also played by Baldwin, of course—is stalking the hero's family and wondering why he has no memory of his own parents. To Koontz's credit, there is a lot more going on in the narrative—the main villain, who created the clone, has a relationship problem with his own father, which seems to be manifesting itself in his work—and because the show runs a full 178 minutes, there is time for it to really build up the characters, the important subplots, and the scientific details. The concept may be laughable, but it is what Koontz and the filmmakers do with it that makes the show worthwhile and puts you on the edge of your seat.

Trimark Entertainment has released the 1998 production (VM7171D, \$25) on a two-sided DVD, each part appearing on a separate side with complete opening and closing credits. The color transfer looks passable, though the cinematography is often bland and contrasts are a bit weak at times. The stereo sound mix has limited dimensional effects. There are optional English, French and Spanish subtitles.

Ireland's origins

Recently broadcast, and destined to be dusted off and rebroadcast every March for many years to come, **St. Patrick: The Irish Legend**, from Shanachie (982, \$25), is an interesting mix of religious politics and special effect sequences. The 92 minute telefilm tells the story of how paganism was supplanted by Catholicism in Ireland, and the infighting that almost prevented it from happening. Patrick Bergin is the adult Patrick, though a good portion of the movie is taken up by his adventures in a more youthful form. Malcolm McDowell turns in a performance with a touch of flair as the British bishop who first assigns him and then attempts to undermine his success. Susannah York and Alan Bates appear briefly as Patrick's parents. By including the supernatural aspects of Patrick's miracles with the all-too-real bickering within the church hierarchy, the film attempts to be both a (modest) crowd-pleasing spectacle and a sober historical drama. While some of the supporting performances lack passion and the ending is rushed, the show works reasonably well, primarily because the subject has never really been explored before on film. Colors are okay, but the picture is soft and almost fuzzy in places. The Irish-themed musical score has a nice dimensionality, but the film's sound effects are generally centered. There is no captioning.

A film for hypochondriacs

Kate Jackson is the chief disease control person in New York City, scrambling to contain a highly infectious and deadly case of the sniffles in **Black Death**, a Libra Pictures International Image Entertainment release (ID5862SVDVD, \$20). The 1991 telefilm is short on logic here and there, but delivers most of what is expected of it. Jackson's character has to stand up to idiot politicians, react quickly to clues and shout commands without losing her femininity, all of which she does with great flair. Like most TV movies, it is a formula effort, keeping the viewer wondering what will happen next until the threat is surmounted. Or did you think this was a TV movie about nine million New Yorkers dying? The picture is a little murky, with bland fleshtones and mild grain in some sequences. Fleshtones are bland but workable. There is a stereo soundtrack, but most of the film's audio remains centered, except for occasional surges in the musical score. The 92 minute program is not captioned and is accompanied by an enjoyable TV trailer (it's the ABC voice, we think).

Shuffling around Buffalo

An irritating, slow-moving film that can also be quite amusing if you get on its wavelength, **Buffalo '66**, has been released by Universal as a *Film Fest Favorites* title (20648, \$25). Vincent Gallo directed and stars as a young man who gets out of prison, meets a girl and starts dragging her around with him. In the first half, they visit his parents, spaced-out football fans played by Ben Gazzara and Anjelica Huston. In the second half, they go bowling, eat at a Denny's and then hang out in a motel. Overall, not much happens, though there is a dynamically staged shoot out in the end, in which guts and guns freeze in mid-air. Gallo's character is whiney and a bit dim, but in his character's stupidity, his impulses and statements are sometimes very funny. Most viewers won't get past the first 15 minutes or so, but those who have patience for

its indulgent pace and limited ambitions will not go without some rewards. The picture is presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The colors are drained and the film has a very drab look, adding to its depressing tone. The stereo surround sound has a limited dimensionality and the dialog recording is often a bit muted. The 110 minute feature has optional English subtitles, profiles of Gallo and Ricci, production notes and a trailer.

Mob comedy

Joe Mantegna is a gangster who is trying to follow the convoluted orders of his senile boss in the mob comedy, **Hoods**, a Pioneer release (PEAD006, \$20). There are some amusing moments in the film, particularly when Mantegna's gang travels to a mental institution to find somebody crazy enough to perform the hit they've been told to carry out, but the film's mood is a little uneven and its pleasures are limited. Viewers who enjoy mob movies as a genre will probably be happy with it, but casual fans may be less impressed. The picture is in full screen only, though the framing looks fine. Hues are a little bland, but flesh-tones are okay and the image is reasonably sharp. The stereo sound has a limited dimensionality but no significant distortion. The 90 minute program is not captioned and includes a trailer.

Boogie nights

A look back at the most famous discotheque in the world, **54**, has been issued by Miramax Home Entertainment (16700, \$30). Mike Myers portrays the disco's owner, Steve Rubell, but most of what story there is revolves around the experiences of a waiter, portrayed by Ryan Phillippe, with Salma Hayek and Neve Campbell. The narrative never amounts to much, but those who either want to know what all the fuss was about or relive experiences they were otherwise too zonked to remember should find the 1998 production interesting. The picture is in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. The picture transfer looks stable, despite all the flashing, colored lights, and the image is reasonably sharp. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital track is great, blasting out the music but still leaving room enough for coherent dialog, such as it is. The 93 minute program has optional English subtitles and a pretty good music video, *If You Could Read My Mind*, by Stars on 45.

Whipping out South Parks and comparing them

The wildly irreverent and profanely humorous **South Park Bigger, Longer & Uncut** has been released by Paramount as a *Widescreen Collection* title (33682, \$30). The film is funniest in its opening half hour, trading off humor for story as it goes along so it can complete a coherent narrative and justify its existence. It also contains a running parody of musical cartoons, and people starved for genuine musicals have embraced its rhyming lyrics and simplified, cliché-evoking orchestrations as an equal to legitimate musical programs, not that you ever want to get caught singing any of the off-color songs to yourself, even in the shower. The animation retains the bargain basement cutout format used on the TV series, and yet it does have a more sophisticated and detailed feel. There are also sequences containing more traditional-looking computer animation, which depict Hell, perhaps as a sophisticated comment upon the art of animation and perhaps just to shake up the tone a little bit.

The picture is presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The color transfer is immaculate, with sharp, solid, vivid hues. The songs make good use of the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital soundtrack, presenting a fully dimensional and enveloping atmosphere that the standard track cannot come close to equaling. The 81 minute program also has a 2-channel French audio track and optional English subtitles.

There are three trailers, including one that opens with an amusing rib on Walt Disney. One of the trailers is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, losing picture information on the top and bottom of the screen in comparison to the DVD's presentation of the film. The chapter encoding and jacket guide are okay.

Comedy Central is continuing its release of the **South Park** TV episodes. The show's only two-part episode so far, *Cartman's Mom Is a Dirty Slut* and *Cartman's Mom Is Still a Dirty Slut*, is included on **South Park Volume 4** (36678, \$20). In addition to the primary narrative, in which one of the characters is trying

to find out who his father is, there is an amusing subplot in which the heroes enter a surreptitiously taken video in a national contest. They also have problems with a blizzard. Two unrelated but amusing narratives are combined in *Ike's Wee Wee*. Fearful that a circumcision ceremony will harm his baby brother, one of the kids tries to protect the child as the day approaches. In the other plot strand, the school counselor loses his job and becomes a junkie—conforming to all the clichés one hears about drugs and junkies. He suddenly gets girlfriends, too. In a reasonably clever and thoughtful episode, *Chicken Lover*, the search for a serial chicken rapist reveals that the town's policeman cannot read. He returns to school, while the kids take over as law enforcement officers, all during a take off on *Cops*. The punchline will be especially amusing to Ayn Rand haters. Finally, as an added bonus, the DVD contains a fifth episode, the famous 'April Fool's Day' episode about the show-within-the-show, *Terrance & Phillip*. Not only did the episode appear after the program's winter hiatus in the beginning of 1999, but it was placed between the two *Cartman's Mom* episodes, and was promoted as being the sequel to the first of those two. What's more, the show's popularity had suddenly generated a great deal of publicity, so that its return attracted an exceptionally large audience, all of whom received a rather large raspberry when they tuned in, for none of the kids appear in the episode, Kenny isn't seen and doesn't die, and the animation is (purposely) even more stiff than usual. Hoopla aside, however, the episode is an inspired variation upon the show's themes and a witty piece of self-parody.

On **South Park Volume 5** (36679, \$20), a pair of narratives is effectively combined in *Conjoined Fetus Lady*. In one, the town leadership goes out of its way to make a citizen with a birth defect feel at home, while in the other part, the kids advance to the world finals in dodge ball, only to face a ferocious Chinese team. The segments are crazy, profane and intelligent, and capture the essence of what works with the show. In *The Mexican Staring Frog of Southern Sri Lanka*, the kids play a trick on some Vietnam vets after thinking the vets gave them some false information for a school report. Meanwhile, the TV program that is hosted by the Jesus character changes its format after a drop in ratings. The two narratives eventually converge in a Jerry Springer-style free for all. One of the best episodes, *Flashbacks* is a takeoff on the typical 'flashback' episode, where a TV program robs footage from earlier programs and recycles it as characters recall past experiences. In this case, however, there is something odd about each 'flashback,' which the children share as they dangle on a bus that is hanging halfway over a cliff, and the ending is brilliant. Colorado bans fireworks in *Summer Sucks*, so the town obtains the world's largest 'snake' and ignites it for the Fourth of July, only to have it cause terror and destruction as its expanding ash covers the entire country. One of the characters also learns to swim, in a filthy public pool.

Evocative of the earlier episodes, there is a less focused narrative in *Chef's Salty Chocolate Balls* on **South Park Volume 6** (36680, \$20), a satire on the film industry in which Robert Redford, deciding that Park City has become too crowded, moves Sundance to South Park. The story is coherent, but the focus is on ridiculing movie people. In *Chicken Pox*, the parents of the kids try to expose them all too chicken pox, so they'll have the disease while they're young, but the kids uncover the plot and cook up a nasty revenge. The kids build rival treehouses in *Clubhouses*, so they can play 'truth or dare' with girls. There is also an amusing look at divorce. Finally, an evil planetarium operator is hypnotizing patrons, including most of the kids during a field trip, to compensate for failing revenues in *Roger Ebert Should Lay Off the Fatty Foods*. Anybody who has ever giggled at a planetarium show will be fully amused.

Rather annoyingly, the episodes are not chapter encoded. Creators Matt Stone and Trey Parker appear introducing each episode, including several sequences where they are shown feeding bacon to a pig. In another annoying flaw, the volume levels on the intros are much lower than the volume levels on the cartoons, though we recommend that rather than adjusting your volume control, you just leave it low and ignore what Stone and Parker have to say. The transfers of the cartoons look fine, with bright, sharp colors, though they are not as vivid as the feature film. While technically stereophonic, separation effects on the audio track are limited and most of the audio track remains centered. The episodes, which each run about 23 minutes with the intros, are captioned.

Memories of tomorrow

From the riveting, suitable-for-framing jacket covers to the better-than-usual theme song and to the mind-bending narrative, the animated **Serial Experiments Iain** series, from Pioneer, is an exceptional cartoon program. Reminiscent of **The Matrix**, which it preceded, the story is about a young girl, who may just

be a computer program, and her attempt to understand her existence. The narrative is rife with theological, epistemological and cybernetic paradoxes, and while it is at times challenging to figure out what is going on, it is always intriguing enough to keep you wanting to try. Movement is minimal, but the artwork is outstanding, constantly shifting in style and perspective, with many impressionistic sequences that enhance the work's emotional impact.

Each episode runs 25 minutes. The first set contains four episodes, but the subsequent three volumes contain three episodes each. The programs default to English, without subtitles, but there is a Japanese track and optional English subtitles as well. Although not as complex as the imagery, the stereo surround sound has a continually dimensional mix and is reasonably strong. The episodes are referred to in the jacket text as 'Layers.' Each DVD is accompanied by a few conceptual drawings in a supplement and some cool stickers on an insert, along with brief but interesting images of human body parts that come at the end of each collection.

In the opening episode on **Serial Experiments lain: "Navi"** (PIDA2231V, \$30), *Layer 01: Weird*, a young girl commits suicide, but afterward, her classmates, including the heroine, start receiving e-mails from her. In *Layer 02: Girls*, the heroine and her friends visits a hot night club ('Cyberia'), where a young boy on a mind-enhancing nano drug shoots a bunch of people until he is starred down by the confused heroine. In *Layer 03: Psyche*, the heroine receives a special chip that she installs in her new top-of-the-line computer. Becoming increasingly drawn to the computer's world, the heroine manifests psychic-kinetic power to make mysterious guys with glasses stop watching her apartment in *Layer 04: Religion*. Also, boys around the town who are playing a net game somehow get hurt.

In the three episodes on **Serial Experiments lain: "Knights"** (PIDA2232V, \$30), *Layer 05: Distortion*, *Layer 06: Kids* and *Layer 07: Society!*, the heroine starts to recognize her relationship to widespread computer system flaws. The key sequence appears in *Kids*, in which she meets a professor in a virtual world who tells of his initial experiments upon the psychic abilities of children and the fallout that resulted. There are also strong comments about the relationship between reality and the cyberworld, and which world could be run by God. If you are cost conscious, you can probably skip the first volume and just start out with these, since the first four episodes spend most of the time establishing the characters and the setting, and you can absorb most of what you need just by diving into **Knights**. The pace of the first four episodes is a little drawn out as well, while things start happening more quickly in the next three.

The narrative becomes more challenging in **Serial Experiments lain: "Deus"** (PIDA2233V, \$30), as a second version of the heroine appears, making trouble for the first. In *Layer 08: Rumors*, the world around her begins to draw away, and she becomes aware that the people she thought were her parents may not be. In *Layer 09: Protocol*, the format changes a bit, with grainy images that give a history of technology in the Twentieth Century, intercut with brief pieces of story, where she becomes even more disconnected from what she thought was the real world and begins having more communications with what are apparently cyber beings. Except for the three episodes in **Knights**, it may be the best episode in the series. *Layer 10: Love* then dives back into the narrative, as other people connected to the computer network are assassinated and the heroine starts becoming an organic part of her computer set up.

The wrap up, in *Layer 11: Infornography*, *Layer 12: Landscape* and *Layer 13: Ego*, on **Serial Experiments lain: "Reset"** (PIDA2234V, \$30), avoids easy answers, and we discover that another character may actually be the true heroine of the story. As for the first heroine, she meets a figure who believes he is the 'God' of the cyberworld, but points out flaws in his tautology. She then achieves a state of peace, and recurring scenes that have appeared throughout the show are re-played one more time, with a significant difference.

Poké-mania

It is always amusing to see movie critics confronted with something they do not understand, and that was the case with the required reporting upon **Pokémon The First Movie**, which has now been issued on DVD by Warner Home Video (18020, \$27). The film itself is short, barely running over an hour, but it is accompanied by an opening 20 minute featurette, extending the complete playing time of the program to 96 minutes and exhausting the patience of those who don't know a Charizard from a Jigglypuff. The chief complaint among the widespread reviews of the film was that it is 'too dark' and unsuitable for small children, who proceeded, anyway, to lap it up. It isn't all that much darker than a number of the episodes. There is one strong plot turn where a viewer might wonder for about a minute whether or not the hero of

the series has died, even though that would preclude there being any sequels or more TV episodes, but that can hardly be considered a detriment. Is the film to be condemned for trying to generate a decent narrative?

The **Pokémon** series is not the greatest cartoon that was ever conceived, but it is a relatively inspired concoction, particularly when one takes into account its various marketing arms and how they rather effectively support each other. Although the hero gradually gains more powers as the series progresses, it does not have a continuing narrative and is episodic, with the hero confronted by a new situation and pretty much a new environment in each installment of his travels. The opening featurette is a relatively plotless confection that does not involve the hero at all and depicts the title creatures—fancifully designed animals of all shapes and sizes—cavorting in a park-like play area. It gives the animators an opportunity to exercise their cuteness algorithms and gives theater patrons a chance to finish getting popcorn before the real movie starts.

Perhaps the most admirable aspect of **Pokémon** is its Japanese origins and the emphasis it gives to poetic aspects of nature and life that are otherwise invisible to western attitudes (one Pokémon walks around carrying a leek). The plot of the film is not elaborate and follows the plot of a typical episode rather closely, though its relative expansion to feature film length is achieved without padding. The heroes are invited to a tournament, but reaching the site turns out to be a great challenge, and then the tournament turns out to be a trap. Like all of the episodes, there is humor, and the narrative is effectively constructed so that older viewers who are familiar with the format will have as much to follow as younger viewers. Those who aren't familiar with the show will not have as easy a time trying to fathom what is going on, and the film's one real failure is that it has little to offer viewers who are not already steeped in its rules, its characters and its comedy.

Like **Eyes Wide Shut**, the picture on the film is presented in full screen format only on the DVD. Some shots seem a little tight on the sides, but for the most part the framing looks identical to the TV program. The color transfer looks terrific, with crisp, bright hues. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound delivers livelier and more dimensional pleasures than the standard stereo soundtracks on the TV episodes. The standard stereo track is not as engaging. There are optional English and French subtitles, and some production notes. The DVD also features a couple short segments, running about 2 minutes each, that appear related to the film and explain the backgrounds of various characters and situations. There is a music video, by M2M, urging youngsters not have sex on the first date, and there are trailers for the film at hand and its forthcoming sequel. More essays are available on a DVD-ROM function.

The director of the English language version, Michael Haigney, and the producer, Norman J. Grossfeld, provide a commentary track over the film (but not the opening featurette), talking about the changes implemented between the original Japanese film and its Americanized counterpart, and sharing quite a bit of rewarding Pokémon lore. About 20% of the footage was re-animated with CGI, and the film was substantially re-scored. While the basic narrative remained the same, Grossfeld and Haigney, who perform the same duties on the TV show, made significant changes to the personalities of a number of the characters. They discuss the challenges of finding dialog that matches the lip movements of the characters and how they coped with specific problems within certain sequences. They also talk a bit about the voice talent, a few errors they allowed to remain in the film, and speak humorously about some aspects of their work. Fans will get a real kick out of the talk, and even casual viewers will find that it provides an adept introduction to the world of **Pokémon**.

Pioneer continues to issue the TV episodes on DVD, three to a platter with a single set of opening and closing credits, though the beginning of each new episode is identified with a title card. The picture quality is more erratic than on the feature film. Even within a single episode, some segments look a little dull and worn, while others are rich and sharp. The stereo sound is reasonably energetic, though, as we said, it seems dull and flat compared to the film's audio mix. The episodes, which run about 20 minutes a piece, are in English only and are not captioned.

The opening episode on **Pokémon Wake Up Snorlax!** (PIKA13DVD, \$25), *The Battling Eevee Brothers*, is one of the better offerings. The heroes meet three brothers, each of whom has a Pokémon that has matured differently, and all three are putting pressure on a fourth brother, whose Pokémon has not matured yet, to choose one of the three paths. Eventually, though, the fourth brother manages to go in his own unique direction. In the title episode, the heroes must figure out how to move a huge, sleeping Pokémon that has blocked a small town's water supply. Vaguely reminiscent of **Yojimbo**, the heroes enter a town in *Showdown at Dark City* where two rival families of Pokémon trainers are inadvertently terrorizing their

neighbors as they compete for superiority.

The premises of *The March of the Exeggutor Squad* and *The Song of Jigglypuff* are fairly similar on **Pokémon Jigglypuff Pop** (PIKA14DVD, \$25). In *Exeggutor*, the heroes meet a magician who uses Pokémon that hypnotize people and in *Jigglypuff*, the heroes find a Pokémon that puts people to sleep when it sings. In both instances, the bad guys try to take advantage, but end up falling prey to the mesmerizing powers of the creatures right along with the heroes. In *The Problem with Paras*, a fairly engaging episode, the heroes meet an apothecary who has a particularly useless Pokémon and help her motivate it.

All three episodes on **Pokémon Charizard!!** (PIKA15DVD, \$25) are quite entertaining. In *Attack of the Prehistoric Pokémon*, the heroes fall into a sinkhole, where they find Pokémon that were thought to be extinct. In the end, the bad guys are still trapped in the cave, but somehow escape for the start of the next episode. In *A Chansey Operation*, the heroes help a doctor care for Pokémon that have been hurt in an accident, while the bad guys try to take advantage and capture the Pokémon for their own. In the amusing *Holy Matrimony!*, one of the bad guys is tricked into returning to the home of his rich parents and, with the help of the good guys, barely escapes his wedding.

In another strong episode, an egg the heroes obtained in *Prehistoric Pokémon* hatches in *Who Gets to Keep the Togepi?* on **Pokémon Totally Togepi** (PIKA16DVD, \$25) and the heroes start battling one another over who should be its rightful owner. In *So Near, Yet So Farfetch'd*, an episode similar to *The Problem with Paras*, the heroes have to show a young thief how he ought to be working with his Pokémon instead of just using the creature for petty crimes. The heroes witness a secret maturation ceremony in *Bulbasaur's Mysterious Garden* and prevent the villains from hijacking the participants. The narrative is effectively conceived.

Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon

An hour-long episode from the reasonably classy girl superhero cartoon from Japan, **Sailor Moon R The Movie**, known in Japan as *Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon R* and in America as *The Promise of the Rose*, has been released as an *Uncut Special Edition* by Pioneer (PISA0001V, \$30). The artwork is elegant and the 'Sailor' superheroes, teenage girls with secret powers, are good looking, particularly in their skimpy superhero outfits. Although the episode falls into a rote repetition of the series' standard moments in a couple places, the narrative is reasonably involving and the climax is effective. A being from outer space is possessed by something evil and arrives on Earth to disrupt the life of an old acquaintance. The heroines repel him, and then save Earth from a renewed attack.

The program is presented in English in stereo, with an alternate monophonic Japanese audio track and optional English subtitles that offer a different translation of the dialog. The color transfer is good and adds to the beauty of the artwork. The image is solid and is presented in full screen format. Except for the musical score there is little on the soundtrack that feels particularly stereophonic. Two segments that were altered for the 'American' version of the program are presented as an option in the supplement (one has reduced implications of nudity), along with some stills and character profiles.

She just didn't listen

An unrecognizable Bridget Fonda stars as a deaf woman accused of killing her abusive husband in **Break Up**, a Dimension Home Video release (18156, \$30). Kiefer Sutherland is the cop in charge of the investigation. The story has enough twists to keep you watching, but the final act is uninspired. The picture is in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The color transfer is okay, though the cinematography is drab and contrasts are a little weak in places. The stereo surround sound is equally run-of-the-mill. The 101 minute program has optional English subtitles.

Naked vampire

A 1960 Italian vampire film that is said to feature the 'first nude female vampire,' *L'ultima preda del vampiro*, has been released in its Anglicized version by Gordon Films, Inc. and Image Entertainment as **The Playgirls and the Vampire**, a *EuroShock Collection* title (ID5827GODVD, \$20). The premise is overly common—on a dark and stormy night a bus full of showgirls stops by a forbidden castle so the passengers can

seek shelter—but the actual drama isn't bad, as it turns out the castle has two masters, a contemporary scholar and someone substantially older. Both are attracted to one of the showgirls, who bears an uncanny resemblance to a woman in a portrait, etc., etc. There are fleeting topless sequences and compellingly sheer nightgowns, spicing up the story effectively and compensating for the 2-lira plastic vampire teeth.

The black-and-white source material varies in quality. Some of it looks real nice and some of it looks very secondhand and fuzzy. Usually, the image is reasonably sharp, however, and contrasts are adequate, with a few scattered speckles. The film is dubbed in English, and most of the time it isn't distracting. The monophonic sound is noisy but workable and the 80 minute program is not captioned. The chapter encoding and jacket guide are limited.

Kung fu comedies

They say that one culture's comedies are another culture's head scratchers and that is often the case when one tackles a humorous kung fu movie. The fight scenes on **The Buddhist Fist**, a Tai Seng Video Marketing, Inc. release (75074, \$20) directed by Yuen Wo Ping, are outstanding, choreographed with energy and flair, but the heavily comical dramatic scenes are more difficult to digest.

The picture is presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.9:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. The image is very sharp, but the source material is somewhat worn, with many minor speckles and somewhat bland hues. The monophonic sound is okay. The 87 minute program audio tracks in Cantonese, Mandarin and English, with no subtitling, and a profile of Wo Ping.

Another presentation of **The Buddhist Fist** is available from Xenon Entertainment Group as part of *The Shaolin Collection* (XEXX2085DCD, \$20), but the picture is much softer, the hues are less distinctive, and the running time is only 83 minutes. The presentation is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.15:1 and no 16:9 enhancement, but the top of the image is trimmed in comparison to Tai Seng's presentation. The mono sound is also a little fuzzier, and the film is in English only, with no subtitles.

The makeup on the characters is exaggerated in a grotesque manner that may be funny somewhere but doesn't strike us as anything other than an awkward silliness, hampering what is otherwise a decent story (the opening scene tells you the film's ending, but subsequent events stop you from believing it), about the theft of a jade figure and the hero's search for a relative who has disappeared. Yuen Shun Yi and Tsui Siu Ming star in the 1979 feature.

Even harder to take is **Dragon from Shaolin**, another Tai Seng release (60504, \$30). The hero is a child who is training to be a monk. On a trip to the city, he gets separated from his party and ends up hanging out with a slightly chunkier, crew cut street urchin, the two of them getting into a lot of trouble but eventually helping to retrieve a head that has been stolen from a sacred statue. The film contains the sort of child nudity that is forbidden in Hollywood. Some of the action scenes are so lackadaisical they make no sense whatsoever. In one promising sequence, a car containing the heroes lands on top of a train it has been chasing. The train approaches a tunnel and so the driver slams the car into reverse to get away. There is a shot of the car being smashed by the rock face above the tunnel and then the very next shot is of the heroes inside the rear of the train, with not even a 'whew, that was close' to explain how they got there. But for the most part, it is the child-oriented humor that is the film's most obscure component. Some of the physical humor is readily accessible, but some of it involves references to foods, customs and attitudes that will not strike American viewers as particularly humorous. The fight scenes are mannered, and have a moderate energy. Ha Sau Hin directed the 1996 production, which features Yuen Biao among the grownups.

The picture is in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. Again, the image is quite sharp, but colors are a little yellowed and fleshtones are a bit pinkish. The 89 minute feature has Cantonese, Mandarin and English language tracks, with optional English subtitles. The Cantonese track is stronger and smoother than the other two. There is a trailer and a profile of Biao.

On the other hand, Sammo Hung's **Enter the Fat Dragon**, a Crash Cinema release (CCD0202, \$20), will be accessible to just about any fan of kung fu films. Hung, who directed and stars, portrays a country bumpkin and kung fu enthusiast arriving in Hong Kong to help in his uncle's restaurant—among other things, the film is a satirical homage to **Return of the Dragon**—and becoming involved in several skirmishes with extortionists and other gangsters. The narrative is episodic, but it provides a sufficient cohesion to the various fight scenes and slapstick stunts. Although, like the humor in the other films, a few characterizations in the movie are greatly exaggerated to comical effect, for some reason it seems to work better.

Along with his many kung fu and acrobatic skills, Hung is a master at throwing away a joke, so that as he is doing or staging many amusing bits of business, he never calls undue attention to them, letting viewers absorb the comedy at their own chosen paces.

It is a highly enjoyable movie, but the transfer is not exactly pristine. Taken from a very battered print, many sequences are rife with scratches and speckles, to the point where it looks at times like the fall-out from a volcanic ash storm. Colors are drab but discernable and the image is moderately sharp. The presentation is viewable, but it isn't pretty. The picture is letterboxed, with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. The 1978 film is in Cantonese, with permanent English and Chinese subtitles. It runs about 100 minutes and is not time encoded.

Lock 'em up

One of the bad guys in **House of Whipcord**, an Image Entertainment *The EuroShock Collection* title (ID5892EUDVD, \$25), is named 'Mark E. Desade.' Yuk, yuk, yuk. Actually, though, the film, a 1974 British production directed by Pete Walker, is rather lame. A fashion model is kidnapped and held in a prison by some loony women, who feel that loose morals should be a punishable offense. She eventually escapes, only to be re-captured, and then her friends come to rescue her, though she dies before they can bust the place. There is some nudity, but most of the whipping and all that good stuff is off screen. If you're the sort who finds anything about women being put into jail enjoyable, then the film will probably be pleasing, but if you're looking for a little excitement or pizzazz, you may get restless.

Presented in full screen format only, the framing on the 102 minute program looks okay. The picture is quite murky, however, with greenish fleshtones and fuzzy hues. The source material has a lot of speckles, too. The monophonic sound is coherent, but a little wobbly. There is no captioning.

The films of Petr Weigl

Two opera films by Petr Weigl have been released on DVD by Carlton Entertainment and Image Entertainment, **Werther** (ID5657CLDVD, \$25) and **Maria Stuarda** (ID5656CLDVD, \$25). In both, the performers lip synch to a decent recording of the opera while they enact the drama as they would in a film or a music video, on location. There are not as many cuts as there would be in a standard movie, since the structure of the opera itself is unchanged, but the flexibility of perspective and the cinematic format of the works are highly appealing, reinforcing the cohesiveness and enhancing the impact of the operas considerably. Both programs, which come from the mid-Eighties, have sharp pictures with slightly faded but still viable colors and a few scattered speckles. The stereo sound has little dimensionality, but is reasonably clear. The programs are supported by optional English subtitles.

Shot around Prague, the 1985 **Werther** is based upon the tiresome novel by Goethe, about a guy in love with his best friend's fiancée, mucking up their relationship with his obsession. The Jules Massenet opera, however, is ideal material for Weigl's 101 minute film. There is a small number of featured players, including Brigitte Fassbaender and Peter Dvorský (who also appear in their roles, although the others are sung by one group and acted by another), so the inclusion of extras and passers by bring a sense of immediacy to the emotions of the heroes. And, because the plot is so limited and basic, the uninterrupted shifts in location bring a stronger momentum to the work's emotions. Finally, Fassbaender's singing has the controlled intensity of a studio recording, yet she is allowed to be more flexible in her movements and actions than she would be if she really had to sing—and her makeup can also be more flexible, further communicating the depth of her emotional states. The opera is in French.

Even better is Weigl's fascinating 1988 adaptation of **Maria Stuarda**, which combines the play by Friedrich Schiller and the opera by Götter Donizetti. Presented in German, the program alternates between spoken scenes and operatic scenes, depicting the final days in the life of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scotland, from the point at which the British Parliament passes her death sentence, through the decision of Queen Elizabeth I to ratify it and on to the day of execution. The political nuances and arguments are obscure, but the passions of those involved are readily understandable and the unique format brings an invigorating energy to the proceedings. The actors are Czech, but Joan Sutherland, Luciano Pavarotti and James Morris are among the singers. Colors, though still slightly faded, are a bit richer than on **Werther**, and there are fewer speckles.

Verdi opera

A spectacular performance of Giuseppe Verdi's **Ernani** has been released as a *Metropolitan Opera* title by Pioneer Classics (PC99102D, \$30). The 1983 production, conducted by James Levine, stars Luciano Pavarotti, Leona Mitchell, Sherrill Milnes, and Ruggero Raimondi. They all have spellbinding moments of vocal power, though it is Raimondi who receives the greatest number of enthusiastic responses from the Met audience. With grand sets, elaborate costumes and knock out performances, the program is almost a definitive presentation of the Verdi opera, raising its own status as a secondary Verdi effort to one of his most captivating works. The video presentation is competent, providing a serviceable mix of orienting long shots and dramatic close-ups.

The picture is reasonably sharp and although it is an older recording, the colors are fresh and flesh-tones are viable. The stereo sound has a rather basic mix without distinctive separations, but the balance between the vocals and the orchestra is fine and tones are smooth. The 142 minute program is sung in Italian with optional English subtitles, but the subtitling default is 'none,' so they have to be activated.

Vivaldi opera

Marilyn Horne stars in the 1990 San Francisco Opera production of **Antonio Vivaldi: Orlando Furioso**, an R.M. Associates Image Entertainment release (ID5790RADVD, \$30). Vivaldi's work is quite impressive, though it is helped considerably by the creative and energetic staging. The work itself comes from an era when opera consisted of classical-styled characters moving very little and singing lengthy position statements, but the colorful costumes, inventive set design and game dramatic performances enliven the piece considerably, and the singing is super.

The picture is very sharp, and the bright hues of the costumes are always stable. The vocal recordings have a stage echo at times, but it seems to add to the realism of the presentation and does not harm one's appreciation of the music. Otherwise, the stereo surround sound is fairly strong and clear. The program runs 146 minutes and is in Italian with optional English subtitles.

Improvised favorites

A pleasant, hour-long jazz concert featuring riffs on several popular tunes, **The Gadd Gang Live**, has been released by Eagle Rock Entertainment PLC and Image Entertainment (ID5718ERDVD, \$20). Recorded in Tokyo in 1988 in front of a small audience, the combo performs *Things Ain't What They Used to Be*, *My Girl*, *Changes*, *Whiter Shade of Pale*, *I Can't Stop Loving You* and other numbers. The musicianship is not overly elaborate, but the performers, including Steve Gadd, Cornell Dupree, Eddie Gomez, Richard Tee and Ronnie Cuber, are competent and the inclusion of recognizable melodies at regular intervals makes the program an appealing piece of light entertainment.

Reddish stage lights take some of the detail out of the fleshtones, and other hues are a touch flat, but the image is reasonably sharp and looks okay. The PCM stereo soundtrack is quite strong, with a good dimensionality, although the program was originally recorded in an 'all digital' format and has clearly been passed across analog at some point in its life.

Jazz flute

Jazz flutist Herbie Mann gives a pleasant 74 minute live performance with a small band on **Herbie Mann: Jasil Brazz**, a Pioneer Artists release (PA99625D, \$25). Mann's group moves through a range of styles, highlighting each musician, with his own, ballad-like solos anchoring every number. Both the standard PCM stereo track and the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital track are quite strong, but the separation effects on the Dolby Digital track are far more satisfying, giving each instrument a separate voice. The picture looks fine. Some shots are a little fuzzy, depending upon how the stage lighting is hitting the players, but fleshtones are accurate in the close-ups, hues are bright, and when free of halos, the image is sharp. There is a separate chapter guide to each solo performance, profiles of the performers, and on screen 'liner notes.'

Another DVD magazine

We reviewed a whole mess of Warner Home Video's 'DVD magazines' last month, but that doesn't mean they've stopped coming out. (5) **Circuit This Is Music DVD All You Can Eat** (36945, \$15) is actually one of the stronger entries in the music series. For example, there is a 9 minute segment on the group, Breakbeat Era, combining a good live performance set and an interview with the group's female singer. She says the best part of making the music is after the composing and recording hassles are all over and "you get to go on the stage and show off." Additionally, there is an excellent music video from the group, *Ultra Obscene*, in which the members of the band, painted in bright colors, are standing in a single-windowed room in the middle of a field. They then start to melt into the colors.

Also satisfying is a 13 minute profile of Scritti Politti, integrated with a music video, which has a good, energetic beat, with rap segments. The lead singer, who is from Wales, talks about his career and the music. In an additional 5 minute interview, he explains how you can live comfortably in a rural environment on just a few royalties, and how he decided to get back into things after a while. The second interview goes into even better details about his music. He talks about finding a way to integrate hip-hop and work with hip hop musicians that wasn't 'exploitative or imitative'

The Supreme Beings of Leisure provide a terrific 4 minute live set, even though it is grainy. The camera is in there and the angles are provocative. They have a very nice, New Wave sound. In an additional 4 minute interview, with music clips, they claim they do not sound like an L.A. band, yet they are ultimately very Doors-like. They also plug their web site.

Other segments include Gomez visiting the Hollywood Entertainment Museum in a 7 minute segment and talking about British music and their own music, though you don't hear much of it; the Jayhawks in a 9 minutes piece that tours their recording studio (Celine Dion is recording in another room) as they discuss their hopes for their album, a light blend of different styles; a 9 minute segment on Deathray while they're eating donuts, with an additional 2 minutes, as they talk a bit about the punk-style album they're working on and discuss their music; a very dark 7 minute performance segment from Death in Vegas, who have a dull, drawn out sound with too much keyboard, along with a 6 minute interview in which they discuss their music and their performances; 6 minutes of an interview with Royal Trux about their album, mixed with live performance clips, along with another 5 minute interview in which the singer tells her history and the male guitarist singer tells his and argues with her a bit about how they work. The band looks energetic but their recordings are dull and not immediate. There is also a cute 30 second commercial for their album.

There is a 3 minute music video by The Wiseguys on an airplane that features lots of cute, sexy women in a Cro-Magnon rock video sort of way. On an alternate track in a phone interview, the lead singer talks about the success of his single and shooting the video. Finally, there is an elaborate segment on The Residents, who run around dressed like eyeballs and do bizarre, abstract music. While we did not have the patience for an entire LD of Residents tomfoolery (Jun 92), the Circuit format creates an ideal context for their material and it is a highly satisfying segment. Included are four 'minute movies', three summaries of live performances each running about a minute and a half and three bizarre music videos that run a bit longer.

The DVD also contains trailers for **Three Kings** and **House on Haunted Hill**, along with a few other segments that have appeared on other entries in the series and extensive text profiles of each group. Most of the music segments are in 5.1-channel Dolby Digital. The DVD is not captioned.

Before Suzanne

A National Film Board of Canada documentary about Leonard Cohen before he became a singer, **Ladies and Gentlemen... Mr. Leonard Cohen**, has been released by Fox Lorber CentreStage (WHE73050, \$25). Shot in November 1964 when Cohen visited his hometown of Montreal (he was living in Greece) to promote his poetry and his novel, the film crew follows him around as he visits relatives, meets with friends and attends literary functions, including poetry readings. Cohen had established himself as one of Canada's brightest young poets before he began recording songs, and his novel, *Beautiful Losers*, had a first printing of 100,000 copies (among other things, the documentary is fairly specific about Cohen's income and finances). He's very young and a little insubordinate with interviewers, but he plays the game, which is,

after all, what he's doing with the film crew, too, pretending to be the outcast poet. His readings are flat, lacking the gravelly lyricism his music would achieve, but he seems very comfortable in front of an audience and his flair for modernist humor (he tells a story about getting lost in a mental institution while visiting a friend) has the crowd in rapture. It is a fascinating film, and even viewers who are not interested in Cohen or his subsequent career will find the movie's portrait of the early Sixties Canadian literary scene to be intriguing.

The picture is presented in full screen format and is in black-and-white. While the graininess of the image is a natural result of the 16mm source material and shooting conditions, the grain creates minor artifacting pulses in some sequences, which can be mildly distracting. The monophonic sound is okay and there is no captioning. The film runs 46 minutes and is accompanied by four National Film Board shorts, running 20 minutes in total, in which Cohen or his works have been featured—the recent *I'm Your Man* and the older *A Kite Is a Victim* (one of his poems), both delightfully illustrated with colorful morphing images that reflect the text, *Poem*, another, more abstract generation of black-and-white images set to what are apparently failed takes during a poetry recording, and *Angel*, a film pushed to such high contrast that there are only blacks and whites (no grey), depicting a woman, a man and a dog, romping about with some sort of wings. Cohen provides guitar accompaniment and the voice of the man.

Death rock

A mentally unbalanced individual who found a questionably positive outlet for his aggressions through musical performance, GG Allin would pose naked with punk-style rock musicians, defecating in front of them and throwing his excrement at the audience. We got nauseous watching **Hated GG Allin and the Murder Junkies**, a Music Video Distributors release (UPC#2289128292, \$25), but that should not stop you from obtaining the 52 minute documentary, because it is a superb portrait of rock's and life's extremes. Shot in the early Nineties, the filmmaker, Todd Phillips, managed to follow Allin around with a camera without getting his head bashed in, or getting any doo-doo on his equipment. He captures a complete portrait of Allin, who grows progressively incoherent and angry as time passes, somehow earning a living off his recordings and concerts by being so wild that he attracts those who admire the uninhibited. Some of what passes for his songs are played in their entirety, and there are interviews with his associates and fans (John Wayne Gacy thought he was terrific, but complained that he smelled). Additionally, there is a 62 minute video recording of a concert Allin performed the day before he died. It ends in anarchy, with Allin and a few acquaintances wandering around the streets of New York's Lower East Side, trying to find a cab that will accept them, as police converge upon the hall they have just left, to quell a riot. What Phillips captured was tremendously lucky, a piece of musical history that genuinely tested the edge of rock's abyss and would have passed into oblivion if Phillips hadn't been there to grab it.

The source material is often grainy and underlit, but the transfer appears accurate. Nominally stereophonic, most of the sound is centered. The programs are not captioned. Profiles of Allin and Phillips are also included. Needless to say, the program includes extensive profanity and graphic depictions of activities some viewers may find repulsive or, at the very least, unseemly.

An equally fascinating and somewhat more digestible documentary about a California band that was on the path to stardom when the lead singer succumbed to a drug overdose, **Sublime Stories, Tales, Lies & Exaggerations**, has also been released by Music Video Distributors (CRASDVD011, \$25). The 135 minute program combines interviews, home movies and performance footage to tell the story of the enthusiasm the band members had for music, but the difficulty they had curbing their baser impulses, whether it was trashing recording studios and record company offices or using the income they collected on contraband substances. Their music has great potential—often floating into a white reggae and hip-hop that works—and the length of the program gives the viewer time to take in the band's whole history, watching the vector of the group's art and popularity rise until it hit the impasse of self-destruction.

Again, the source material has many inherent weaknesses, but the transfer seems competent. The stereo sound has limited separation effects and the music recordings are rarely elaborate. There is no captioning.

Does that mean he has two of them?

An 'hour long' 45 minute TV special, some of which was shot at an outdoor concert across the river from New York City (with the World Trade Center looming phallically in the background), **Ricky Martin One Night Only**, has been released by Columbia Music Video (CVD50209, \$25). The program cuts between the concert, shots of Martin buzzing around San Juan and a music video. In the best sequence, José Feliciano and Carlos Santana join Martin on stage for a rendition of *Oy Como Va*, sort of encapsulating three generations of Hispanic-American music in a single number. As we observed in our review of Martin's **Video Collection** (Jan 00), he looks better than he sounds, so as long as the camera is pointing at him, his vocal limitations seem irrelevant. The picture on the concert is very sharp and the other sequences, though softer, are adequate. Even the PCM stereo track probably sounds better than it did in broadcast, and the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital track is quite boisterous, with clear tones, though it doesn't aid Martin's vocals much. Another music video is included as a bonus, along with a small still photo segment. There is no captioning, and the DVD's menu is ridiculous. When you return to the main page after visiting a sub page, you have to listen to an entire chorus of *Livin' La Vida Loca* before you're allowed to choose anything.

Greying Sabbath

The visibly aging members of Black Sabbath gather for a reunion concert on **Black Sabbath The Last Supper**, an Epic Music Video release (EVD501887, \$25). The 106 minute program mixes performance sequences with interview segments, sometimes employing split screens to run both the interview and the performance simultaneously. The band members, who look like they're now more ready for iron pills than *Iron Man*, talk about the good old days, all the drugs they gorged on, and about the band's history. Lead singer Ozzy Osbourne is almost incoherent much of the time, though he claims to be straight. The concert sequences lack the full force energy of the band's youth, but the performance is a competent revisitation of past glories and the audience is clearly pleased. Despite such gross moments as when the drummer takes his shirt off, and the regular intrusions of the interview footage, the program is a suitable blend of nostalgia and hard rock, now gone ever so slightly soft. The color transfer looks fine, with sharp, solid hues. The entire program is letterboxed, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. The standard stereo is great, and the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital track has an even more engaging dimensionality. There is no captioning. A 7 minute commercial for the program, a nice collection of stills from the reunion concerts and profiles of all four band members are included.

Greying Blondie

The aging New Wave rock band, Blondie, is depicted in a 1999 'reunion' concert on **Blondie Live**, a BMG Distribution release (63985780879, \$25). Since women have a right to grow older we have nothing negative to say about lead singer Deborah Harry's shift into upper middle age and its conflict with the band's inherent image, but musically none of them seem sharp. It takes almost 50 minute before they find a spark in their songs and Harry can imbue her vocals with an enthusiasm that effectively compensates for the collapse of her vocal range. Some fans will be happy to see the band again, but others will find the memories of the group's former glories to be more comforting. The picture looks fine. Colors are bright and the stage is well lit. The 5.1-channel Dolby Digital track is way stronger than the standard track and more satisfying. The live mix pretty much throws everything together, but it is adequately detailed and has plenty of punch. The show runs 80 minutes (not 65 as is listed on the jacket cover) and is accompanied by a cluttered 3 minute performance video, which is not in 5.1 Dolby. Lyrics to four of the songs are offered as an option, and there is apparently a collection of stills, although we were unable to access it.

Lewis in London

Bravely returning to the land that once expunged him, Jerry Lee Lewis performs live at London's Apollo theater on **Jerry Lee Lewis and Friends**, an Eagle Rock Entertainment PLC Image Entertainment release (ID5876ERDVD, \$20). Lewis is less flamboyant in the 1989 concert than in his more youthful performances. While his keyboard playing has a lot of energy and his voice still has a little range of tone, he sings

every song the same way and doesn't move around much. The style actually helps a few of the tunes, such as *Johnny B. Goode*, by bringing them a fresh perspective, but it flattens out others, such as *What'd I Say* and *Great Balls of Fire*, and on the whole, it is a run-of-the-mill event. While there are some great close-ups of Lewis, the longer camera angles do not seem placed well and the editing doesn't flow very smoothly. Joining Lewis are Van Morrison, Dave Edmunds, John Lodge, Brian May and Ray Davies, but it is Lewis' repertoire and you can barely hear them. Colors are a little light and the image is a little soft, but the presentation on the 61 minute program is workable. The PCM stereo has limited dimensionality but a reasonable amount of power. There is no captioning, and the program is accompanied by profiles of the musicians.

Folk rock

The ever-changing folk rock group, Fairport Convention, can be seen in a 101 minute live concert at the Cropredy Festival in Great Britain in 1998 on **Fairport Convention: Beyond the Ledge**, a Carlton Entertainment Image Entertainment release (ID5868CLDVD, \$25). It is a lively show—they do one number while singing with helium; and folk dancers also take the stage a couple times—with a nice variety of sounds and strong rock rhythms, yet very strong links to the traditional music from Britain's past. The picture looks fine, with bright, clear hues and minimal grain. The stereo sound is okay, though separation effects are modest. The program is not captioned.

Year One of The King

A fairly good documentary that traces the experiences of Elvis Presley during the year when his popularity skyrocketed, **Elvis '56**, has been released by Lightyear (A540852, \$25). Following his movements on a week-by-week and even day-by-day basis, and discussing social events that occurred at the same time, the program includes performance footage, home movies, stock footage and still photos. Narrated by Levon Helm, it is an enjoyable rags-to-riches story. The 61 minute program is not time encoded or captioned. The picture quality looks okay, varying in softness from one clip to the next but never appearing overly distorted. Although essentially monophonic, there is a mild stereo dimensionality to some of the songs. The chapter encoding and jacket guide do not identify many of the songs.

The stories behind the classics

The excellent **Classic Albums** documentary series, from Eagle Rock Entertainment PLC and Image Entertainment, takes a look at the creation of some of the best know rock LPs. None of the DVDs is captioned.

The remarkable success chronicled in **Classic Albums Meatloaf – Bat out of Hell** (ID9071ERDVD, \$20) is an ideal topic for the series. Unlike most rock albums, the creators of the LP, *Bat out of Hell*, all came from a stage background (most were involved in the classic Broadway turkey, *Rock-a-bye Hamlet*) and conceived the title number as the 'ultimate teen car crash' song. Although Meatloaf didn't write the music, he was closely involved with the creation of the album from the very beginning. The only factor in the album's success that is not broached is his appearance in **Rocky Horror Picture Show**, which gave him enough of a name to prime an awareness of his act—the album's success was fueled by an exhaustive tour. Composer Jim Steinman and his collaborators talk about how various numbers on the album were conceived, about the luck of finding Todd Rundgren to produce it (he was the only record producer open minded enough to give it a shot) and the long time it took to find a record company willing to back its release. It is a great story. The older clips on the 60 minute program are a little murky and even the contemporary interviews have somewhat subdued colors. The stereo sound lacks a strong dimensionality.

Clean shaven and looking like a grey flannel executive, Phil Collins talks about the funk he was in when his wife demanded a divorce and how that led to his first solo album on **Classic Albums Phil Collins – Face Value** (ID9072ERDVD, \$20). All divorces should be so profitable. Many of the songs on the album—which included *In the Air Tonight*, performed in two different ways on the program—are discussed in great detail, and there is a good breakdown of Collins' ventures into different styles of music and how they seemed to gel. His relationship with the group, Genesis, is also discussed, and even he admits, "You

wouldn't put this face on a cover if you wanted to sell a record, would you?" The 60 minute program is a good combination of business analysis and artistic analysis, with a number of solid performance sequences. The picture looks fine and the PCM stereo sound is okay.

According to **Classic Albums U2 – The Joshua Tree** (ID9074ERDVD, \$20), in the mid-Eighties, right before the album came out, the band, U2, was gaining popularity on the tour circuit, but record sales were less impressive. It was, therefore, a good time to come up with an exceptional album, and its artistic success sent the popularity of the group skyrocketing. The band members admit, and even claim with pride, that they are 'uncool' and willing, in their music, to display ready emotions. Yet, their music does have an edge—not enough of an edge so that we liked them all that much, but an edge nevertheless—primarily because of the way in which the diverse musical interests of each band member brings elaborate counterpoints to every composition. Along with discussing the inspirations for most of the songs on the album and explaining its fortuitous history, they also talk about the tree that landed on the jacket cover and a few other odds and ends. The picture looks fine and the PCM stereo track on the 60 minute program is quite good, particularly during the performance sequences.

One of the original **Classic Album** programs, **Classic Albums • Paul Simon: Graceland** (ID5845RHDVD, \$20) runs 76 minutes and does a good job at explaining the convoluted thought process that brought Simon to make a vague tribute to Elvis with an African a cappella group (and others). He wanted to have some fun, and that is what comes out of both the music and the documentary. There is a good breakdown of the songs, a lot of African location footage and a decent look at various aspects of African life. The picture is soft and colors are not vivid. The PCM stereo is reasonably strong.

Another classic **Classic Album** program, **Classic Albums The Band: The Band** (ID5846RHDVD, \$20) provides an excellent breakdown not only of each song, but of the band's whole style. They reminisce about producing the album, but also talk about the different sounds they were searching for and the various backwoods influences they wanted to include. Other artists provide testimonials about the group's quality, and the group talks about their history and their different personalities. Funniest story—a hypnotist was hired to cure Robby Robertson's stage fright. The picture looks okay and the PCM stereo sound is pretty good. The program runs 75 minutes.

Adults Only DVDs

They've come up with a game on the adult release, **Dyanna Presents Interactive Body Parts**, a Vivid Interactive release (UPC#0073215755, \$35). Heads, chests and lower extremities of various women scroll horizontally across the screen. The object for the viewer is to match all three to one woman, at which point the DVD proceeds to an erotic modeling sequence. We have a book like that at home, with Goofy wearing funny clothes, but we suppose it's not quite the same thing. Anyway, the game pretty much seems like a sideshow. The main segment is one of Vivid's interactive programs, where the viewer chooses individual sequences and the models talk straight to the camera, urging the viewer to choose more. At least your DVD player doesn't need quarters. The picture and sound are fine.

A guy becomes infatuated with a girl in a hair salon in **Blow Dry**, from Wave (UPC#0073215721, \$35). He fantasizes about being with her and seeing others be with her, but the story doesn't really make much sense and it looks like it is all just an excuse to make a movie in a real hair salon. The erotic sequences are fairly standard. The picture during the indoor sequences is passable, with bright hues and accurate fleshtones. The stereo sound is adequate. The program runs 75 minutes and features Jenteal, Kobe Tai, and Randi Rage.

A collection of individual sequences, most involving women by themselves, is gathered on the Raw release, **Falcon's Femmes Fatales** (UPC#0073215745, \$35). Each sequence is accessed individually with the remote, but that is the extent of its interactivity. A variety of models are on display, including youngish and well-endowed models, and one collection involves models posing in public places. Many of the sequences appear to have been shot with a video camera secondly while a still photographer was working with the model. The picture on most of the sequences is passable. The DVD contains many promotional segments for other adult DVD programs, as well.

LD Reviews

Double V

The clever and rather exciting science-fiction TV miniseries, substantially pre-dating **Independence Day**, about an alien invasion of the Earth, **V: The Original Miniseries**, is available on LD from Warner Home Video (11489, \$50), as is its functional but less inspired sequel, **V: The Final Battle** (14146, \$80). The first **V**, from 1983, runs about 200 minutes. Each of its two episodes is presented on a separate platter with full opening and closing credits. **Final Battle**, from 1984, runs about 268 minutes and consists of three episodes, each one again appearing a separate platter, with complete opening and closing credits and teasers. **Final Battle** comes in a box jacket.

Colors on the first **V** are reasonably strong, but the source material looks a touch worn and the image is often soft, with a stray speckle or two. The picture on **Final Battle** is sharper. Hues are a little brighter and there is less wear. Both programs have monophonic sound, with **Final Battle** having slightly stronger tones and a somewhat more elaborate mix. The musical score on the first movie, by the way, steals shamelessly from Bernard Herrmann's score for **North by Northwest**. The first program is adequately closed captioned but the second is not captioned.

The aliens arrive in huge, **Independence Day**-type ships that encircle the globe. They look like humans and claim to be friendly but soon begin to act very Nazi-like as they secure their control of Earth's political systems—the parallels to WWII are deliberate. The human heroes form resistance groups and eventually link up with sympathetic aliens. Mark Singer stars, but it is Jane Badler, as one of the scheming alien leaders, that you grow to love as the series progresses. For a 1983 TV production, the special effects are quite impressive and the mix of action sequences, soapy emotional conflicts (among the collaborators and resisters), and sci-fi embellishments can be highly entertaining.

At the end of the first film, the heroes have scored a victory or two, but the aliens are still in control and a few cliffhanger situations are still dangling, so it was natural and probably intentional that the filmmakers went forward with a sequel. The sequel wraps things up more resolutely, but some of the choices are a disappointment after the energy created by the first film. For one thing, the budget looks smaller, even though the show is longer. There are fewer special effects—fewer still if you don't count the ones that are simply lifted from the first program—and there is less scope in most of the conflicts. The plot takes some very tiresome turns, including that old sci-fi turkey—the baby that grows up real fast—and while the show is still highly entertaining, one is left on initial viewings with a feeling of disappointment, that the filmmakers didn't have the imagination to see it through properly. It is only on subsequent viewings, when one is aware of the show's limitations, that its pleasures begin to outweigh its disadvantages. Michael Ironside joins the cast for the sequel and Robert Englund, whose part was too small in the first movie to receive jacket billing, has an expanded role in the second.

Getting away from it all

An escaped convict and a female cellist ride out a flood in an abandoned farmhouse, getting to know one another, in **The Escape**, an Orion Home Video Image Entertainment LD release (ID4326OR, \$40). There are some chase sequences at the beginning and the end of the film, but the farmhouse segment turns out to be the bulk of the 91 minute 1995 production. Interestingly, the filmmakers drew from genuine prison poetry to create a subplot about a prison poetry group, and the elements are blended pretty well, but the movie's ending promises more than it delivers and, for all its talk of poetry, the film never draws a parallel between the raging storm and the emotions of the two heroes. Patrick Dempsey and Bridgitte Bako star.

The opening titles are letterboxed and the rest of the film is in full screen. We have no way of knowing if it is cropped or not, but the image often looks tight. The color transfer is okay, but the picture is rather soft much of the time and contrasts are a bit weak. The stereo surround sound has a nice dimensionality when music is involved and is in reasonably good condition. The program is adequately closed captioned. The chapter encoding and jacket guide are okay.

LD Roundup

It used to be that LDs sounded better than DVDs, but since many LDs these days don't have Dolby Digital sound, the DVDs not only look better, they sound better, too. Such is the case with the Paramount Pioneer *Widescreen Edition* LD release, **South Park: Bigger, Longer & Uncut** (LV336823WS, \$30). Since the animation is so simple, the picture is only a little softer than the picture on the DVD (see page 14), and the colors are reasonably strong. Without Dolby Digital encoding, however, the stereo surround soundtrack is nowhere near as lively. The 5.1-channel Dolby track on the DVD has a much greater dimensionality, stronger detail and more oomph. As a result, the viewer becomes more in touch with the spirit of the film. The picture is letterboxed, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The 81 minute LD has no special features and has been issued in CLV. The program is adequately closed captioned. The chapter encoding and jacket guide are passable.

You would be hard pressed to differentiate the Dolby Digital track on the 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment *Widescreen Edition* LD release of **Entrapment** (1424785, \$40) from the DVD's 5.1-channel Dolby Digital track (see page 3). The LD's audio has a slightly crisper bass, but otherwise the two tracks seem interchangeable. The picture, on the other hand, looks much hazier on the LD. The image is soft and even grainy in places, and the glossy sheen on the DVD presentation is missing. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The 113 minute film is adequately closed captioned. The chapter encoding and jacket guide are workable.

The black-and-white picture on the Woody Allen movie, **Celebrity**, a Miramax Home Entertainment *Widescreen Laserdisc* release (15980AS, \$40), is a little softer than the DVD (Feb 00) and greys are less distinctive, but overall it looks pretty good, with deep blacks and clear textures. The presentation is letterboxed, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The sound is officially listed as mono on the LD's jacket, which is on par with Allen's usual audio mixes, whether they are marked stereo or not, and the soundtrack is in decent shape. The 113 minute film is adequately closed captioned. The chapter encoding and jacket guide are okay. Kenneth Branagh and Judy Davis head the all-star cast, including an amusing sequence with Leonardo DiCaprio, in an uneven collection of linked sketches involving relationships and fame.

Nobody cares what condition the PolyGram Video Image Entertainment *Widescreen Edition* LD release of **Very Bad Things** (ID5487PG, \$40) is in (see page 13), but for the record, fleshtones are bland and the image is a bit soft. There is no Dolby Digital encoding, but the stereo surround soundtrack is fairly strong, with a viable dimensionality. The 100 minute program is adequately captioned. The chapter encoding and jacket guide are sufficient.

DVD and LD News

THE DINOSAURS ARE COMING: Universal will be releasing **Jurassic Park** on DVD this summer.

THE ALIENS ARE COMING: 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment will be releasing **Independence Day** on DVD in June with both versions on one platter, accompanied by many supplementary features. It will be priced at \$40.

COLUMBIA TRISTAR DETAILS: Columbia TriStar's **The End of the Affair** will feature a commentary track from Neil Jordan and Julianne Moore. **American Movie** will have a commentary track, a short film made by one of the movie's actors and 22 deleted scenes. **Hollywood Knights** will contain a commentary track by director Floyd Mutrux, **Cliffhanger** will have two commentary tracks and a number of other extras, **Girl, Interrupted** will have a commentary, deleted scenes and more, **Eyes of Laura Mars** will contain commentary by director Irvin Kershner and **New Blood, The Emperor and the Assassin, The Third Miracle** and **Eye of the Beholder** will also have director commentary tracks. Columbia TriStar's **Guns of Navarone** will contain a commentary track by director J. Lee Thompson, a retrospective documentary and several original production documentaries.

LONGER LETHALS: Warner Home Video's reissues of **Lethal Weapon, Lethal Weapon 2** and **Lethal Weapon 3** will all be 'director's cuts' with a few minutes of extra footage in each film. Many of Warner's upcoming reissues, incidentally, such as the **Lethal Weapon** films, **Interview with a Vampire** and **Twister**, will have DTS encoding along with other special features.

CRITERION SISTERS: Criterion Collection will be issuing a special edition of Brian DePalma's **Sisters**.

SONS OF HERCULES: Trimark Home Video will be releasing a 4-platter set, **Adventures of Hercules**, containing seven classic Italian Hercules films, *Hercules vs Moloch*, *Son of Hercules vs Medusa*, *Hercules vs Hydra*, *Hercules vs Sons of the Sun*, *Triumph of Hercules*, *Lion of Thebes* and *The Trojan Horse*. It will be priced at \$35.

SPECIAL DREAM: Image Entertainment will be releasing a special edition of the sci-fi thriller, **Dreamscape**. Image is also releasing a dual-sided dual-layer 330 minute program about **Trains**, and has lowered the prices on a number of their Universal titles, such as **Road to Morocco** and **Electric Horseman**, to \$15.

LD NEWS FROM JAPAN. A six-platter **Columbo Volume 8** has been released on LD in Japan (PILF2825, ¥30000), as has **Brokedown Palace** (PILF2814, ¥4700) and **Never Been Kissed** (PILF2804, ¥4700).

CLOSED OUT OF TOWN: *Hondo/McLintock* on DVD, *Ringo Star & His 4th All-Star Band* on DVD, **The Judds The Farewell Concert** on DVD, and *Strange & Gruesome* on DVD have been removed from our *Coming Attractions* listing.

FIGHT THE ZONES: Want to get rid of the 'zone' restrictions that prevent DVDs sold in one world region from playing on a machine in another? You can sign a petition to eliminate the regional codings at www.7thzone.com.

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DVD and LD Ads

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Coming Attractions

The following titles are promised for the near future. How many of them will show up is never a certainty. Logical subdivisions appear unmarked within each division. Titles which did not appear on last month's list are marked with an asterisk () and are added to the bottom of subdivisions so that the longest awaited titles appear at the top within each grouping:*

DVD Releases

From A&E:

Regret to Inform
Planets (8 hours)
Monty Python's Flying Circus Complete Set Vol.5
Monty Python's Flying Circus Complete Set Vol.6
*The Scarlet Pimpernel (miniseries)

From Acorn Media:

Coming Home (Peter O'Toole)
Discworld: Wyrld Sisters

From Anchor Bay:

The Last Valley
Watcher in the Woods
Running Time
Fata Morgana
Little Dieter Needs to Fly
Aguirre the Wrath of God
Cobra Verde
Heart of Glass
Woyzeck
The Mystery of Kaspar Hauser
Stroszek
Kinski My Best Fiend
The Ghost Goes Gear

Killing Hour
Shock
Sonny and Cher in Good Times
*Four-Sided Triangle
*Abominable Snowman
*Qatermass 2 – Enemy from Space
*X The Unknown
*Castaway Cowboy
*Come Dance with Me
*Deep Red (Argento)
*Great Locomotive Chase
*Inferno (Argento)
*Les Femmes
*Bardot in a Box Set (Come Dance with Me, Les Femmes, Naughty Girl, Please Not Now!, Brigitte

Bardot Take One)

*Naughty Girl
*One Little Indian
*Please Not Now!
From A-Pix:
Oxygen
Relax...It's Just Sex!
Above All Else: Everest Dream
The Science of Magic
Super Racers
Six Ways to Sunday
Wild Rides
Broken Vessels
Razor Blade Smile
Planet Earth
Italians
Love Kills
From Artisan:
Masterpiece
Little Odessa
The Bedroom Window
Killing Zoe
Gypsy (Midler)
Search and Destroy
Behind the Lines
Journey to the Center of the Earth (miniseries)
Dark Harbor
Judgement Day
The Minus Man
Why Dogs Smile and Chimps Cry
The Tenth Kingdom
Partners in Crime
Red Firecracker, Green Firecracker
Blue River
Wild Side
*Breaks
*Felicia's Journey
*Partners in Crime
*The Immortals
*The Last Ride

*Medal of Honor World War II

From Avalanche:

Beyond Redemption

Believe

*Life in the Fast Lane

*Out in Fifty

*Scandalous Behavior

*Nowhere Land

From Barnholtz Entertainment:

Taxman

From BFS Entertainment:

*The Perfect Husband

*The Cinder Bath

*Framed

From BMG:

The Motley Crue: 1983-99 The Video Collection

Lynard Skynyrd: Lyve from Steel Town

Windham Hill: Winter Solstice on Ice

Stone Country

N'Synch: 'N The Mix

Evgeny Kissin: Gift of Music

*Barry Manilow: Greatest Hits

*Dokken: One Night Live

*ELO2: Access All Areas

*Elvis in Hollywood in the 50's

*Iron Maiden: Raising Hell

*John Pizzarelli: Live Montreal

*The Planets: Epoch 2000 (Patrick Stewart narrates)

*Todd Rundgren: Ever Popular

*Utopia: Retrospective 1977-1984

*Who Kids Are Alright

*Blondie: VH1 Behind the Music

From Brentwood:

*Cheating Las Vegas

*Advanced Master's Pokémon Guide

*Swing Dance – Learn How To

*Mars The Red Planet Collection (Life on Mars, Destination: Mars)

From Buena Vista:

The Adventures of Ichabod & Mr. Toad

Alice in Wonderland

Aristocats

Backstreet Boys: Disney Live

Bedknobs and Broomsticks

Best of the Best 1 & 2

The Black Cauldron

Blood In, Blood Out

Camilla

Chasing Amy

Cradle Will Rock

Eddie

Father of the Bride 2

Fox and the Hound

Fresh

From Dusk Til Dawn Special Edition

Fun & Fancy Free
Happy, Texas
Hocus Pocus
The Hunchback of Notre Dame
The Insider
Jackie Chan's Project A
Jet Li's Enforcer
Like Water for Chocolate
Make Mine Music
Melody Time
Mighty Ducks
Mighty Peking Man
Mumford
Music of the Heart
Mystery, Alaska
Next Stop, Wonderland
Oliver & Company
Pete's Dragon
Pocahontas
Pocahontas II
Princess Mononoke
The Program
Rich Man's Wife
Rescuers Down Under
Robin Hood (animated)
Saludos Amigos
Switchblade Sisters
The Sword in the Stone
Tarzan Special Edition
That's the Way I Like It
The Three Caballeros
The Tie That Binds
What about Bob?
From Central Park Media:
Silent Service
Strange Love
Midnight Panther
Battle Skipper: The Movie
Neon Genesis Evangelion #0:1 (4 episodes)
Urotsukidoji: Perfect Collection
Revolutionary Girl Utena #2
Sakura Diaries #1
Geobreeders
*Monster Rancher
From Columbia TriStar:
*American Movie
*Backlash
*Bear in the Big Blue House - Friends
Bizet's Carmen
Blind Fury/Omega Doom
*Cliffhanger (special edition)
Close Encounters of the Third Kind
Dennis Miller: Live from Washington DC
Dogma

*Emperor and the Assassin
End of the Affair – 1955
End of the Affair – 1999
Eye of the Beholder
*The Eyes of Laura Mars
*Foxfire
From Here to Eternity
Fortress 2
Funny Girl
Gen-Ex Cops
*Girl, Interrupted
Godspell
*The Golden Voyage of Sinbad
The Guns of Navarone
The Hollywood Knights
Jagged Edge
The Larry Sanders Show (4 episodes)
Little Women (collector's)
The Lords of Flatbush
Men in Black
*Mercy
Murphy's Romance
Myth of Fingerprints
New Blood
*Pest
Picnic
The Red Dwarf
Shakes the Clown
Stuart Little
Stuart Little (lb)
*Things Change
*Third Miracle
*Three Stooges All the World's a Stogie
Two Moon Junction
Virtual Sexuality
From Criterion:
Sisters
Carnival of Souls
Spartacus
The Lady Eve
Orpheus, Testament of Orpheus, Blood of a Poet
Written in the Wind
All that Heaven Allows
The Hidden Fortress
The Magic Flute
The Tales of Hoffman
Last Temptation of Christ
Cleo from 5 to 7
Le Million
Vagabond
*Sisters
*Gimme Shelter
*The Bank Dick
*W.C. Fields Six Short Films

*And God Created Woman
*The Harder They Come
*The Lady Eve
*Element of Crime
*Knife in the Water
*Olympia
*Children of Paradise
*Do the Right Thing
*Alexander Nevsky
*Ivan the Terrible Parts 1 & 2
*Kwaidan
*The Blob
*Fiend without a Face
*Black Narcissus
*The Ruling Class
*Cries & Whispers
*The Scarlet Empress

From Dead Alive Productions:

In the Woods

From Delta Entertainment:

*Divided We Stand

From DreamWorks:

Galaxy Quest

*American Beauty

From D3K:

*Arthur's Quest

*The Many Taboos of Death

*Meet Prince Charming

From DVD, Ltd:

Reaches

Prisoner of Zenda

From DVD International:

The Watcher

Naxos Bach

Naxos Handel

Naxos Mozart

Naxos Spanish Festival

Naxos Vivaldi

From Elite:

Buckets of Blood/Attack of the Giant Leeches

The Brain That Wouldn't Die

The Slime People

Castle of Blood

The Night Evelyn Came Out of the Grave

Kiss of the Tarantula

Last Man on Earth

Giant Gila Monster

Vampire Bat (uncut)

The Screaming Skull

I Eat Your Skin

Black Sabbath/Kill Baby Kill

The Ape

Werewolf Vs. The Vampire Women

The Wasp Woman

Night of the Blood Beast
Howling 3
Communion
Bluebeard
Jack the Ripper
Don't Mess with My Sister
Killer Creature Double Feature: Screaming Skull/The Giant Leeches
From EMI:
Paul McCartney's Standing Stone
From Fantoma:
Whity (Fassbinder)
From First Run Features:
Tower of Fear
*The Watermelon Woman
From FocusFilm Entertainment:
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Terror by Night
Woman in Green
Dressed to Kill
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The Challenge of Flight 3
The Challenge of Flight 4
The Challenge of Flight 5
The Challenge of Flight 6
The Challenge of Flight 7
The Challenge of Flight 8
The Challenge of Flight 9
Challenge of Flight 10
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From Fox Lorber:
Eden
Cadillac Ranch
Norman Rockwell Painting America
One Hundred and One Nights
Hellhounds on My Trail
Deep Blues
infinity
Just Write
La Collectioneuse
Telling Lies in America
Popeye 70 Years of Cartoons
Quarrel
Marcello Mastroianni: I Remember
In the Realm of Passion
In the Realm of the Senses
Bastard Out of Carolina
Bloodmoon
The James Bond Story
Love Etc...
On the Ropes
Boston Kickout
The Brylcream Boys
Alone

Back to Back
*Shameless
*Devil's Island (Icelandic)
*The Source
*The Other Side of Sunday (Norwegian)
*Stella (Cacoyannis)
*A Matter of Dignity (Cacoyannis)
*A Girl in Black (Cacoyannis)
*Attila '74: The Rape of Cyprus (Cacoyannis)
*The Directors William Friedkin
*The Directors Lawrence Kasdan
*The Directors: Terry Gilliam
*The Directors: Spike Lee
From Full Moon Pictures:
Auditions from Beyond
Blood Dolls
Subspecies
Vampire Journals
Dying to Get Rich
Diary of Lust
The Dead Hate the Living
Trancers
Phantom Love
Pit & Pendulum
From Goldhil:
*Lightbath: Alpha and Orange
From Goodtimes Home Video:
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The Warlord
Cry in the Wilderness
Into the Badlands
Murder 101
War Lord
From Ground Zero Entertainment:
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*Men Men Men
From HBO Video:
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*Sex & The City (complete 1st season on 2 platters)
*Witness Protection
From Image Entertainment:
Enchanted Forest
Sergei Eisenstein's Autobiography
Macbeth

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Lost in Space Forever
*Love Kills
The Lower Level
Manhattan Transfer Vocalese Live
Marvin Gaye Greatest Hits Live in '76
Masters of Russian Animation Vol.1
Masters of Russian Animation Vol.2
*Masters of Russian Animation Vol.3
*Memories of Hollywood
Mesmer
Monsieur Verdoux
Ms. 45
Nabucco: Verdi
Nancy Sinatra Movin' with Nancy (original Sixties TV special)
National Parks
Nature's Banquet: Moodtapes
*October 22nd
*On the Border

Operavox
*Orpheus and Eurydice
Pacific Surf: Moodtapes
*People of the Wind
Pet Shop Boys Somewhere
Peter Frampton Live in Detroit
Playboy Erotic Fantasies 2
Playboy Girlfriends 2
Playboy Sensual Pleasures
Popeye (animation)
Portrait of an Assassin
*Project Moonbase
*Psychomania
*Rembrandt Films Greatest
Rick Wakeman The Classical Connection
*Roberto Devereaux
Rock Rock Rock
*Rocketship X-M
Rossini Stabat Mater
The Runner
*Sabat Mater
Secrets of War: The Gulf War
*Shadows/Outside the Law (Lon Chaney)
She-Freak
*The Sign of the Four (Ian Richardson)
*Silent Shakespeare
The Slipper and the Rose Special Edition
*Slippery When Wet
A Soldier's Tale (Gabriel Byrne)
*Something Weird
*Steely Dan Two against Nature
Stella Maris
The Story of G.I. Joe
*Street Gun
Surf Crazy
*Surfing Hallow Days
Surrender
*A Talk with Alfred Hitchcock
Tannhauser: Wagner
Time Masters
*Tina Turner Live in Rio
Trader Hornee
*Trains (330 min.)
The Twelve Chairs
20th Century Fox The First 50 Years
VH1 Divas Live 1999
Victor Victoria on Broadway
*Vietnam: The 10,000 Day War (2 platters)
Visions of Light
The Wizard of Gore
The Woman Eater
*The Wonderful Planet
Yosemite Ascending Rhythm

From Kino on Video:

Conspirators of Pleasure/Food
Coming Apart
Black Tights
Carnegie Hall
New Orleans
*Lured
*Pandora and the Flying Dutchman
*On Our Merry Way
*A Scandal in Paris

From Leo Films:

Kiss and Tell
Bomb Squad
Deadlock

From Living Arts:

AM Yoga/Stress Relief/PM Yoga for Beginners

From Lyrick Studios:

Barney in Outer Space

From MacDaddy:

The Best of MacDaddy 5th Year Anniversary

From Madacy:

*Strike Force
*The Andy Griffith Show (10 episodes)
*The Beverly Hillbillies
*The Lucy Show
*The Lone Ranger
*Aliens: The Complete Truth
*When Dinosaurs Ruled

From MGM:

Lord of the Dance
Friends and Lovers
The Adventures of Tom Sawyer
Blue Velvet
Breathless (remake)
*Desperately Seeking Susan
Dr. No Special Edition
Flawless
A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum
*FX
*FX2
Guys and Dolls
Honeymoon in Vegas
How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying
The Idolmaker
The Man with the Golden Gun
*Married to the Mob
Molly
Mr. Mom
Moonraker Special Edition
No Way Out
On Her Majesty's Secret Service
Showgirls
Spaceballs

The Spy Who Loved Me Special Edition

Thunder Road

*Thunderbolt and Lightfoot

The World Is Not Enough

From MPI Home Video:

*20th Century A Visual History (12 hours)

*Dan Curtis' Dracula/ The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

*The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes (4 Brett episodes)

From MTI:

Streetwise

Never Too Late

Smalltime

Undercurrent

Girl Next Door

True Friends

Winner Takes All

Fugitive Mind

Portrait of the Soul

Fall

Jaded

Naked Acts

Angel of the Night

*The Settlement

From Music Video Distributors:

*Richard Kern: Hardcore Collection

*Eric Carr: Tale of the Fox

From New Horizons:

Cheyenne Warrior

Deathsport

Carnosaur

Carnosaur 2

Carnosaur 3

Coroner

Mom, Can I Keep Her?

Bloodfist

Bloodfist 2

Bloodfist 3 Forced to Fight

Bloodfist 4 Die Trying

Fire on the Amazon

From New Line Home Video:

The Hidden

House Party

The Rapture

Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me

Bachelor

Mother Night

*Tumbleweeds

From New Video:

The Brandon Teena Story

Unreal Story of Pro Wrestling

Dancemaker (Paul Taylor)

Regret to Inform

From Paramount:

Star Trek Original Series Tomorrow Is Yesterday/Return of the Archons
Star Trek Original Series Taste of Armageddon/ Space Seed
Reds
Sliding Doors
Hollywood Confidential
Jennifer 8
Star Trek 3: Search for Spock
Superstar
G.I. Blues
Roustabout
Blue Hawaii
Bringing Out the Dead
*The Firm
*Romeo and Juliet
*American Gigolo
*Sleepy Hollow
From Passport:
Hispanic Hollywood
From Pioneer:
Getting Personal
Searching for Jimi Hendrix
The Best of Ocean Adventures
Battle Athletes Victory: No Looking Back
Monkey Magic: Quest Begins 12-13
Catnapped The Movie
*Trigun Lost Past
Horowitz in Moscow
Jackson Browne – Going Home
Beethoven 5. Piano Concerto
Windham Hill Winter
Windham Hill Autumn Portrait
Windham Hill Western Light
Windham Hill Water's Path
Blue Submarine 6 Blues V.1
*Blue Submarine 6 Pilots
Cowboy Bebop V.1
*Cowboy Bebop Sessions 2
*Cowboy Bebop Sessions 3
Eat-Man '98
Earth Wind & Fire in Concert
Sol Bianca The Legacy Lost Treasures
Kitaro: Tamayura
Marshall Tucker Band Then and Now
Ranma ½ Collection
Mobile Suit Gundam Wing DVD Operation 1
Pokémon Picture Perfect
Pokémon Water Blast!
Sailor Moon S The Movie The Uncut Special Edition
Nazca Betrayal of Humanity
*Little Feat: Rockpalast Live
*Best of MusikLaden Live Stephen Stills and Manassas
*Mozart in Salzburg
*Britannic
*Tenchi Universe Collection 1 Tenchi Muyo on Earth 1

*Escarflowne: Dragons and Destiny
*Haunted Junction
From PM Entertainment:
Extramarital
Acapulco Gold
From PolyGram Video:
Being John Malkovich
From PPI Entertainment:
Power Play
Mrs. Arris Goes to Paris
Nativity Story
From Raven Releasing:
Cold Hearts
The Stranger Kabloonak
From Real Entertainment:
Rapmania: The Roots of Rap
From Renegade Pictures:
The Cotton Club (Coppola w/extras)
Apocalypse Always: Tales from The Cotton Club
From Rhino Home Video:
Jocks/Hunk
Bubble
Sigmond and the Sea Monsters
Doo Wop at 50
Mystery Science Theater: Eegah!
Mystery Science Theater: The Brain That Wouldn't Die
*Coach
*H.R. Pufnstuf
*I'm from Hollywood
*Andy Kaufman Show
*My Favorite Martian (4 episodes)
*Stacy's Knights
From Roan:
Horror Hotel (fresh transfer)
Carnival of Souls (original theatrical version)
Missouri Traveler
Three Musketeers (serial)
That Uncertain Feeling
The Big Lift
Bowery at Midnight
Invisible Ghost
Scared to Death
Mysterious Mr. Wong
The Ape Man
Ghosts on the Loose
Black Dragons
Chamber of Horrors
Svengali
Mad Monster
Condemned to Live
The Monster Walks
S.O.S. Coast Guard
From RykoDisc:
*Castle of Cagliostro

*Devil Man Parts 1 & 2
*And Ya Don't Stop – Hip Hop
*Perfect Blue
*Sounds & Motion
From Shanachie:
*At the Jazz Ball: Early Hot Jazz, Song and Dance
From Showtime Entertainment:
Inspectors
From Simitar:
Sitting Bull
Cartier Affair
Ninja Academy
Exotic Aquarium: Coral Dreamscape
*Major League Soccer 1999
From SlingShot Entertainment:
Animation for Kids
This Is ElvisSinatra
Great Journeys
The Impossible Spy
Roger Corman Box Vol.1 (Attack of the Giant Leeches, Wasp Woman, Bucket of Blood)
For Your Height Only
The Joker's Wild
Spring Fever, USA
Malibu Weekend
Irene Dunne Romance Classics: Love Affair/ Penny Serenade
Fay Wray Collection: Most Dangerous Game/The Vampire Bat
Dreams of Flight: Air
Dreams of Flight: In the Beginning
Dreams of Flight: The Golden Age & Beyond
Dreams of Flight: Higher,Faster,Farther
Eruption of Mt. St. Helens
A Paper Wedding
Rikyu
Pope John Paul II Celebration of the Great Jubilee
From Sony Music:
Kate Bush: Line Cross & Curve
Beavis & Butt-Head: Butt-O-Ween
Karajan: New Year's Eve 1988
Johnny Cash & Willie Nelson VH1 Story Tellers
Will Smith Video Collection
MTV Unplugged Classic Moments
MTV Unplugged Finest Moments
MTV Unplugged: Ballads
MTV Unplugged: Superstars
*MTV: Soul of R&B
*Kathy Smith: Total Body Workout
From Spectrum Films:
FumbleHeads
Better Place
The Brain that Wouldn't Die
Beast from Haunted Cave
From Sterling Home Entertainment:
The Wrecking Crew
Webmaster

*Brown's Requiem

From Strand Releasing:

*Dry Cleaning

*Love is the Devil

*Voyage to the Beginning of the World (Mastroianni)

From Synapse Films:

She Killed in Ecstasy

Beast from Haunted Cave

Evil Dead Trap

A Better Place

From Tai Seng Video Marketing, Inc.:

Body Heat

Adventurous

Summer Heat

Storm Riders

Suspect

Yoko's Secret Diary

Aphrodite of Asia

Yes, Madam

Shu Kei - Viva! Island Girl

Buddhist Fist (reviewed in this issue)

Riki O The Story of Ricky

Running Out of Time

Mission

*Mysterious Obsession

*Virgin Assassin

From THF Home Entertainment:

The F Zone

From Trimark:

Saturday Night Live: Chris Farley

Saturday Night Live: Steve Martin

Saturday Night Live: Game Show Parodies

Hellblock 13

Blue Juice

Hide & Seek

The Official Story of the Ryder Cup 1999

The Indy 500 Series

*Adventures of Hercules (Hercules vs Moloch, Son of Hercules vs Medusa, Hercules vs Hydra, Hercules vs Sons of the Sun, Triumph of Hercules, Lion of Thebes, The Trojan Horse)

*Rent a Cop

From Troma:

Teenage Catgirls in Heat

The Stendahl Syndrome

Legend of the Chupacabra

The Suburbantors

The Rowdy Girls

The Rowdy Girls (unrated)

Maniac Nurses Find Ecstasy

*Escape from Hell

*Drawing Blood

From 20th Century Fox:

History of the World Part 1

Miracle on 34th Street (remake)

Anna and the King (new version)
Anywhere but Here
Power Rangers Pink Ranger: No Clowning Around/Bloom of Doom
Power Rangers Black Ranger: Happy Birthday Zach/Putty on the Brain
Walking with Dinosaurs
The X-Files First Season (\$150)
Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid
Fight City
Boys Don't Cry
*Independence Day Special Edition
*Entrapment Special Edition
From Ultra DVD:
Richie Valens: The Complete Richie Valens
From Universal:
Back to the Future
Back to the Future II
Duel
Harry & the Hendersons
The Money Pit
Cats
For Love of a the Game
End of Days
Conan The Barbarian Collector's Edition
Burn the Floor
Shania Twain: Live
*Jurassic Park
*Dinner Game
*I'm from Hollywood
*Marnie
*Snow Falling on Cedars
From Vanguard:
*Anchoress
From VCI Home Video:
A Doll's House
Black Sabbath
Black Tights
Blood and Black Lace
The Brave One
Brother Can You Spare a Dime
Death Game
Dick Tracy (serial)
The Duke of West Point & My Son My Son
Getting Gertie's Garter & Up in Mabel's Room
Gorgo
Jack Armstrong (serial)
Jungle Girl (serial)
Kill, Baby...Kill!
Marco
The Naked Kiss
Negatives
Pinocchio (Danny Kaye)
Pippin
Ride in the Whirlwind & The Shooting
Ruby

From Ventura:

*Gangstresses

From Victory Multimedia:

Silent Prey

Visions & Voyeurism Featuring Pandora Peaks

Zackl & Reba

From Vista Street Entertainment:

*Witchcraft XI

From Warner:

Citizen Kane

Eight Days a Week

Imagine: John Lennon

The Old Man and the Sea

Pee-Wee's Big Adventure

The Omega Man

A Star Is Born

Anchors Aweigh

Chill Factor

Short Cinema Journal 3

The Philadelphia Story

House on Haunted Hill (remake)

The Killing Fields

Kelly's Heroes

Seven Days in May

Three to Tango

Diner

Big Bully

Crush

Major League 2

Major League 3

On the Town

Short Cinema 8

Silent Fall

Stay Tuned

Three Kings (reviewed in this issue)

Gypsy (Russell)

Tweety's High-Flying Adventure

Batman Beyond: Return of the Joker

Switching Goals

Scooby-Doo and the Alien Invaders

Interview with a Vampire Special Edition (w/extras)

Baseball (all 9 episodes)

Shaft

Shaft in Africa

Shaft's Big Score

Twister Special Edition

*Freejack

*Lethal Weapon Director's Cut (7 extra minutes)

*Lethal Weapon 2 Director's Cut (4 extra minutes)

*Lethal Weapon 3 Director's Cut (3 extra minutes)

*White Sands

*Elvis: Aloha from Hawaii, Via Satellite

*Elvis: The Alternate Aloha Concert

From WaterBearer:

*Mandragora

From WEA:

Art Garfunkel: Across America

Metalica with The San Francisco Orchestra Conducted by Michael Kamen

Swan Lake: Tchaikovsky – Bourne

*The Smiths: The Complete Picture

From WGBH Boston Video:

Nova Everest The Death Zone

From Wolfe:

Defying Gravity

From World Vision:

Kids from Shaolin

The Shaolin Temple

Born to Defence

From WWF:

Hell Yeah

Wrestlemania XV

From Xenon:

Dangerous Evidence: Lori Jackson

Penitentiary

Penitentiary 2

Dangerous Evidence

From York Entertainment:

Johnny 2.0

Men of Means

Kolobos

Wanted

Angels Dance

Act of War

An American Affair

Convict 762

Random Encounter

Spoiler

Forgotten City

Storm Tracker

*A State of Mind

*The Hunger: Soul for Sale

*The Hunger: Vampires

*The Hunger: Wicked Dreams

LD Releases

Best Man

The Bone Collector

Bringing Out the Dead

End of Days

For Love of the Game

Hoods

Life Is Beautiful

The Limey

The Story of Us

Superstar

*Man on the Moon

*Sleepy Hollow

*Snow Falling on Cedars

Current Attractions

The following titles recently appeared for the first time:

DVD Releases

Absence of the Good (Columbia TriStar)
The Abyss (Fox)
Adventures in the Old West (Madacy)*
The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert (MGM)
The Adventures of Sebastian Cole (Paramount)
An Affair to Remember (Fox)
Aftershock Earthquake in NY (Artisan)
Alegria (Image)
Alive and Kicking (Image)
Angel in Training (Image)
Angel on Fire (Tai Seng)
Any Number Can Win (Image)
The Architecture of Doom (First Run)
Around the World with Orson Welles (Image)
Autopsy (Anchor Bay)
Autumn Sun (EMI)*
The Avengers '64 Set 1 (A&E)
The Avengers '64 Set 2 (A&E)
B. Monkey (Disney)
Back to School (MGM)
Bandits (Columbia TriStar)
Barney's Rhyme Time Rhythm (Lyrick)
Bauhaus: Gotham (Music Video Distributors)*
Beach Boys: Endless Harmony (EMI)
The Bear (Columbia TriStar)
Bear in the Big Blue House (Columbia TriStar)
Beavers (Image)
Bell, Book & Candle (Columbia TriStar)
The Bells (Image)
Betrayed (MGM)
Big Squeeze (Fox Lorber)
The Birds (Universal)
Black Circle Boys (Image)
Blank Generation (Anchor Bay)
Blood and Sand (Trimark)*
Blood Guts Bullets and Octane (Universal)
Blue Juice (Trimark)
The Bone Collector (Universal)
Bound for Glory (MGM)
Bridge at Remagen (MGM)
Cannibal! The Musical (Troma)
Century of the Dragon (Tai Seng)
Chaplin First National Collection (Image)
Chinese Connection (Front Row)*
Christina Aguilera: Out of the Bottle: Unauthorized (Music Video Distributors)*
CinderElmo (Sony)
Circuit 1:5 (Warner)*
Classic Albums U2 Joshua Tree (Image)

Classic Albums: Steely Dan: Aja (Image)
Color of Money (Disney)
The Contract (MTI)
The Count of Monte Cristo (Fox Lorber)
Crash and Burn (Full Moon)*
Crazy in Alabama (Columbia TriStar)
Creed: Riding the Edge: Unauthorized (Music Video Distributors)
Cross My Heart and Hope to Die (Vanguard)*
Cyborg 2 (Trimark)*
D.A.F.T. (EMI)*
D.O.A. (Image)
Dangerous Curves (New Horizons)
Daniella by Night (First Run)*
Daughters of the Dust (Kino on Video)
Death Machine (Trimark)*
Desecration (Image)
Destination Moon (Image)
Devil Girl from Mars (Image)
Directors Joel Shumacher (Fox Lorber)
Directors Norman Jewison (Fox Lorber)
The Disenchanted (First Run)*
Dixie Chicks: Chicks Rule (Sony)
The Dog of Flanders (Pioneer)
Dr. Seuss's My Many Colored Days (Blackboard)*
Drive Me Crazy (Fox)
Drunken Master (Front Row)*
Drunks (Fox Lorber)
Duke Ellington Sacred Concerts (Image)
Dungeon of Desire (Full Moon)
El Dorado (Paramount)
Emmanuelle 5 (New Horizons)
Emmanuelle 6 (New Horizons)
Emmanuelle First Contact (New Horizons)
End of Violence (MGM)
Ends of the Earth: The Secret Abyss of Movile Cave (Image)
Eric Rohmer Shorts (Fox Lorber)
Erik Friedlanderskin (Music Video Distributors)*
Evolver (Trimark)*
Explosive Dance (Image)
Extreme Crisis (Tai Seng)
Extreme Justice (Trimark)*
An Extremely Goofy Movie (Disney)
Eyes Wide Shut (Warner; reviewed last month)
Family of Cops (Trimark)*
Fanatic (Troma)
Fantastic Night (Image)*
Fifth Ward (York)
Finding North (Wolfe)
Fists of Fury (Front Row)*
Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe (VCI)
Flash Gordon's Trip to Mars (Image)
Flashfire (Trimark)*
Flynn (Vanguard)*
Force 10 from Navarone (MGM)

4-D Man (Image)
Frank Sinatra: The Hollywood Years/On Television (LaserLight)*
Galaxina (Rhino)
Get a Life (Rhino)
The Girl Hunters (Image)
A Good Day to Die (Trimark)*
Gothic (Artisan)
Grass: A Nation's Battle for Life (Image)
Guinevere (Disney)*
Hangmen Also Die (Kino on Video)
Heaven's Gate (MGM)
The Hideous Sun Demon (Image)
The Hitch Hiker (Kino on Video)
Highlander The Adventure Begins (Artisan)
Highwayman (Sterling)
Hillbilys in a Haunted House (VCI)*
Hook (Columbia TriStar)
Hoosiers (MGM)
Horror Express (Image)
Hot Boyz (Artisan)
How Green Was My Valley (Fox)
How to Be a Woman and Not Die in the Attempt (Image)
How to Stuff a Wild Bikini (MGM)
Human Monster/Mystery Liner (Roan)
I Was a Teenage Zombie (Image)
Il Postino (Disney)
Impact (Image)
In Passione Dominik Concerto: J.Cura: Jubileum (SlingShot)
Indochine (Columbia TriStar)
Jakob the Liar (Columbia TriStar)
Jazz on a Summer's Day (New Yorker)*
Johns (Fox Lorber)
Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat (Universal)
Just Write (Fox Lorber)
Killer Condom (Troma)
Killer Instinct: Predators (Front Row)*
Killing Mr. Griffin (PM)*
King of Masks (Columbia TriStar)
Las Vegas Hillbilys (VCI)
Last Night (Universal)
Last Time I Saw Paris (Front Row)*
Laurel and Hardy Volume 6 (Image)
Lee Ritenour & Dave Grusin: Live at the Record Plant (Image)
The Legend of Rudolf Valentino (Image)
Leprechaun in the Hood (Trimark)
Like Water for Chocolate (Disney)
The Limey (Artisan)
Limp Bizkit: Kiss Some @\$\$ Unauthorized (Music Video Distributors)
Liquid Sky (MTI)
A Little Bit of Soul (Vanguard)*
Little Princess (Front Row)*
The Living Sea (Image)
Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing (Fox)
Magical Legend of the Leprechaun (Artisan)

Martha Agerich and Friends (Pioneer)
Meteor (MGM)
Metroland (Universal)
Miami Rhapsody (Disney)
Midnight Tease/Midnight Tease 2 (New Horizons)
The Million Dollar Kid (D3K)*
The Mirror (Kino on Video)
Mob Hits (Trimark)
Modern Times (Image)
Molly and Lawless John (Front Row)*
Mr. Jealousy (Fox Lorber)
My Chauffer (Rhino)
My Little Assassin (Xenon)
Mystery Train (MGM)
National Lampoon's Last Resort (Trimark)*
Nazca - Blood Rivals (Pioneer)
New Adventures of Heidi (Front Row)*
New Jakarta Ensemble: Commonality (Music Video Distributors)
Niacin: Live: Blood, Sweat and Beers (Image)
Night Calls 2 (Image)
Night of the Warrior (Trimark)*
Night Vision (Xenon)
An Occasional Hell (Trimark)*
The Ogre (Kino on Video)
The Omega Code (GoodTimes)
On the Beach (MGM)
One Man's Hero (MGM)
Out of Africa (Universal; reviewed last month)
Outrageous Fortune (Disney)
Outside Providence (Disney)
Paul Taylor: Dancemaker (Docurama)*
Playboy WildWebGirls.com (Image)
Plunkett & MacLaine (PolyGram)
Pokémon The First Movie (Warner)
Prophecy 3: The Ascent (Disney)
The Puppet Films of Jiri Trnka (Image)
Railroaded (Kino on Video)
Random Hearts (Columbia TriStar)
Raw Nerve (York)*
Red Shoe Diaries: Girl on Bike (Showtime)
Red Shoe Diaries: The Game (Showtime)
Retro Puppet Master (Full Moon)
Richard III (MGM)
Rockers (Music Video Distributors)*
Sacco and Vanzetti (VCI)
The Sacrifice (Kino on Video)
Safari: World of Cats (Front Row)*
Sandra Bernhard I'm Still Here (RykoDisc)
Santo Bugito #1 (Image)
Santo Bugito #2 (Image)
Saturday Night Live: Best of Chris Rock (Trimark)
Saturday Night Live: Best of Dana Carvey (Trimark)
Scooby Doo's Original Mysteries (Warner)
Shadowzone (Full Moon)

Shallow Grave (MGM)
Shattered Image (Columbia TriStar)
Sidney Poitier One Bright Light (Fox Lorber)
The Sixth Sense (Disney)
Slaves to the Underground (Image)
Solar Crisis (Trimark)*
Son of the Sheik (Kino)*
Song of Freedom/Big Fella (Kino on Video)
St. Patrick The Irish Legend (Shanachie)
The Stand-Ins (Image)
Star Trek Original Series Shore Leave/Squire of Gothos*
Star Trek Original Series The Alternative Factor/Arena*
Stargate SG-1 (MGM)
Stigmata (MGM)
Storefront Hitchcock (MGM)
Storm Chasers (Pioneer)
Stranger Than Fiction (Image)
The Suburbans (Columbia TriStar)
Taffin (MGM)
Taking of Pelham 1-2-3 (MGM)
That's Life (Artisan)
The Tempest (Kino on Video)
Thrill Ride (Columbia TriStar)
Tierra (Vanguard)*
Tom and Jerry's Greatest Chases (Warner)
Tony Bennett A Special Evening (Image)
Torso (Anchor Bay)
The Trial (Image)
Trigun The \$60,000,000, 000 Man (Pioneer)
True Grit (Paramount)
Truman (HBO)
The Twilight Zone Vol.20 (Image)
The Twilight Zone Vol.21 (Image)
Two If by Sea (Warner)
UFO Chronicles (Front Row)*
Velocity Trap (Columbia TriStar)
Vendetta (HBO)
Visions of Tranquility (Simitar)
Volunteers (HBO)
The Voyager Odyssey (Image)
Walk in the Sun (Front Row)*
West New York (MTI)
What a Blast (A-Pix)
White Lies (MTI)
Who Is Harry Crumb? (Columbia TriStar)
Wide Awake (Disney)
Without Air (Image)
Woodstock '99 (Sony)
Young Tiger (Front Row)*

LD Release

Double Jeopardy (Pioneer)

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

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