

THE DVD- LAGER DISC NEWSLETTER

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A box of thrills

Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment has released all four **Alien** movies in a *20th Anniversary Edition* boxed set entitled **The Alien Legacy** (4110439, \$110), as well as releasing each THX presentation individually, **Alien** (4110430, \$30), **Aliens** (4110431, \$30), **Alien³** (4110432, \$30), and **Alien Resurrection** (4110433, \$30). Additionally, although we don't understand why they just didn't include it in the box, if you follow the instructions on an inserted postcard, you can obtain for a shipping charge a 68 minute program on another platter that is also entitled **The Alien Legacy**, has no catalog number, and features a retrospective documentary about the first **Alien**.

The transfers on the first three films hold significant improvements over the respective LDs. All four are in letterboxed format only, with an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. **Alien**, **Alien³** and **Alien Resurrection** have an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. **Aliens** has an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1, masking a bit off the top and bottom and adding a little to the sides in comparison to full screen versions. All of the films except **Aliens** have an alternate French audio track in standard stereo and all four have optional English and Spanish subtitles, and original trailers. The documentary has optional English, French and Spanish subtitles.

Fleshtones are pinkish on the most recent **Alien** LD (Feb 96), and are paler, but more consistent on the DVD. Other colors are crisper and the presentation is free of grain. The Dolby Digital 5.1 channel sound is stronger than the standard stereo track, but the LD's Dolby Digital channel is better, with more energy and more detail.

The **Alien** DVD is loaded with special features. It contains the extensive deleted scenes and outtakes that were included in the collector's edition LD (Nov 92), such as the spine-tingling sequence depicting the fate of Tom Skerritt's character, an extensive collection of the film's production artwork and photos, including many drawings by H.R. Giger, Ron Cobb, Jean 'Moebius' Giraud and Chris Foss, director Ridley Scott's thorough storyboards (Fox doubled his budget after seeing them), and advertising designs. There are also DVD-ROM materials, such as screen savers, and two additional audio tracks, one featuring Jerry Goldsmith's excellent musical score and the other featuring the audio playback without Goldsmith's music. The film itself runs 116 minutes.

Additionally, there is a commentary track by Scott, who has a superb grasp of the commentary format. As he has demonstrated in the past, he is very adept at explaining the reasoning behind his choices, the process behind various effects, and many basic but insightful filmmaking tips. It is best to listen to his commentary after watching the **Alien Legacy** documentary, which provides more of a background on how the film was created and who the various contributors were. (It does not get into the 'he said/she said' controversy over who was most responsible for the script, basically taking Dan O'Bannon at his word.) The combination of the commentary, the documentary and the other supplements

supplies an excellent overview of how the film was conceived (it was sort of a sibling to the beachball sequence in **Dark Star**), and how enthusiasm for it snowballed, taking on more artistic quality at every turn.

The 1979 film has been imitated and ripped off so many times in the past 20 years it no longer conveys the nerve-numbing horror it did to its original audiences—even first-time viewers are now more jaded—but other aspects, such as the performances (Sigourney Weaver is terrific, but the others are wonderful, too, including Yaphet Kotto, Harry Dean Stanton, John Hurt, Ian Holm, etc.) and Scott's mature sense of style (he may not have discovered Giger, but he understood exactly how to employ him) have enabled the film's appeal to endure long past its gimmicky frights and pre-CGI special effects.

James Cameron's inspired 1986 follow-up, **Aliens**, has been issued as a *Special Edition*, running 154 minutes, some 17 minutes longer than the standard version. We reviewed the LD presentation of the **Special Edition** in Jan 92 and, more recently, a Dolby Digital presentation of the standard version (Feb 96). This is the first time that the **Special Edition** has appeared in Dolby Digital. In comparison to the most recent—and best looking—LD picture transfer, the DVD's picture is much improved. Fleshtones are too orange on the LD, and while the fleshtones look somewhat drained in comparison on the DVD, other colors are sharper, more stable and clearly more accurate. The grain that plagued previous presentations of the film has been eliminated. The Dolby Digital 5.1 channel sound has a slightly weaker ambience than the Dolby Digital sound on the LD, but it is fairly similar and reasonably effective—enhancing the thrills in a manner that the blander standard stereo surround soundtrack is unable to emulate.

Aliens also has some special features, most of which appeared on the **Special Edition** LD. There is an interview with Cameron, 'live' views of the various miniatures, tests of various special effects and lengthy still presentations of conceptual artwork and production photos. The extras may not be as exhaustive as they are on **Alien**, but they are still quite extensive and highly gratifying.

For those who are unfamiliar with the feature, the 'longer' **Aliens** adds more information about the colonists—including footage of their activities—and a few other odds and ends, notably some cool-looking automatic guns that the heroes set up to stall the advance of the monsters. Where the first film is a horror movie, the second is more of an action feature, and if you aren't interested in the quality of the drama or the artistic blending the sequel makes with its predecessor, then you can comfortably skip the movie's first half hour and go right to chapter 7, where the heroine and the marines wake up and prepare to land on the planet. Weaver is joined by Michael Biehn, Bill Paxton, Paul Reiser and Lance Henriksen. Either way, it is an exciting, imaginative feature and ideal for DVD playback.

Alien3 should never be played after Aliens, for it is a real letdown in that context, but as a freestanding feature it is superbly directed and very entertaining, and seen in tandem with Alien Resurrection, it blows the latter away. Set on a 'prison planet,' Weaver's character is awakened from space travel hibernation, only to discover that one of the creatures has tagged along for the ride. She has to convince the convicts there is a problem, and then find a method to destroy the monster without weapons. Directed by David Fincher, the setting is adeptly depicted, so you never see or comprehend more of it than what Weaver's character does. Fincher builds the excitement steadily, and provides a realistic mix of characters to sustain the 1992 film's believability.

The picture presentation is much improved over the LD (Feb 93). Not only are colors more accurate and more consistent, but the image is sharper and more stable. The LD had no Dolby Digital, so although the standard track is a little weaker than its LD counterpart, the Dolby Digital track is much stronger, with a better dimensionality and sharper details. There are no elaborate supplementary features as there are on the first two DVDs, but there is a very good 20 minute or so (it isn't time encoded) 'making of' featurette, which includes interviews with the cast and crew, lots of behind-the-scenes looks at how the 115 minute film was staged and how the special effects were accomplished, and shots of Weaver getting her hair cut off. It can be supported by optional English or Spanish subtitles. There's also an ad for the tie-in video game.

We reviewed the LD release of **Alien Resurrection** in Jul 98. Except for one plot turn and accompanying special effect, it is an enjoyable thriller, with some reasonably interesting twists on the format. Weaver portrays a clone of her former character, with Winona Ryder, Ron Perlman and Brad Dourif. The picture quality is basically identical to the LD, though it is a bit sharper. Hues are accurate and fleshtones look good. Because of its age, the 1997 film has the best sound mix in the series, and while the LD's Dolby Digital track has a little more punch, the DVD's Dolby Digital track is still highly pleasing, with

lots of separation effects and an energetic dimensionality. The 108 minute feature is accompanied by a very brief 'making of' featurette that includes some cast interviews.

Regret nothing, report everything

One of the greatest LDs ever produced, the Criterion Collection edition of Terry Gilliam's **Brazil**, has been replicated in its entirety on DVD (BRA100, \$60) as an impeccably designed three-platter set. The first platter contains Gilliam's 142 minute version of the 1985 film, which is also available separately, from Universal (May 98), though only Criterion's version has a commentary track by Gilliam. The third platter contains a wildly dissimilar 97 minute TV version of the film originally conceived by Universal Pictures studio head, Sydney Sheinberg, who had taken control of the film away from Gilliam before its release and had tried to make it more commercial. It, too, is accompanied by a commentary track, by journalist David Morgan.

The middle platter contains a wealth of supplementary features, including a 30 minute 'making of' documentary that was shot when the film was being produced, but that covers the fights over the film so closely it could hardly be used for publicity purposes; a 60 minute documentary about the fight over the film's release between Gilliam and Universal; and shorter interviews with screenwriters Tom Stoppard and Charles McKeown, production designer Norman Garwood, costume designer James Acheson (his comments on Gilliam, which appeared on a second LD audio track, are the only thing from the LD missing from the DVD—apparently they were inadvertently dropped) and composer Michael Kamen, each coordinated with appropriate still frame material or other materials that relate to their specific contributions; an excellent breakdown of the script development; elaborate storyboards; exhaustive still photos; a comprehensive look at how the special effects were accomplished; and other odds and ends we've undoubtedly neglected to mention. Yet, regardless of how complex and elaborate the mix of stills and motion footage becomes, the middle platter remains blissfully simple to navigate, and we hope every budding DVD producer in the future lines up to obtain a copy and sees how it should be done. The menus are clearly delineated, the selections are easily identifiable, and the material is intuitively organized.

The picture quality on the main feature is identical to the Universal release, although the frame transfer rate is a little higher, staying in midrange on the Universal version and favoring the upper-midrange on the Criterion version. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. The color transfer is excellent, with crisp hues and accurate fleshtones. The stereo surround sound is also identical to the Universal version and maintains a pleasing dimensionality. This version of the film can be supported by optional English subtitles. The third platter version is presented in full screen format (although the letterboxing adds nothing to the sides and masks off picture information from the top and bottom of the screen, it can be seen in the older documentary that the film was designed for the 1.85:1 framing). The image is a little softer in places, but still looks very nice, and the sound is somewhat less dimensional. There is no subtitling. The DVD was produced by Sean-Wright Anderson.

Brazil is not a simple film, and its production history was not a straightforward affair, but Criterion's exhaustive DVD not only details every aspect of how it came into being, it thoroughly explores every attribute of the movie's artistry. In the beginning, Gilliam hammered out his ideas and brought together the personnel he needed to turn his fantasy into a film. Fearing a marketing nightmare but loving what Gilliam had accomplished, Universal tried to take it away from him and, at the very least, generated a lot of free publicity by failing to do so. Those who already admire the film will be overwhelmed by the wealth of insight and revelation Criterion has brought to it, and those who dislike or are indifferent to the film need only study the DVD (it can take a week to get through everything) to undergo a complete change of heart, learning not only about the extent to which motion picture marketing can replicate the imagination, but how art can survive and thrive in a world of commerce.

Something funny in the neighborhood

The classic 1984 special effects comedy, **Ghostbusters**, has found new life as one of this summer's biggest DVD blockbusters, thanks to a Columbia TriStar Home Video release (04139, \$30). The film is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The picture is substantially less grainy than the most recent LD release (Jan 90) and the color transfer

looks pretty much the same, with decent fleshtones and bright, nicely detailed hues. The standard stereo surround sound is a little weaker than the LD's stereo, but it is cleaner, and the film has been given a 5.1 channel Dolby Digital mix that is more dimensional and better detailed. The audio doesn't have quite the punch that a newer movie's audio would provide, but its best moments add to the fun. The 107 minute feature, starring Dan Aykroyd, Bill Murray and Sigourney Weaver, can be supported by English subtitles.

In addition to the movie, which is plenty funny if you haven't seen it in a while, the DVD is loaded with extras. There is a commentary track with director Ivan Reitman, co-screenwriter and star Harold Ramis, and associate producer Joe Medjuck. They laugh at the film while talking about the atmosphere on the set and how the film's various imaginative sequences were conceived and executed. One option allows you to see the three in silhouette at the bottom of the screen, *Mystery Science Theater* style, while they talk, though the utility of this option is limited (and you have to de-activate the enhanced 16:9 playback). More promisingly, a subtitling option brings up notations about the film's various sequences as they appear.

There is a decent collection of deleted scenes, most of which contain amusing gags that would have slowed down the pace of the narrative. There is a nice 10 minute behind-the-scenes 'making of' featurette from when the film was originally produced, another 10 minute retrospective featurette that includes reminiscences from some of the cast and the director, and an informative 15 minute retrospective featurette on the movie's special effects. Three major special effect sequences are replayed with a multiple angle option, so you can toggle between a preliminary version of the shot and the final version. Three more scenes are presented in split screen with storyboards, and there are more storyboards for about a dozen sequences that weren't shot. An excellent collection of production photos and drawings (including early versions of the **Ghostbusters** logo, which look quite Casper-ish) are also featured. There is a lot of menu overlapping for these features, which is convenient, but also a bit confusing.

Columbia TriStar has also issued the film's 1989 sequel, **Ghostbusters 2** (50169, \$30), though without any significant special features. The film is humorous in spots, but is not an inspired follow-up to the original and has the feel of filmmakers cashing in. The picture is presented on one side in letterboxed format, 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, adding nothing to the top or bottom of the image and losing a lot of picture information on the sides (Ramis complains on the **Ghostbusters** commentary track that he is forever getting dropped off by the cropping). The picture is much nicer than the LD (Jan 90). The image is sharper and colors are stronger. Fleshtones look accurate and other hues are bright. Darker sequences are free of distortion. The LD had no Dolby Digital sound, so the DVD's Dolby Digital track is a great improvement, with more distinctive separation effects and more power. There are alternate Spanish and Portuguese audio tracks in standard stereo, optional English, Spanish, Portuguese, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean and Thai subtitles, a cast-and-director profile section, and several trailers.

The world of Kevin Smith

All of Kevin Smith's films are inter-related, a strategy that is going to payoff handsomely for him someday, artistically if not monetarily. Miramax Home Entertainment has issued Smith's debut effort, **Clerks**, a black-and-white comedy about a convenience store clerk and a video store clerk who talk with a marvelous, earthy wit about love and other subjects as oddballs come and go from their stores. There is also a narrative, of sorts, as the hero argues with his new girlfriend and yearns for his former one. The *Miramax Collector's Series* program (17365, \$40) is a duplication of the LD release (Oct 95), which includes a party-like commentary channel featuring Smith and his friends, several deleted scenes, a powerful alternate ending, a trailer and a color music video.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. The black-and-white picture is a little grainy in spots (the film's budget was minimal) but workable, and the stereo surround sound is good, at least for the rock songs. The 92 minute program can be supported by optional English subtitles. The commentary channel does give the viewer an idea of how the film came together and, by implication, the atmosphere surrounding the production.

It is with immense irony that Universal should release Smith's follow-up feature, **Mallrats** (20019, \$35), on DVD in the same month that Universal Studios' hit comedy, *American Pie*, opened in theaters, because, as it is made clear in the excellent supplementary features that accompany the film, Universal

originally conceived of **Mallrats** as a 'smart **Porky's**,' and then proceeded to tie Smith's hands and temper the severity of the humor and sex in the 1995 film, emasculating it to the point that it not only flopped, but flopped with great timidity. Maybe Universal learned their lesson, and let *American Pie* alone, but Smith was left holding the bag, until **Chasing Amy** restored his reputation.

Mallrats, which officially takes place, in Smith's mythology, on 'the day before **Clerks**,' is about two young men pining for their former girlfriends at a shopping mall, while a couple of peripheral characters cause trouble. It concludes with an elaborately staged 'Dating Game' show, being held at the mall. As is evidenced on the DVD, which includes a good hour of deleted scenes, the 96 minute film does not flow naturally. The jokes often seem forced and the timing is uneven. Because it is part of a larger whole, and because there is some humor to it, home video has redeemed some of its reputation, and it can be enjoyable if you like the characters and know what to expect. It just earns the fewest votes for being Smith's best film. Shannon Doherty stars with Jason Lee and, though he isn't listed on the jacket, Ben Affleck also appears.

We reviewed the LD in May 96. Fleshtones on the LD are little warmer, but other colors are yellowish and it is clear that hues on the DVD are more accurate. The image is also sharper. The presentation is letterboxed, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The stereo surround sound is okay, and there is a 5.1 Dolby Digital channel that enhances the musical score effectively. There is also a French audio track in standard stereo and optional English subtitles.

The 96 minute film appeared on LD without special features, but the DVD has a bunch of stuff. There is a commentary channel featuring Smith, Lee, Affleck, Jason Mewes (who appears, with Smith, in each of Smith's films), producer Scott Mosier, and Smith collaborator or historian or something, Vincent Pereira. The atmosphere is very similar to the **Clerks** commentary. With the DVD's most innovative feature, you can use the alternate angle function to see them all talking in one section of the screen, while the movie is playing (if an annoying logo comes on whenever the alternate angle is available, it can be suppressed—check your DVD player's user manual). There is also a 20 minute retrospective documentary, a collection of publicity stills and the usual production notes, cast profile section and trailer, as well as the elaborate 'deleted scenes' collection.

The film failed in part because the film company started mucking with Smith's vision, but it also failed because Smith's sense of timing was not appropriate for the 'R-teen' comedy genre, which otherwise dumbed down the intellectual gags that make **Clerks** so engaging. This is especially true of the film's original 20 minute opening, which is the centerpiece of the deleted scenes. It painfully lacks a comic focus and it is a good thing they dropped the sequence, regardless of how much added character information it supplied.

The commentary and documentary provide a fairly complete picture of how the film came together and then fell apart. Each is also very entertaining itself, using the movie as a foil for amusing comments about the filmmaking industry and the stigmas of success (they all rank on Affleck—even Affleck ranks on Affleck). But, as Smith points out, the mere presence of extra features enhances the respectability of **Mallrats**. "By doing this DVD, it makes it seem like this film is this unappreciated piece of genius," Smith says, chuckling.

Do not open until Christmas

You probably don't want to think about this in the sweltering heat of mid-Summer, but the 256 minute miniseries, **Stephen King's Storm of the Century**, released by Trimark Home Video (VM7035D, \$30), is the perfect DVD to watch during a blizzard. For one thing, it's long, like a blizzard is, and for another, it is set in the middle of a whopper itself, so you can feel cozy watching one while you're experiencing another. The plot has no crescendo twist and the hero doesn't articulate his arguments the way we would have, but it is an involving story that keeps you watching. Set on a small island off the coast of Maine, a mysterious stranger appears just as a humongous storm is getting under way. He murders an elderly woman and is arrested, but he seems to know the innermost secrets of every citizen, and guarding him in jail is not a fun task, particularly when the weather outside is so frightful. The show is nicely paced, so that just as you begin to tire of one set of events, it moves on to the next elaboration.

Split to two sides, the show is presented in full, with a single set of opening and closing credits.

The picture looks good, with decent fleshtones and darker scenes (much of the film) that are solid and stable. The surround sound has those directional demonic whispers that get used a bit too often these days but still seem rather creepy. There are optional English and Spanish subtitles, and a cast profile section.

There is also an excellent commentary track by King, intercut with comments by director Craig Baxley. Due to the length of the program, there are also longish gaps between some of the comments. King's track is so good, however, that we wish he'd take a pause from fiction and do a book on the art of writing. Everything he says is fairly basic, but he instinctively finds the essence of every concept, communicating it clearly and succinctly. He gives a historical overview of the miniseries format and explains why, when he suggested that he do an 'original' story instead of one based upon a previous work, the network was receptive—networks, mind you, are rarely receptive to radically new ideas. He also breaks down the process of constructing the miniseries itself (he honestly didn't know how the story would end when he began), likening its nightly divisions and commercial breaks to the major divisions and chapter subdivisions of a novel. In addition to this, he talks about the story, about the cast and about what works in the movie and what doesn't. He has no compunctions about pointing out where the efforts of an actor or others fall short. Baxley's talk is less interesting, but he does fill in details of how the film was executed (some of it was shot in Toronto, some in Maine; he also points out the different types of fake snow that were utilized) and other background information on the production.

Coming down with a little something

There are bad movies and then there are very stupid but enjoyable movies and **Virus**, a Universal release (20431, \$30), falls comfortably into the second category. Jamie Lee Curtis, Donald Sutherland and William Baldwin star in the monster thriller, about an alien intelligence that penetrates the computers of a ship and starts using the machine shop to build doodads that are part stray components and part human. It wants to conquer the world, and the heroes just want to get off the boat without becoming talking toaster ovens. There is almost nothing that is original about it (for redundancy, see **Deep Rising** or contact your local Borg recruiting office), but the special effects are elaborate, the stars, even when they over act, are appealing, and the required excitements keep grinding away for 99 minutes (actually 90 minutes, there is a very long end credit scroll). This is what movies were meant to do.

The entertainment is enhanced by the nice picture and sound transfer. The Dolby Digital track has many well-defined separation effects and keeps pulling you back to the action when your attention starts to wander. Even the standard stereo surround soundtrack is lively. The picture is 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 crisp hues and accurate fleshtones. The program has an alternate French audio track, in standard stereo, optional English subtitles, production notes, a cast-and-director profile section, and a trailer.

There is no indication of it on the jacket cover, but there is also a good, decent-sized documentary about creating the special effects, a standard 'making of' featurette (which repeats a lot of the material from the other documentary), and a commentary channel by the director, John Bruno, secondary cast members, Marshall Bell and Sherman Augustus, and composer Joel McNeely (who has to be prompted, but has many insightful things to say about music when he's asked the right questions). They talk about the logistics of the shoot (a lot of it was done on a real boat in Virginia, with backgrounds hidden by CGI fog), about the special effects, and jovial anecdotes about the production (apparently practically everyone lost his or her temper at one point or another). It is not a comprehensive talk, but it avoids addressing the script's weaknesses—all of the best dialog lines, incidentally, were adlibs—and explores the complex experience of making an elaborate special effects feature with enthusiasm. We recommend watching the documentaries first, so you are familiar with the behind-the-scenes personnel the commentators are referencing.

Defective personalities

Paul Schrader's involving portrait of a troubled sheriff in a small New England town, **Affliction**, has been released Universal (20588, \$30). Nick Nolte stars, and James Coburn won an Oscar for his portrayal

of Nolte's father. Based upon a novel by Russell Banks, the film's script holds too tightly to its literary origins and is narrated by a character who was devised entirely to serve the written word. His actual presence looks awkward. The conclusion is also somewhat oblique, though that is not really a flaw, just a disappointment that the film has to come, so soon, to an end. Shot in real snow, the film's atmosphere is meticulously executed and the characters are vividly conceived. There is a token mystery for the sheriff to investigate, which makes an ideal distraction from the story's real focus—a spellbinding exploration into the fatally defective personalities of the father and the son.

The picture is presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. The letterbox framing is consistently elegant and involving. Except for a couple Day-Glo hunting jackets and a few home movie-style flashbacks, there are no bright colors in the film (the hero's memories are brighter than his reality), but the image appears to be accurately transferred and is highly satisfying. The stereo surround sound is adequate (there is no 5-channel mix). The 115 minute program can be supported by optional English subtitles and comes with production notes, a cast profile section and a trailer.

Lottery fever

We once sat through a painfully bad film that we have fortunately forgotten the title of, about a group of people in a diner who discover a dead person holding a winning lottery ticket. **Waking Ned Devine** has basically the same plot, but it is a great deal more charming. Set in a small and remote Irish town, the emphasis is upon the personalities of the villagers, but the narrative careens forward with utmost logic and so while you take delight in the company of the characters, you also can't wait to see what will happen to them next. The one criticism that could be leveled against it is that the whole movie is too calculated and sweet, but that is a common complaint about many classics. Ian Bannen is top-billed.

The film is a 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment release (4110385, \$35) and is in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. The image is crisp and the lovely green hills are deeply and accurately hued. The stereo surround sound carries a nice dimensionality for the pleasingly Irish musical score and the dialog is usually easy for American ears to follow. The 91 minute program has optional English and Spanish subtitles, a cast-and-director profile section and a trailer.

The Master

It began when museums would borrow paintings from other museums and from private collections to present a comprehensive look at the works of a particular artist. Now Warner Home Video has done the same thing on DVD, coordinating a release of Warner titles with those of MGM Home Entertainment and Columbia TriStar Home Video to present a legitimate and surprisingly enlightening retrospective entitled **Stanley Kubrick Collection** (29831, \$150). The films contained in the collection have also been released separately, including **2001: A Space Odyssey** (65000, \$25), **The Shining** (17369, \$25), **A Clockwork Orange** (17367, \$25), **Lolita** (65004, \$25), **Full Metal Jacket** (17371, \$25), **Barry Lyndon** (17366, \$25) and from Columbia TriStar, **Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb** (04093, \$25). MGM has issued three additional titles in coordination with the others, though not part of the **Collection** box set, **Killer's Kiss** (907707, \$25), **The Killing** (907706, \$25) and **Paths of Glory** (907674, \$25).

Ingmar Bergman and Billy Wilder can now battle for the title, but until he passed away last Spring, Stanley Kubrick was the world's greatest living filmmaker. His 1968 masterpiece, **2001: A Space Odyssey**, remains an astounding accomplishment in science-fiction drama and motion picture making, more than 30 years after it was produced. His other features are equally resilient to the passage of time, and many of them alter, repeatedly, a viewer's understanding of self and of the world at large.

As often as we have seen the films, however, even we were surprised by the resonance and revelation the retrospective format brought to them. What such a format does is magnify the artist's technique, as well as his greater themes. The subject may change from work to work, but the methods and interests of the artist, while undergoing growth, remain relatively constant. Thus a film we haven't cared much for in a long time, **A Clockwork Orange**, suddenly gained a greater power because we were more attuned to Kubrick's attention to detail. Throughout the 1971 film, Kubrick uses very narrow set

designs, reinforcing the representation of the hero as a personification of Libido—no wonder he is irrepressible. (Malcolm McDowell is a punk sent to prison for murder who is then allowed to undergo a mind control regimen to go free, subsequently becoming a political pawn between liberals and law-and-order enthusiasts.) One might say that many people like the film for the wrong reason—responding directly to its violence and sex without acknowledging the lessons it wants to impart—but the film’s abstract inserts, its political, psychological and cultural satire (making fun, for example, of the ubiquity of Beethoven’s 9th Symphony), and its loveless eroticism make it a celebration of wrong reasons. Those who condemn it and those who praise it can be equally embarrassed when they try to detail their arguments, because the film continually negates the values it pretends to espouse. The lingo may be different, but it is a gangsta movie, without a constituency.

The problems one encounters in **Lolita** are also superseded by the impact of Kubrick’s style. The viewer can tire of the hero’s possessiveness as quickly as the heroine does, but when the film’s blatantly comical aspects are blended with an awareness of Kubrick’s drier humor, it is enough to see one through the hero’s lapses in judgment. James Mason stars as a college professor who becomes infatuated with his landlady’s teen daughter and eventually runs off with her. Of course the 1962 film would be much more intriguing if the heroine were more underage than she is allowed to be, but Kubrick seizes upon the film’s paranoia, allowing the viewer, through the eyes of the hero, to have glimpses of what seems like another movie taking place in the same space, in which Peter Sellers is also pursuing the girl.

Many of Kubrick’s films are segmented into smaller whole narratives and one of the most distinctive examples of this is his Vietnam movie, **Full Metal Jacket**. The boot camp drama that takes up the 116 minute film’s first 40 or so minutes is a freestanding and unnerving portrait of soldiers pushed to the edge. Again, one becomes aware of the film’s exceptional style, so much so that Kubrick is able to enter one of the most repetitive extended situations in film—the training of recruits—giving it a fresh viewpoint and an incredible sense of immediacy. His camera floats about chest high and always makes you believe you are in the barracks with the soldiers instead of on the outside looking in. The subsequent Vietnam sequence is more abstract and less deeply involving, but that is a calculated reflection upon the nature of the War, and the action scenes hold a viewer’s attention to the end, while the film’s complicated moral and psychological explorations unfold. It is easier now to follow the characters, incidentally, than it was when the 1987 film first came out, because many of the actors have gone on to become stars, including Matthew Modine, Adam Baldwin and Vincent D’Onofrio. R. Lee Ermy, of course, gives a definitive performance as the drill sergeant.

In the commentary channel on **Storm of the Century** (see page 3), Stephen King talks about his dissatisfaction with Kubrick’s **The Shining**, and claims that was his motivation for sponsoring the TV miniseries remake. He also admits that the ratings failure of the miniseries was probably due to the popularity of the original movie. Well, we’re glad he went and made it again, but we’re also glad Kubrick did his version. The 1980 film is that rare sort of horror movie that gets under your skin and imbedded in your memory, forgoing cheap thrills (there are moments where Kubrick deliberately chooses the least startling camera angle for a shot) to achieve something that is far more disturbing. We know people that feel uncomfortable to this day looking at pictures of Jack Nicholson or watching him act because of his performance as the mountain resort caretaker who goes mad and chases after his family with an axe. Again, the film has many narrow sets, which seem to go in tandem with another popular Kubrick shot, the close-up with the bare forehead and eyes pointing upward, lit from below. Kubrick has often been accused of making ‘dry’ or non-humanist films, but a look at the performances of Nicholson, Shelley Duvall and others in **The Shining** demonstrates why this is a misconception. Because of his technical mastery, he is able to induce practically raw emotions from his cast, and their reactions to the horror are so believable you forget it is a fiction.

Kubrick’s stately Eighteenth Century adventure based upon a novel by William Makepeace Thackeray, **Barry Lyndon**, runs 185 minutes, every second of which is stunningly photographed. Ryan O’Neal portrays an Irishman who travels to Europe in an army and stays on, to work his way up in society until his fortune takes a turn for the worse. The 1975 film can be as engrossing as a novel if the viewer is not alienated by the period atmosphere and deliberate pace. There are many exceptional moments of human drama—something people rarely acknowledge in a work by Kubrick—and many memorable sequences, all of which are enhanced by Kubrick’s finely honed and very dry humor. O’Neal’s character makes an extreme and seemingly arbitrary personality shift shortly after the Intermission that takes some

getting used to, and this may be the film's biggest joke of all. Seen in the context of the other movies, the film's style is an outstanding manifestation of how we view the past (and Kubrick seems to forego his tracking shots in favor of slow zooms and gradual movement). We would take issue, however, with Kubrick's closing epigram, which claims that because the film takes place so long ago, the characters 'are all equal now.' It is not true. If one takes a religious point of view, then some of them are damned and some are not. If one takes a scientific point of view, then the DNA of some survive, while the DNA of others do not. Either way, their fortunes continue beyond the grave.

Writing in a recent Kubrick tribute in the New York Times, Peter Bogdanovich let slip that it was Kubrick himself who dropped Peter Sellers from the part inherited by Slim Pickens in **Dr. Strangelove**, because Sellers wasn't delivering what Kubrick wanted for the role. The frantic Cold War comedy about the trigger of a nuclear annihilation, stuffed from the first shot to the last with blatant sexual connotations, is consistently engaging and inspired satire. As it turns out now, the Russians barely had enough bombs to blow up the Golden Gate Bridge, much less everything else, but the 1963 feature is about the paranoia that dominated the country's political climate at the time, and its irreverence has not only survived the change in times, it certifies the absurdity of the topical arguments of its day.

It seems that Kubrick first really started to move his camera with **Paths of Glory**. The long tracking shots through the trenches are the precursor to the steadicam shots of the boy on his bike rolling down the halls in **The Shining** and the marching scenes in **Full Metal Jacket**. The gripping 1957 feature, starring Kirk Douglas, is about a hypocritical court martial for cowardice during World War I, and it is because of Kubrick's explosion of technique that you never feel the drama is simply a filmed stageplay, something it could easily have become in the hands of a less innovative director.

Kubrick's 1956 feature, **The Killing**, about a botched robbery, is very similar in format to John Huston's **The Asphalt Jungle** and dozens of subsequent films, notably **Reservoir Dogs**. The voiceover narration was later skewered by Woody Allen in **Take the Money and Run** (see page 7), so it is best to give the one film a wide berth if you intend to watch the other. Sterling Hayden stars as the mastermind of a race track heist, which is undone by greed and lust. It is a taut, well-executed thriller, with a number of subtle stylistic innovations and a cleverly shuffled chronology. As we've pointed out in the past, the film also shares some remarkable similarities with the events surrounding the Kennedy Assassination, though what this means we're not sure (were the conspirators familiar with the film?).

Kubrick's earliest available commercial film, **Killer's Kiss**, from 1955, runs 67 minutes and is a satisfying tale of love and murder, with many striking sequences, about a boxer who helps a dancer stuck in the wrong crowd. Shot on a shoestring budget, Kubrick consistently overcomes his production limitations with imaginative images (there is a startling dream sequence, done in negative, that foreshadows the narrow hallway effects he uses in the other films) and an alertness to what can and cannot be accomplished in each sequence. There is also a mature attitude toward sexuality that never wavered throughout his career. **Killer's Kiss** is an enjoyable film in any context and an appetizing way to either start or conclude a Kubrick marathon retrospective.

Warner insists to all inquiries that the transfers of the films to home video were approved by Kubrick. What they don't say is when the transfers were approved. There is a question of letterboxing that we will get to in a moment, but what seems more blatantly unforgivable are the speckles and stray scratches that show up in several features, particularly *A Clockwork Orange*. The wear is not enough to spoil the film—you probably won't even notice most of them if you don't look for them (they're mainly in the second half)—but it is difficult to believe that Kubrick would have allowed such a print to be exhibited in even one theater, let alone be disseminated on home video, were he cognizant of the flaws (example—44:17). Otherwise, the film's colors look accurate. Fleshtones are purposely pale and other hues also look deliberately light or washed out (there are often lights shining directly into the camera, another Kubrick touch), but the replication appears accurate and, occasional speckles aside, is highly pleasing. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.55:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. The color transfer is identical to the LD (Oct 91), but the enhanced sharpness of the DVD is highly appealing. The monophonic sound is weak, but the Dolby Digital mono sound is stronger and is on par with the LD's standard mono track.. The 137 minute program has an optional French language track, optional English or French subtitles ("Mais assez parlé. Les actes sont plus éloquentes que. Aux actes, à présent."), and an exactly 1 minute long trailer that discourages blinking.

Both Criterion Collection and MGM issued LD versions of **Lolita**, with the Criterion version being

the better looking of the two, although the Warner DVD looks better still. It is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1 and no 16:9 enhancement, matching the letterboxing on MGM's LD. Criterion's LD, however, had a little more picture information on all four edges of the screen, although the advantages of this are negligible. The picture on the LD was sharp and contrasts are nicely detailed, but the picture on the DVD is sharper, blacks are richer and whites are brighter, creating a slicker, and more compelling image. The monophonic sound is weaker than on the LD, but the Dolby Digital mono track is on par with the LD and is satisfying. The 153 minute feature has an alternate French language track, optional English and French subtitles and a trailer.

Neither **Full Metal Jacket** nor **The Shining** are letterboxed. Again, it is a question of how recently Kubrick approved the transfers. Did he intend for video viewers to see a different image than theatergoers saw? It is likely with both films that nothing would be gained on the sides with letterboxing, and with **Full Metal Jacket**, at least, the full screen framing is highly compelling (check out the crane shot in the obstacle course sequence—you feel like you're going to fall off), but couldn't Warner have at least provided the option to play a letterboxed version along with the full screen?

Although it isn't as heavy as **A Clockwork Orange**, **Full Metal Jacket** also contains some speckling, including white dots on the supposedly solid black end credit scroll. The color transfer looks only slightly improved over the LD (Nov 88), but fleshtones appear accurate, the lighting is always stable and the image is very crisp. The monophonic sound is fine. There is an alternate French audio track, optional English or French subtitles and a trailer.

Full Metal Jacket seems to work okay in full screen format, but **The Shining** is not as accommodating. There are many shots where it is clear that there is nothing but empty space above or below the characters, not only ruining the balance of the composition, but upsetting the film's claustrophobic atmosphere. There are speckles in the opening shot, and in several other places during the 144 minute film. The color transfer is the least satisfying in the **Collection**. Hues are purposefully light and drab, and fleshtones still look accurate most of the time, but there are sequences where the image looks just a little too washed out or hazy, and fleshtones seem a bit too peachy. The monophonic sound is good and there is an alternate French audio track, optional English and French subtitles, and a trailer. Also included is an excellent 35 minute documentary by Kubrick's daughter, Vivian, that contains some of the only available footage of her father at work. The program explores aspects of a movie shoot most 'making of' featurettes avoid, particularly in its depiction of the actors preparing for their roles (and getting chewed out by the director). The video transfer on the short contains some track patterns and other minor flaws.

The color transfer on **Barry Lyndon** looks identical to the LD (Oct 91), but the picture is much sharper. The transfer is excellent, and the DVD image brings out more detail and a clearer view of the shifts in light and shade. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.58:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. Alone among all the films in the **Collection**, we were quite cognizant of artifacting flaws, however, particularly a slight jitter in the image that would disappear when we toggled to the LD. There are scattered speckles, too, though they seem a bit less prevalent than speckles on the LD's image. The monophonic sound is okay. There is an alternate French audio track, optional English and French subtitles, production notes and a trailer.

Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb is identical to a previous Columbia TriStar DVD release, called simply **Dr. Strangelove** (01729, \$25); in fact, the platter for the new release, identical to the old, also retains the shorter title, although the jacket art has squeezed in the longer title. The black-and-white image is very crisp, with nicely defined details. As with the LD releases (Jun 94), the film has a very slight, varying and somewhat mystifying letterboxing band that comes and goes from one shot to the next. Generally, you're not aware of it at all. The monophonic sound is okay. The 94 minute feature has alternate Spanish and French language tracks, optional Spanish subtitles and English closed captioning.

Warner's presentation of **2001: A Space Odyssey** is identical to the MGM Home Entertainment DVD release we reviewed in Oct 98. In fact, although the jacket has a new catalog number, the platter retains MGM's catalog number. To recap: The image is incredibly crisp and the color transfer looks great, though it is likely that there is some minor room for improvement in spots, and there are, once again, some stray speckles. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.2:1 and no 16:9 enhancement (drat!). There is a 5.1 Dolby Digital track, but it does not sound much different from the standard stereo surround soundtrack. There is very little dimensional activity and there is some minor background hiss, but

the audio presentation is adequate. There is an alternate French audio track in mono, optional English, French and Spanish subtitles, a couple trailers and a 20 minute talk by scenarist Arthur C. Clark from 1968, when the 148 minute film was first released. If we were marketing people, however, we'd certainly be planning to reissue the title again in two years.

There is a bit more picture information around the edges of the full screen presentation of **Paths of Glory** than there was on the Criterion LD (Jul 89), and it appears that the image is very slightly windowboxed. The picture transfer is excellent, though it is a measure of how well the LD was produced to say that its presentation is just as sharp and almost as well detailed. Some shadings on the black-and-white image are more clearly delineated on the DVD, but essentially the two look the same. The monophonic sound on the DVD is cleaner and just as strong as the LD's sound. The 87 minute feature has an alternate French audio track, optional English and French subtitles and a trailer.

The black-and-white picture on the LD release of **The Killing** (May 93) looks a little washed out in comparison to the nicely detailed contrasts on the DVD. The image is presented in full screen format and looks very sharp, with rich blacks. The monophonic sound is fine. The 89 minute program has optional English and French subtitles and a cool trailer.

The low budget black-and-white **Killer's Kiss** is less grainy than the LD (May 93). The image is almost as vivid as the other black-and-white films. It is very sharp and reasonably smooth, and while there is a bit of speckling, there seems to be less wear than the LD image had. The monophonic sound on the LD is much louder, but also much noisier, and the DVD's audio has a better compromise between clarity and hiss. The program can be supported by optional English or French subtitles.

Tally ho

The enjoyable hour-long 1932 thriller about a rich guy who likes to hunt people, **The Most Dangerous Game**, has been released by The Criterion Collection (MOS020, \$25). Shot by the same group who made *King Kong*—while they were working on *Kong*—Leslie Banks is the villain, Joel McCrea is the victim-hero and Fay Wray is the gender interest. The film moves rapidly and has a number of action scenes that have sustained a visceral appeal over time, but the psychological conflicts between the characters are also highly entertaining.

The jacket cover uses Criterion's all too common we-don't-want-you-to-buy-this-unless-you're-committed artwork. The black-and-white picture transfer is somewhat worn in spots and has a number of scratches, speckles and blotches. The inconsistency of the source material also promotes some displacement artifacting. The image is fairly sharp most of the time, however, and when it is free of damage it looks quite nice, with finely detailed contrasts and pure blacks. The presentation is windowboxed, though not as severely as the Roan Group LD (Nov 95). Although the LD looked fine, the better detail and sharper focus on the DVD are more satisfying. The monophonic sound is fuller and smoother on the LD, and the DVD's audio is a bit tinny and less detailed in comparison. The dialog is clear, but ambience is limited. The program can be supported by optional English subtitles.

There is also a very good commentary track by commentary track veteran Bruce Eder. The LD also had an alternate track, with a different commentator, but Eder's talk is better organized and more involving. Although both speakers have the same material to work with, Eder is more adept at drawing the listener through the film and its illustrious personnel.

Star appeal

Even the dopiast movies can become totally watchable if they are filled with movie stars who know what they are doing. The second half of **Stepmom** isn't bad but the first half is pretty ridiculous, what with Julia Roberts playing an ace fashion photographer who's all thumbs when it comes to taking care of her boyfriend's kids. Her flaws are contrived and the narrative goes nowhere for a very long time. Yet, even at its worst, with Roberts and Susan Sarandon (as the mother of the children) doing their thing, the movie is difficult to resist, and it is so much fun watching them share the screen that multiple viewings are inevitable. Roberts has all of her little smiles and her aura of self-confidence (even when her character is blowing her babysitting chores), charming the viewer the instant the camera catches her, and then Sarandon enters and lords over the space around her like a queen. Hearts already beating fast, because

of the talents of one actress, double in speed when the other appears. By the end, everybody's crying and the viewer will be hard-pressed not to join in.

Columbia TriStar Home Video has released the Chris Columbus feature (02852, \$30) in letterboxed format on one side and in cropped format on the other. The letterboxing has an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The picture transfer looks fine, with sharp lines and accurate fleshtones. The stereo surround sound and Dolby Digital sound are rather uninteresting, and the music tends to surge in places. The 125 minute program has optional English subtitles, a cast-and-director profile section, a trailer and a brief 'making of' featurette that includes interviews with the stars.

Mining town dramas

A small but very pleasing movie about young boys growing up in a West Virginia coal town and eventually winning a national science contest, **October Sky**, has been released by Universal (20557, \$30). The first half of the film is fairly run-of-the-mill, but the second half has many emotional payoffs that make the entire movie a memorable and very special experience.

The film is presented on two layers, in letterboxed format on one layer, with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback, and in cropped format on the other layer, although cropping harms the film's atmosphere significantly. The picture transfer looks great, with bright, crisp hues and accurate fleshtones.

We didn't care much for the Dolby Digital 5.1 channel mix, preferring the standard stereo mix instead. There is very little rear channel activity on the Dolby Digital mix, except for occasional surges in the musical score, while the standard mix has a comfortable collection of appropriate rear channel sound effects in addition to the music. Even the front sound on the Dolby Digital track seems more centered than it is on the standard track. There is an alternate French audio track in standard stereo, optional English subtitles, a cast-and-director profile section and a trailer. Contrary to a jacket notation, there is no commentary channel, although there is a very good 20 minute or so 'making of' featurette. It includes an interview with NASA official, Homer Hickman, Jr., whose autobiography served as the basis for the film.

Great motion picture music comes in all shapes and sizes, but rarely is it as unexpected as Ron Goodwin's brass band score in the 1977 Walt Disney feature, **The Littlest Horse Thieves**, an Anchor Bay Entertainment release (DV10830, \$25). The film is a typically solid effort by Disney's British unit, directed by Charles Jarrott and featuring Alistair Sim in one of his final roles. It is set in a Yorkshire mining town a little before World War I, when ponies were still being used to drag the coal bins back and forth through the mines. The mine is losing money, and so the manager decides to replace the horses with machinery. His own daughter, and the sons of one of the miners, collude to save the horses from the slaughterhouse. The film is smartly constructed and while it seems, from a marketing angle, to be a good two decades out of date, it is, from an entertainment angle, a well made drama that adults and older children can enjoy with equal pleasure.

Now brass bands are the ALL CAPS of the musical world, but they are also practically indigenous to England and particularly to Yorkshire coal mining towns. Because it is a Disney movie, the music can be a little playful, and Goodwin does a superb job at modulating the enthusiasm of the score to suit the emotional level of the scene. But what makes the score exceptional is that along with adeptly defining the film's emotions—thereby bringing you to tears even more quickly during a scene than you might if there had been no music—it also resonates upon the film's locale. When a film is set in Mexico and uses guitar music, then that effect is no big deal, because the guitar is quite adaptable, but in using a brass band to evoke the society involved in the drama while at the same time while still accommodating the film's subtlest shifts in mood and atmosphere is a remarkable accomplishment. And when the band finally appears in person during the film's joyful conclusion, it is yet another added thrill.

The film is presented in letterboxed format on one side, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and no 16:9 enhancement, and is in full screen format on the other, trimming some picture information off the sides and adding a little to the bottom. Either framing seems workable. The color transfer is nice. Hues

are a little light in places and there is a bit of grain in some sequences, but the image is crisp and colors are clearly defined, even in the dark mine scenes. The monophonic sound is good and the music has a near-stereo ambience. The 104 minute program is not captioned. The chapter encoding and jacket guide are fine.

The stuff thrillers are made of

Neil Jordan is no hack and In Dreams, though wrongheaded, is no **Eyes of Laura Mars** rip-off. Parts of it, in fact, are thrilling, even gut wrenching, and the performance of Annette Bening in the lead role is sublime. Bening is a mother who has visions, mostly of what a killer who has abducted a little girl is seeing. She soon learns that some of these visions involve her own daughter and, when she is unable to prevent them from coming true, she attempts suicide in a sequence so spellbinding there is a tendency to stop breathing or blinking until it is concluded. And yet, here we have the same old gimmicks found in so many other lousy supernatural thrillers—dead children, psychic visions, a wacko killer, embodied by Robert Downey, Jr. with a wig, who sings a catchy tune (*Don't Sit under the Apple Tree*) as he goes about his terror, etc. The ending is unable to transcend the genre conventions and so the movie is no metaphysical masterpiece, but it is so compellingly executed that if you can stomach its premise (children in harm's way is not an easy entertainment), the excitement as it goes along more than compensates for the inevitably compromised wrap up. Aidan Quinn and Stephen Rea co-star.

The film is a DreamWorks Home Entertainment release (84665, \$30) and is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The picture quality is very good. The many dark and underwater sequences are sharp and carefully detailed. Fleshtones are accurate and blood is a deep, solid red. The stereo surround sound and Dolby Digital sound are fine. The mix is fairly direct, but it underscores the best scenes effectively without getting in the way. The 100 minute program has optional English subtitles, production notes, a cast & crew profile section and a trailer. The chapter encoding and jacket guide are passable.

Pal classics

Producer George Pal's terrific 1952 interpretation of H.G. Wells' The War of the Worlds has been released by Paramount (053037, \$30). Gene Barry stars as the meteor scientist roped in to inspecting the first landing craft. The 85 minute film's pace is super, never bogging down in the talk that padded many other Fifties science-fiction adventures, and there are a couple sequences that remain frightening to this day. Pal's special effects work is also very pleasing.

The picture is presented in full screen format and looks identical to the Paramount's superb LD release (May 94). The colors are rich and smooth, fleshtones are deep, and the image is sharp. The LD had a remastered stereo track, but the DVD release retains the film's original mono track, which is adequately presented. There is also a French mono track, English closed captioning and an engaging Fifties trailer.

Pal's 1950 Jimmy Durante vehicle, The Great Rupert, has been issued by Arnold Leibovitz Entertainment and Image Entertainment (ID5506ALDVD, \$25). The title character is a squirrel, often animated in stop motion. It takes the cash the landlord of Durante's character is hiding in his wall and drops it onto Durante's family, who think the cash is coming from Heaven. Fortunately, their daughter and the landlord's son have a thing going, so the money stays in the family. The special effect sequences are of minor importance, however, as the focus of the film is on the human comedies, which are schmaltzy, but enjoyable. Durante, though a memorable personality, appeared in very few movies, and despite the animation, the program is most worth having for his presence.

The black-and-white source material is a little uneven, looking reasonably sharp in some sequences and soft, with minor wear, in others. There is some displacement artifacting during the most damaged sequences. The monophonic sound is fine and the 88 minute program is not captioned.

Beyond Pal

A superb but very bizarre 57 minute stop-motion animated feature, **The Secret Adventures of Tom Thumb**, is available from Palm Pictures (8006355872WR01, \$30). The animation is outstanding, providing not only foreground action, but enough background action (insects wandering around the characters, for example) and shifts in setting to support many extra viewings. Combining what appears to be stop motion live action using human actors with clay figures and other manipulated objects, the narrative follows the experiences of the thumb-high hero, who is born to human parents, but is taken away to a science lab, where he escapes with the help of some strange creatures and eventually meets more of his own kind, all of whom are being terrorized by humans. Then, the small ones go on the attack. The images are consistently fascinating and a little bit disturbing. Fans of the medium, however, will find it to be 57 minutes of sheer brilliance.

Colors are a little light, but generally the picture quality looks good, with reasonably sharp details. Darker sequences are stable. The picture is presented in full screen format, and it is difficult to say whether a smidgen is missing from the sides or not, though there would be no more than that. The stereo sound is okay, and has a modest dimensionality. There is virtually no dialog (only a few scattered words in the mumblings of the characters are discernible) and so there is no captioning. Included with the film is a 10 minute short by the same filmmakers entitled *The Saint Inspector*, which is basically an imaginative, single-gag featurette, about a very fat man living on top of a large pole. There is also a biography of the filmmakers and a listing of the awards **Tom Thumb** has received.

Used goods

The transfer on the Fox Lorber Home Video presentation of Max Ophuls' 1955 compromised masterpiece, **Lola Montes** (FLV5050, \$30), appears to be identical to the breakthrough LD transfer from Criterion Collection (Dec 86), the first American LD to present a film in its original widescreen format. A decade is a long time to sit in a transfer, however, and the colors on the DVD are dull, with soft edges. Fleshtones are bland and there are hazes around the brightest hues. The letterboxing on the Cinemascope image has an aspect ratio of about 2.27:1 and could probably use a revisitation itself. The letterboxing has no 16:9 enhancement, and permanent English subtitles for the French dialog appear beneath the image in the letterboxing band. The monophonic sound has a weak high end, causing the music to warble or go scratchy. There are some minor text supplements, and watch for the reflection of the camera at 59:46.

Martine Carol and Peter Ustinov star in the 110 minute costume drama, about the notorious European courtesan and her romances. Ophuls' accomplishment was subsequently butchered by his producers and this is all that is left, though it is still a highly satisfying and enigmatic work, albeit one that is in need of a new transfer.

Ancient history

A 171 minute TV miniseries about the tumultuous decade that many people still equate with America growing up, **The '60s**, has been released by Trimark Home Video (VM7084D, \$30). Most of the film follows the experiences of three young white adults from one Chicago family as they undergo a political and cultural awakening in various parts of the country. In the best spirit of the Sixties, however, there is also a token subplot, about a young black man who undergoes a similar maturation. Although the film has more cliches than there were roach clips in Jerry Garcia's desk drawer, it is still an enjoyable trip down memory lane. Was it really that much like a circus?

One of the show's biggest assets is its pop song musical score—brilliantly marketed during its original broadcast as a tie-in CD—and even though many of the songs have been on the radio constantly for the past four decades (some are less often aired, such as cuts by Nico, Lou Reed and Jefferson Airplane), the syzygy of the Sixties music and Sixties images creates a solar burst of nostalgic feelings—you're so busy relating to the memories you don't want a drama more complicated than the one that is offered to interfere with your pleasure.

The picture looks fine and the stereo sound is super. There's a nice, heavy bass, and the songs

sound rich and alive. The program is split to two sides at what appears to be the break between the first evening and second evening broadcast, although there is only one set of opening and closing credits. An 8 minute interview with producer Linda Obst is offered, in which she speaks enthusiastically about the project and the era. A collection of quotations from the Sixties and a cast profile section are also included. The program can be supported by optional English, French or Spanish subtitles. The chapter encoding and guides are not nearly as much fun as they could have been.

Another day, another Don

The late Mario Puzo could do little more than shuffle and re-shuffle his one great work, but fans never tire of the wise guy milieu and the Machiavellian plotting, both of which are available in abundance in the miniseries released by Trimark Home Video, **Mario Puzo's The Last Don** (VM6907D, \$35), and its sequel from Trimark, **Mario Puzo's The Last Don II** (VM7073D, \$30).

The original **Last Don**, based upon Puzo's novel, runs 262 minutes and is split to two sides. Danny Aiello stars as the family patriarch and chief mobster, but most of the show belongs to Joe Mantegna, who portrays Aiello's nephew and primary hitman. Jason Gedrick is Mantegna's son. Penelope Ann Miller, Robert Wuhl, Daryl Hannah, k.d. lang (as a movie director!), and Rory Chochrane also appear, with Kirstie Alley giving the best performance in both shows, as Aiello's daughter. Beset with mental instability by the violence that surrounds her, her reactions are often spine-tingling.

If only the rest of the show were that good. Puzo has a great time taking pot shots at Hollywood and its makes-the-Mafia-look-like-the-Girl-Scouts accounting practices, and the rivalry that eventually develops between Gedrick's character and the son of Alley's character is effective as the central narrative, but even though it runs over four hours, the first show is too short. It tries to cram in as much of the novel as it can, and it tends to just go boom, boom, boom from one plot advancement to the next, without taking time to smell the characters. The dialog is reduced to summaries and simplicities (which might play better when interrupted by commercials) and its pleasures, though viable, are sporadic.

Although it is shorter, running only 178 minutes (it is still spread to two sides—unlike its predecessor, each side has complete opening and closing credits for the two-part program), **Last Don II** is more satisfying because it settles into a single time and story. Patsy Kensit, who also gives a compelling performance, joins the cast and several others drop out—we don't want to spoil things, but Mantegna only appears in dream sequences. Gedrick is the star of **II**, attempting to fortify his power and avoid betrayals on several fronts. The two programs work best, however, as a single day's viewing, giving the viewer an opportunity to bask in Puzo's world and cheer, while they last, for villains.

The color transfer looks okay on the first film, with bright hues and adequate fleshtones, but there is some displacement artifacting and smearing in darker sequences, particularly during the second half. The stereo sound has a basic dimensionality and is functional. Angelo Badalamenti's score deliberately evokes **The Godfather** at one point and often verges on resurrecting it. The picture on **Last Don II** is solid and has no artifacting flaws. The cinematography, however, is less accomplished, and the film has a slightly blander look. The stereo sound is fine. **Last Don** can be supported by optional French or Spanish subtitles ("Tu veux qu'il devienne une tapette? Un liseur de livres?") and also contains English captioning. **Last Don II**, which is not time encoded, has optional English, French and Spanish subtitles. **Last Don** is also accompanied by a promotional featurette that includes an interview with Puzo. Both films are identified as containing footage that did not appear in the broadcast versions, but while **Last Don II** has a couple scenes with nudity (to their advantage—we can't imagine how the scenes worked without it), neither the violence nor the sex seems all that explicit in the first film.

Want to soak up some gangster atmosphere but don't have eight hours to spend? Why not try **Master P MP Da Last Don The Movie**, a No Limit Records Priority Records release (P253426, \$25)? Although it was produced by music video people and runs 45 minutes, it is a straight movie (there is plenty of music on the soundtrack, but it never dominates the proceedings) in which the hero, played by hip-hop artist Master P, portrays the son of a gangster who inherits the top position when his father is rubbed out, and then has to hold onto it in the face of challenges and betrayals. There is lots of nudity and squib work,

and because the film isn't a full-length feature, the boring stuff that is used to pad out such dramas is eliminated. Yet there is still plenty of emotional interaction between the characters and, like we said, if you're in a hurry, then the film provides a convenient fix.

The picture and sound are excellent. The image is very sharp, with bright hues. The stereo surround sound has a terrific bass and plenty of engaging directional effects. The program is not captioned and is accompanied by two music videos, *Live at the Summit* and *Thinkin' Bout You*.

One of Woody Allen's earlier, funny films

Woody Allen's first original feature, **Take the Money and Run**, has been released by Anchor Bay Entertainment (DV10835, \$30). The 1969 crime film spoof has a badly paced narrative, but its scattershot humor has endured, while its structure has actually become more common and easier to tolerate as the years have passed. Allen portrays a nebbish bank robber, who tries to raise a family while in and out of prison. Everybody has one gag sequence from the film that they really enjoy (we have always been amused when the hero is sent into 'the hole' with an insurance salesman) and, in multiple viewings, it is easy to overlook the failed one-liners and focus on the humor Allen is able to generate from the material and the performances.

The picture is presented on one side in full screen format and on the other side in letterboxed format, with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. The letterboxing masks picture information off the top and bottom of the image and doesn't appear to add anything to the sides. The color transfer looks very nice. Fleshtones are accurate, the black-and-white sequences are pure and other hues are bright. The image is sharp, and the source material is in decent shape. Although there are a couple unintentional scratches, they seem to fit right in with the intentional ones. The monophonic sound is reasonably strong and the 85 minute program is not captioned. The chapter encoding and jacket guide are somewhat limited.

Fairbanks silents

The impressive two-strip color 1926 Douglas Fairbanks feature, **The Black Pirate**, has been issued by Kino on Video (K112DVD, \$40). The presentation is identical to the LD (Nov 96) and we could not tell the two apart. The color quality is inconsistent, with some sequences looking not much different from a heavily tinted black-and-white print, but when the color process does work it looks really neat, with vivid blues, decent fleshtones and tantalizing decorations. The image is regularly speckled and somewhat soft, but generally, the presentation adds to the film's entertainment. Fairbanks plays the survivor of a shipwreck who pretends to be a pirate and saves the heroine from their clutches. Billie Dove co-stars. The film is not as compelling as Fairbanks' best features, but it is reasonably entertaining, particularly when the colors click.

There is a decent stereophonic musical score, based upon the original orchestrations written for the 90 minute film. On another audio track, Rudy Behlmer provides a commentary, talking about the film's production and other related topics. Behlmer's talk continues over 21 additional minutes of fascinating outtakes, behind-the-scenes footage and terrific still photos.

Kino has also issued two other Fairbanks classics, the 1921 rendition of **The Three Musketeers** (K117DVD, \$30) and the 1924 spectacle, **Robin Hood** (K116DVD, \$30). Again, both presentations are identical to their LD counterparts, which appeared together in a Fairbanks box set (Aug 96). **Musketeers** is in black-and-white and has plenty of wear marks, though it is certainly watchable. **Hood** is heavily tinted and is less appealing in this regard (tinting tends to hide image detail), though it is workable. Both presentations are slightly windowboxed.

Hood has a sort of deliberately tinny and mildly stereophonic score performed by Eric Boheim and the Elton Thomas Salon Orchestra. The same group performs for **Musketeers**, but with a slightly more classical style. **Hood** runs 120 minutes and **Musketeers** runs 118. Both films are highly entertaining renditions of classic stories, with terrific stunts and fairly elaborate stagings.

Silent rebellion

V.I. Pudovkin's 1928 political adventure, **Storm over Asia**, has been released by The Blackhawk Films Collection and Image Entertainment (ID4672DSDVD, \$25). About a peasant who is chosen to be a puppet leader, but rises to the occasion and achieves freedom for his people, the film is an exciting blend of action, humor and drama, set in an exotic Soviet Asia locale.

Image released the 125 minute silent feature on LD as part of a box set (Aug 98), and the DVD is a replication of that presentation. The black-and-white source material is a bit ragged in spots, but is workable. There are fresh English intertitles and there is a nice stereophonic musical score, by Timothy Brock.

War and its discontents

Two outstanding and spiritually similar films about the confusion of battle, based upon real incidents, have been issued on DVD, **Hamburger Hill**, from Artisan Entertainment (60495, \$25) and **Pork Chop Hill**, from MGM Home Entertainment (907669, \$25). Directed by Lewis Milestone, who helmed several definitive war movies across his long career, the 1959 **Pork Chop Hill** is set in Korea, with Gregory Peck as a lieutenant who leads an assault on an enemy position. The film never really bothers with dramatic niceties or establishing elaborate characters. Instead, it is primarily a 98 minute look at the anarchy of the battlefield, where no one really knows where others are or what they are supposed to be doing, beyond shooting and killing every enemy they see. Even today, it is an eye-opening film (perhaps because it is in black-and-white and therefore appears closer to the patriotic war movies people are used to seeing in that format) and an intuitively accurate look at what war is really like.

John Irvin's 1987 **Hamburger Hill** was clearly given the go ahead because of the success of **Platoon**, and because of **Platoon** it has, as an also ran, never really received the respect it deserves. Like **Platoon**, however, it is, clearly, a very personal work, which gets to the heart of how completely out of control America's involvement in Vietnam became. It spends a little more time establishing characters than **Pork Chop Hill** does, but once that is over, the premise becomes the same—take the enemy position—and the result is just as chaotic. American helicopters fly over and start shooting American soldiers, the rains become so torrential that the squad could not make it up the hill even if nobody was shooting at them, and death is random and pervasive. It is a devastatingly powerful feature, and should be required viewing for all politicians.

The picture on **Hamburger Hill** is letterboxed, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. Letterboxing loses nothing on the top or bottom and adds picture information to the sides in comparison to cropped versions. The film's hues are mildly subdued on purpose, but the picture transfer looks excellent, with clearly defined colors and shadings, and accurate fleshtones. The image is solid and darker sequences are free of distortion. The stereo surround sound is bland, but the 5.1 Dolby Digital channel is much stronger, with more separation effects, better definitions and a clearer mid-range. There is an outstanding musical score, by Philip Glass. The 110 minute program is not captioned and is accompanied by a trailer. The chapter encoding and jacket guide are good.

The picture on **Pork Chop Hill** is presented in letterboxed format on one side, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and no 16:9 enhancement, and in full screen format on the other side. The letterboxing adds very little to the sides and trims picture information off the top and bottom of the screen in comparison to the full screen version. We prefer the full screen presentation, which doesn't look as cramped. The black-and-white picture transfer is excellent. Razor sharp and finely detailed, contrasts are clear and textures are vivid. The source material is spotless. The LD (Mar 98) looked fantastic, but the DVD is even sharper. The monophonic sound is reasonably strong. There is an alternate French audio track, optional English and French subtitles, and a trailer.

The classic submarine adventure, with Clark Gable as the Ahab-like captain and Burt Lancaster as his no-nonsense exec, **Run Silent, Run Deep**, has been released by MGM (907500, \$25), in letterboxed format on one side, with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1 and no 16:9 enhancement, and in cropped format

on the other side. Directed by Robert Wise, the 1958 feature, set during World War II, has several effective plot turns and a number of exciting—though now somewhat commonplace—submarine action sequences. The cast, which also includes Jack Warden and Don Rickles, is great fun, and the film delivers everything one wants from a submarine movie.

The black-and-white picture quality is excellent. Contrasts are carefully defined and the image is crisply detailed and effectively textured. Damage to the source material is minimal and most sequences are spotless. The monophonic sound is fine. The 93 minute feature has optional English and French subtitles, and a trailer.

Peter Weir's international hit, which also brought a vastly increased stardom Mel Gibson's way, **Gallipoli**, has been released by Paramount as a *Widescreen Collection* title (015047, \$30). The last 20 minutes are about battle, and the film concludes with the famous World War I slaughter, but most of the 111 minute feature depicts the adventures of two young men who eventually enlist and travel halfway around the world to participate in a war they do not understand in the least.

Because the real life events it depicts are so senseless and so tragic, we really don't care much for the film, but others admire it and Paramount has done a fine job bringing it to DVD. It is in letterboxed 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 sharp, accurate hues and good looking fleshtones. The 1981 feature has a stereo surround sound mix, but it isn't all that active, providing little more than a generalized dimensionality for the musical score and some of the battle sequences. There is also a 5.1 Dolby Digital track, but it doesn't add much to the mix, either. There is a French audio track in mono, optional French subtitles, English closed captioning and a trailer, as well as a very good 7 minute or so interview with Weir, who talks about many facets of the film's creation and execution.

Made in 1943 while the war still raged, **Bataan** is an effective, surprisingly frank Alamo-esque action film about a platoon that helps their army retreat by preventing the Japanese from building a bridge. The enjoyable and stereotypical cast includes Robert Taylor, George Murphy, Thomas Mitchell, Lloyd Nolan, Robert Walker and even Desi Arnaz. The characters speak disparagingly of persons of Japanese descent, but all's fair in war, right? Directed by Tay Garnett, the battle scenes are super, full of up close carnage and excitement, and the dramatic interludes, though formulaic, are well handled by the stars. An MGM production, the sets and special effects are lavish, but provide an effective balance to the focus on the heroes, particularly as their number begins to diminish.

The MGM Home Entertainment release (907662, \$25) has some wear in places, but is in reasonably good condition, with adequate contrasts. The black-and-white image is sharp. The monophonic sound is okay, and there is an alternate French audio track as well. The 114 minute program can be supported by optional English and French subtitles, and is accompanied by an enjoyable trailer. The chapter encoding and jacket guide are okay.

If you're looking for a serious, brisk and very entertaining war movie, you could do a lot worse than Anthony Mann's excellent **Men in War**, a Master Movies *Silver Screen Collector's Edition* release (DVD5504, \$15). Robert Ryan stars in the 1957 feature, set in Korea, about a platoon stuck behind enemy lines after a retreat, spending the day trying to make it to safety. The film is refreshingly free of stereotypes (for example, everybody in the squad is sympathetic to the scared soldier and shares in picking up his slack) and always keeps moving, as the men tramp across hostile countryside, their number continually dwindling from isolated engagements. In addition to its efficiency, there are several of good fight sequences, where the strategies of both sides are made clear to the viewer. Aldo Ray co-stars and a young Vic Morrow also appears. There is a terrific Elmer Bernstein score, as well.

Perhaps one of the reasons we enjoyed the film so much is that the transfer looks so nice. The

black and white image is consistently crisp and clean, with well-defined contrasts. There is some minor smearing at times, but if you sit far enough back from the screen, you probably won't see it. The monophonic sound is fine. The 102 minute feature is not captioned and is accompanied by some minor text supplements.

John Ford's 1945 production, **They Were Expendable**, about PT boats in the Pacific, is also a fairly entertaining feature, keeping his usual sentimentality to a minimum (at least after the first excruciating ten minutes are over) and emphasizing strategy and other details of war. John Wayne and Robert Montgomery are captains who develop effective tactics for their craft while coping with the Japanese invasion of the Philippines. Their star power delivers a sufficient drama to bridge the action sequences, and there is an air of historical accuracy (the war was fresh in everyone's minds) in the film's depiction of historical events.

The black-and-white picture is identical to the LD (Jul 92) and is fairly sharp most of the time, with effective contrasts and pure whites, although some outdoor and night sequences are a little softer. Wear to the source material is minor, and the monophonic sound is adequate. The 135 minute feature has optional English or French subtitles, and a trailer.

The classic 1949 Allan Dwan feature with Wayne as a sergeant who whips his inexperienced squad into shape and takes them into battle, **The Sands of Iwo Jima**, was released by Republic Pictures as a *Silver Screen Classics* title before Republic's DVDs were taken over by Artisan (45570, \$25). The black-and-white picture transfer is outstanding. The image is spotless and smooth, with crisp, finely detailed contrasts. The monophonic sound is fine. The 102 minute program also has a Spanish language track, optional English, French or Spanish subtitles ("Nous combattons pour notre pays/Dans les cieux, sur terre et sure les mers...") and a trailer. There is a 16 minute retrospective documentary as well, hosted by Leonard Maltin. Although he says little about the battles upon which the film is based, the story of how the film was made (it was all shot at Camp Pendleton) and its subsequent success is well covered, including interviews with surviving personnel and with Wayne's son. As a drama, the film has not aged well, and its non-battle scenes can be taxing, but the battle sequences are exciting and the immaculate picture quality can carry a viewer through even the worst cliches.

One of the best books we ever read about Vietnam, Neil Sheehan's **A Bright Shining Lie**, was turned into a cable film written and directed by Terry George, and is now available from HBO Home Video (91220, \$25). A biography of Lt. Colonel John Paul Vann, who was, off and on, involved in the war from 1962 until he was killed in a helicopter crash in 1972 (he became, through a very unusual appointment, a 'civilian' two-star general), the reason we admired it so much is that Vann saw everything first hand, from the horror and confusion of the battlefield to the political strategies in the Oval Office, and he understood what he was seeing. The moral quagmire of the war also reflected the moral quagmire of his personal life, but the 118 minute film is unable to do more than touch the surface of this concept.

The film is very different from almost all other Vietnam movies. There are terrific action scenes, with enough gore and explosions to please genre fans, but there is also a deft, sober look at the political complexity of America's involvement with the South Vietnamese, with a clear concept of what strategies worked, at least in the short term, and what did not. It's an involving film and we wish it had been a miniseries instead, because whenever it jumps over a segment of time, summarizing events or incidents with brief conversations, we felt a letdown. But the movie is also a disappointment because the star, Bill Paxton, sleepwalks through his role as Vann. He says his lines flatly and without expression, exuding none of the charisma or energy a person in Vann's position would have to utilize to succeed. It's like he's slumming in cable, and his apathy takes the shine off of what could have been an important and memorable historical drama.

The picture quality looks quite good. Fleshtones are accurate, other hues are bright and the image is sharp. The stereo surround sound has a cable quality mix, but in the heat of battle, it is still fairly rousing. There is an alternate Spanish audio track, optional English and Spanish subtitles, a decent 4 minute 'making of' featurette, and a cast & crew profile section.

Space adventure

A jokey and uneven outer space adventure that was intended for the theaters but ended up going straight to home video, **Space Truckers**, has been issued by Sterling Entertainment as a *Millennium Series* title (7205, \$30). Dennis Hopper stars as an independent hauler who is given a mysterious cargo to transport to earth. Stephen Dorff and Debi Mazar are his companions. They have to cope with space pirates, the cargo itself, and other problems, but it is rarely all that involving. The film just doesn't feel like a major motion picture, despite its letterboxed image. The tone is often irreverent although the film only makes a half-hearted attempt at comedy (which isn't Hopper's forte, anyway). The action scenes are repetitious, the special effects are usually second rate, and there isn't much of a narrative, just the heroes coping with situations as they arise.

The letterboxing has an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. Colors are bright and the image is very sharp, although fleshtones are a little pinkish in places. The stereo surround sound is passable but not elaborate. The 96 minute program has optional Spanish subtitles, but no English captioning. In the DVD's most innovative and satisfying feature, the film's storyboards are offered as a subtitling option that can be toggled on and off at will. There is a 26 minute 'making of' documentary that gets to be a bit embarrassing when everybody starts talking about how great the movie is. There are also production notes, a trailer, a DVD-ROM script option, a simple trivia game, some nice looking conceptual art and production photos (you have to go through the game to get to it), as well as a director commentary channel from Stuart Gordon. Gordon doesn't say much about the production's problems (it was started in 1995), but he does have interesting things to say about the scientific basis for the various designs and effects, as well as talking about his experiences on the shoot, how the look of the film was developed, and some of the changes the script went through. He also breaks down the effects as they occur and points out other interesting details.

The beginning of a beautiful friendship

William Peterson is a writer gone to seed and Michael Wincott is an Atlantic City loan shark collector who befriends him in the somewhat pretentious **Gunshy**, a Sterling Entertainment release (7235, \$25). Diane Lane has the Ingrid Bergman/Lena Olin part, if you get our meaning, or theirs—they even splurged to have a clip from **Casablanca** playing on the TV when Peterson and Lane first meet. Wincott asks Peterson to teach him about books, and Peterson asks Wincott to show him the darker side of life. There is one reasonably inspired plot turn and the filmmakers try very hard to make the movie seem classy, but it doesn't amount to a hill of beans, and if you roll your eyes as much as we did when Peterson and Wincott start reading *Moby Dick* together, you'll get dizzy.

The picture is presented in full screen format. Fleshtones are a bit indistinct, but the color transfer is adequate and the image is reasonably sharp. The musical score, including some Miles Davis tunes, has a nice dimensionality, and the stereo surround sound is passable. The menus take an annoyingly long time to hand control over to the viewer. The 101 minute program can be supported by optional Spanish subtitling, but there is no English captioning. There is a cast-and-crew profile section and a trailer.

Additionally, there is a commentary track by the director, Jeff Celentano and the writer, Larry Gross. They are both blissfully unaware of their film's artistic shortcomings and speak with great enthusiasm about the performances (though we would have to agree that Peterson, with his matinee idol looks, deserves to be a much bigger star, regardless of his acting abilities), the script and other aspects of the production. They detail the logistics of the shoot (most of it was done in LA, subbing for Atlantic City, but you don't notice the palm trees until they point them out), the difficulties they encountered working from a limited budget (get the shots as quick as possible and move on) and other reasonably informative insights.

Be all you can be

The leader of an army platoon assigned to the border patrol in Southern California ends up becoming the drug kingpin of Los Angeles before the hero, working undercover, takes him down in **The Base**, a Sterling Entertainment release (7245, \$25). Mark Dacascos is the hero and Tim Abell is the villain. The film begins promisingly but gets a little ridiculous towards the end, though the basic mix of action and drama is tolerable. Presented in full screen format, the picture quality is workable, with reasonably sharp hues and adequate fleshtones. The stereo surround sound is functional but not elaborate. The 97 minute program can be supported by Spanish subtitles, but there is no English captioning. A trailer and a cast-and-crew profile section are included. Additionally, the director, Mark Lester, provides a sporadic commentary track. He talks about the logistics of the shoot, about using quasi-military locations, and about the mistakes that were made during the filming. Once in a while he gets details about the film wrong while he is discussing the story, but maybe it has been a while since he made it. He also tends to offer backhanded praise at times, such as when he is discussing the skills of action star Dacascos: "Here I like the idea that Tim Abell could do the talking and Mark Dacascos could do the watching."

Order some Chinese food and settle back

A grotesque black comedy—apparently based upon a true incident—about a restaurant owner who kills people and uses their meat for one of his pork dishes, **The Untold Story**, has been issued by Tai Seng Video Marketing, Inc. (45254, \$30). Anthony Wong stars as the killer, and Danny Lee is the detective who finally tracks him down in the Hong Kong production (set in Macao), though the police investigation is very sloppy and not highly motivated, allowing the killer to continue his culinary mayhem for quite a while. Parts of the film have a humorous tone, but it is also extremely, graphically violent and very disgusting in places (children are not spared).

We reviewed the LD release in Apr 97, but the DVD provides a number of improvements to the 95 minute feature (not 110 minutes as the LD's jacket claimed). The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. It is centered in the screen, while the LD's image was raised. The color transfer is much nicer on the DVD. Hues and fleshtones on the LD are yellowed, while whites look white and fleshtones, though soft, look truer on the DVD. The image is also sharper and details are better defined. The film still has a low budget, Hong Kong look to it, but the presentation is less alienating. The mono sound is fairly weak, but tones are sharper and the audio seems more focussed than the LD's audio track. The program is available in Cantonese and Mandarin, with optional English subtitles. There are trailers, a cast profile, and two commentary tracks, one by Wong and one by the film's director, Herman Yau, both prompted by Miles Wood. Yau's track has many longish gaps between comments. Wong's track is better at first, but the second half also has longish gaps. Yau talks a bit about the production, the film's background, and how he got Hong Kong to look like Macao. Wong talks about his experiences during the shoot and his acting career, and both contemplate the film's level of violence and its odd shift in sympathies when the killer himself is tortured by the police.

Sadistic thriller

A sadistic Austrian thriller with a metaphysical twist at the end, **Funny Games**, has been issued by Fox Lorber Home Video (FLV5055, \$30). Most of the film is a straightforward tale about two nicely dressed punks who terrorize a well-to-do family in a large but isolated vacation house. Directed by Michael Haneke, the film allows the unrelentingly mean villains to get away with everything, including murder, and then, after the viewer is thoroughly numbed by the pain and torture of the sympathetic characters, Haneke has the villain start winking at the camera and changing the sequence of events. He is clearly, then, making a movie about fantasizing serial crimes, but the balance of the film's emotions is not changed by such sleight-of-hand excuses. The conclusion opens a great many intriguing ideas and encourages philosophical contemplation, but the rest of the movie is still nasty and distasteful.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.75:1 and no 16:9 enhancement, and is sharp and well lit, with strong colors. Even scenes set in semi-darkness are clear, with well-defined

shadings. The stereo surround sound is also fairly good, with a decent dimensionality and a reasonable amount of power, though most of the film is just dialog and incidental sound effects. The 103 minute program is in German with permanent English subtitles. A trailer and some filmographies are also included.

Political drama

George Raft and Sylvia Sydney star in kind of an oddball 1946 drama about a political boss who romances a female candidate for governor to get her out of the race, **Mr. Ace**, an Image Entertainment release (ID5373FWDVD, \$25). Raft clearly can't understand the motivation of his character, and the script has a number of illogical turns, but it remains an interesting film despite its flaws, just as Raft remains a pleasing screen presence, even when his line readings are stilted and his timing is off.

The black-and-white source material has a number of worn sections, but the image is sharp and contrasts look nice, with deep blacks and bright whites. The monophonic sound is adequate and the 83 minute program is not captioned. There are filmographies for Raft and Sydney, as well.

When women ruled the roost

Roan Group Archival Entertainment has issued an interesting triple bill of mature dramas from the early days of sound films, **Pre-Code Hollywood: The Risqué Years #1 Of Human Bondage • Kept Husbands • Millie** (AED2004, \$40). The brief jacket copy talks about the implementation of the Code, but what is suggested by the three films is that while the code was used to suppress saucy subject matter, what it was really doing was reining in female independence. Although there are token 'happy' endings in which the heroine comes back into the fold, all three are about women who are in control of their lives, maintaining a leg up on the men around them.

Bette Davis stars in the 1934 **Of Human Bondage**, as a waitress who dominates her relationship with a weak-willed doctor, played in typical limp noodle fashion by Leslie Howard. Davis has a Cockney accent and takes charge of every scene she's in. The film runs 82 minutes.

In Lloyd Bacon's 1931 *Millie*, starring Helen Twelvetrees, the heroine divorces her husband when she discovers his infidelity, but refuses alimony or custody of her child, and gets a job to support herself. When the new men in her life attempt to supplement her finances, she turns them down as well, wishing to avoid all obligations. It is only when her own daughter matures that she starts to make choices based upon someone else's needs, and soon she is standing trial for murder. The 84 minute film is an entertaining look at the flapper era, with barely veiled references to prostitution, homosexuality and other matters, and it advances briskly.

Joel McCrea is a steel mill worker and Dorothy Mackaill is the mill owner's daughter, who takes a fancy to him in the 1931 *Kept Husbands*. At first they're in love and have a good time, but she wants to continue living in the lifestyle to which she is accustomed, and he wants to be more responsible for their livelihood. Although the heroine learns her lesson at the end, she spends almost the entire 76 minute film enjoying not having learned it. (Tom Hanks is commonly compared to Jimmy Stewart, but there is a lot of Joel McCrea in what he does, as well.)

All three films are in black and white. *Millie* is in very nice condition. There is isolated wear, but the images are fairly sharp and contrasts are nicely detailed. *Kept Husbands* is grainy, with fairly constant vertical scratches and a softer focus. **Of Human Bondage** also looks softer, and damage to the source material is a bit more prevalent, but we've seen versions (Feb 87) that look a lot worse. There is grain in a lot of places and a number of scratches in some segments, but the image is crisp and the presentation is workable. On all three, the monophonic sound is noisy but adequate for the age of the programs, though the audio on *Kept Husbands* is a little extra scratchy. There is no captioning, no menus and no chapter guide.

Poitier trips on Ivy

1967 was a big year for Sidney Poitier. He had three large box office successes, including a film that went on to win the Oscar for Best Picture, but then, as sometimes happens with such careers, he started to appear in bombs. The first was a movie with an appeal pretty much limited to the **How Stella Got Her Groove Back** crowd, **For Love of Ivy**, which has now been issued on DVD by Anchor Bay

Entertainment (DV10834, \$25). It is not that the film is outrageously bad or anything, it is just that it is limited dramatically in a manner that the previous films were not. Poitier's star appeal, though potent enough to keep the film in circulation, was not enough to compensate for its shortcomings. Still, the film is a gas, particularly now that thirty odd years have passed since it was made.

Poitier is the owner of a trucking firm that runs legitimate jobs during the day, but turns one rig into a roving casino at night (the film's art direction is one of its few genuinely admirable components). Abbey Lincoln is a live-in maid for an upper middle class family that includes Carroll O'Connor, as the father, and Beau Bridges, as the long-hair-and-sideburns-and-Nehru-collar-wearing son. When Lincoln's character gives her notice, because she wants to pursue a different career, Bridges blackmails Poitier into romancing her, so she'll change her mind about leaving. Naturally, they fall in love for real, and most of the movie depicts their drawn-out path to romance. This was the first or virtually the first mainstream Hollywood movie about black characters who act like Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire off the dance floor, and as such, it is woefully bland and almost timid. But as an aged cultural landmark, it is fascinating and funky. The dialog and character interaction regarding race are self-conscious, but achingly liberal. The colors are all Sixties pop, we already mentioned the art direction, and Poitier looks so great in a tux you wish they'd signed him up to play James Bond. The film was inconsequential in its day, but it is a nostalgic treasure now.

The picture quality on the DVD adds greatly to the film's appeal. All those right-on colors are fabulously bright and fresh looking, and the image is very sharp. The source material does have some scattered damage, but it is not enough to interrupt the flow of the drama. If you get too close to the screen, you can see a number of displacement artifacting effects, but if you remain at a sensible distance, compression flaws are rarely noticeable. The picture is presented on one side in letterboxed format, with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and no 16:9 enhancement, and in full screen format on the other side. The letterboxed image adds nothing to the sides and masks off picture information from the top and bottom in comparison to the full screen version, and we tended to prefer the framing on the latter. The monophonic sound is fine, and the 101 minute program is not captioned.

Good things come in twos

Those wild, shagadelic heroines from the marvelous Sixties Italian spy movie, **Kiss Me Monster** (Feb 99), are back in another terrific, totally incoherent thriller from Anchor Bay Entertainment, **Two Undercover Angels** (DV10822, \$30). Janine Reynault and Rossana Yanni star as two beautiful models or something who investigate the mysterious disappearances of several other beautiful women. It seems a mad artist is having his werewolf friend kill them while he paints the murders. Although the film is not quite as exhilarating as **Kiss Me Monster**, it still takes a couple viewings to figure out what is going on, and uses many of the same sets that **Monster** did, making an ideal companion on a double bill.

The picture is presented in full screen format and appears to be at least a little bit cropped. The source material is worn in a number of places, and has stray speckles here and there even in the best passages. The color transfer, however, looks reasonably good. There is some grain, and really strong oranges and reds are blurry, but other hues are bright and nicely detailed, and fleshtones aren't bad if the lighting is decent. The sound is stereophonic, but don't get your hopes up. The film is badly dubbed—that's one of its many charms—but tones are muted and the audio track is a bit noisy. The 75 minute feature is accompanied by an entertaining trailer and is not captioned. The chapter encoding and jacket guide are fairly generalized.

A very bizarre hour-long film that starts out as a pirate movie, turns into a western (in Australia) and a romance, and then becomes a dinosaur (or big lizards with things taped on their backs) film, **Two Lost Worlds**, has been issued by Image Entertainment (ID5377FWDVD, \$20). James Arness stars in the enjoyably bad and blissfully brief 1950 adventure, which has a marvelously dopey voiceover narration to keep things moving. We had some trouble keeping track of the secondary characters (we swear that one appears in a shot after he's supposed to be dead), but that just means we need to watch the movie more times to get everything straight. We look forward to it.

The black-and-white picture looks super. There is damage at the reel-change points, but otherwise the image is crisp, contrasts are nicely detailed and blacks are deep. The monophonic sound is adequate (there is a wonderfully over-indulgent symphonic score) and the program is not captioned. A very thorough Arness filmography is also included. The chapter encoding and jacket guide are limited, and whoever wrote the jacket copy should pay better attention—Arness plays the owner of the shipping line, not the captain.

Fantastic DVD

The excellent 1973 animated feature by René Laloux, **Fantastic Planet**, has been released by Anchor Bay Entertainment (DV10702, \$30). We reviewed a Roan LD in Aug 98. Filled with wild and imaginative images, the 78 minute film is about tiny human-like beings who are kept as pets by giant blue beings. One pet escapes and leads a revolution. Production problems caused the final act to seem a bit rushed, but the film is a striking effort that is both unique and stimulating.

The picture on the DVD looks pretty much identical to the LD. It is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. The colors look terrific and the image is sharp. There are monophonic audio tracks in both French and English, but unfortunately, they are accompanied by permanent English subtitles.

In addition to the main feature, three Laloux animated shorts have also been included on the DVD. One, *Les Escargots (The Snails)* from 1965, an 11 minute effort about gigantic snails that attack mankind, was included on the LD, but the other two were not. Both are more esoteric and dark, with very simple animation. *Les Dents Du Singe (Monkey's Teeth)* from 1960, uses painted images with clear brush strokes to evoke nightmarish images of dentistry, with people, as teeth, being plucked from life while a dark monkey hovers in the background. It runs 14 minutes. Equally weird, *Les Temps Morts (Dead Times)*, from 1964, uses mostly camera pans across pen and ink drawings, though there is some block figure movement in places. The ten minute short is a rumination upon murder and death. All three are in French with English subtitling, although dialog is sparse.

Days, nights and animals

Elliott Gould is a pilot, Geneviève Bujold is a missionary transporting farm animals to a Pacific Island and Rick Schroder is a stowaway in Walt Disney's 1980 feature, **The Last Flight of Noah's Ark**, an Anchor Bay Entertainment release (DV10831, \$25). They crash on a different island, meet two Japanese WWII soldiers, and transform the plane into a boat to sail home. Except that the opening credits don't appear until 17 minutes into the 97 minute film, it is a formula effort, mixing safe thrills and pleasantries, and is fairly harmless entertainment. The picture is presented on one side in letterboxed format with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and no 16:9 enhancement, and in full screen format on the other side. The letterboxing doesn't add much to the sides and masks picture information off the top and bottom, but either version is workable. The color transfer looks fine. Fleshtones are reasonably accurate and other hues are bright. The image is fairly sharp most of the time and darker scenes are stable. There are a few scattered speckles. The monophonic sound is adequate and the program is not captioned. The chapter encoding is slightly different on each side.

Formula Disney comedy

A collection of Seventies TV stars are gathered in the formula 1977 Walt Disney comedy, **The North Avenue Irregulars**, an Anchor Bay Entertainment release (DV10829, \$25), including Barbara Harris, Cloris Leachman, Karen Valentine, Michael Constantine and Ruth Buzzi. Edward Herrmann stars as a church minister who recruits his parishioners to stake out and tail a gambling ring that is upsetting the moral fabric of his community.

Even though they are better than the material, the stars are amusing, and there is a typical (but enjoyable) Disney demolition derby finale.

The picture is vivid. The image is crisp, hues are bright and fleshtones are accurate. The presentation is in letterboxed format on one side, with an aspect ratio of about 1.66:1 and no 16:9

enhancement, and is in cropped format on the other side, though the cropped framing is workable. The monophonic sound is fine and the 100 minute program is not captioned. The chapter encoding and jacket guide are passable.

The Seagal that shoots the fastest kills the mostest

The first fight doesn't occur until the film's half-way point, and although there are a couple other bloody encounters, the body count is a bit lower than usual on the latest Steven Seagal feature, **The Patriot**, a Touchstone Home Video release (17095, \$30). Seagal is a Montana doctor who just happens to also be the world's greatest bacterial warfare expert (he can also rope a steer), which is fortunate when some militant fanatics decide to release some really heavy sniffles in his home town (there is a vague logic to this, because a super-secret bacteria center is located nearby, the hero used to work there, and its where the bad guys got the stuff). It's ludicrous, but reasonably systematic, and if you enjoy Seagal's manner, you probably won't mind his impersonation of Roy Rogers crossed with Jonas Salk and Bruce Lee.

The picture is presented in letterboxed format only, with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. The image transfer is good, with sharp hues and accurate fleshtones. The stereo surround sound and Dolby Digital sound are not elaborately mixed, but there are some separation effects, with the Dolby Digital track offering slightly purer definitions. The 90 minute program is adequately closed captioned. The chapter encoding and jacket guide are okay.

Isn't this man's range amazing? In **Out for Justice**, from Warner Home Video (12219, \$20), Seagal portrays a Brooklyn Italian-American cop looking for the crazed drug dealer who killed his brother. He even speaks Italian in places, with subtitles, when he has to talk to the Mafia chieftains who have known him since he was a little mozzarella. The film is just as ridiculous as **The Patriot**, but there is more blood and you don't have to believe Seagal is a scientist.

The 1991 film seems out-of-focus in spots, but the transfer looks okay, with accurate fleshtones and stable hues. The image is sharper, with more accurate colors, than the LD (Dec 91). The program 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 in cropped/full screen format on the other side. Why do we say 'cropped/full screen?' Well, it appears the film was shot in Super-35, but the full screen version is mostly a cropped presentation of the widescreen version, except where the shot requires that you see more picture information on the sides, such as during the opening credit sequence, which is then a replication of the widescreen image with more picture information on the top and bottom.

The film has been remastered for 5-channel Dolby Digital, though we could detect almost no difference between the Dolby Digital track and the standard track. Separation effects are less elaborate than on **The Patriot**, and the audio has less thrust. The soundtrack is stronger, however, than the LD's audio. The 91 minute film also has a French audio track in standard stereo and optional English and French subtitles. The chapter encoding and jacket guide are okay.

Seagal is so versatile! He not only stars in **On Deadly Ground**, another Warner release (13227, \$20), but he also directed the film, and we have a sneaking suspicion that he picked out his own clothes for the movie, as well. Seagal plays an employee of the world's evilest oil company, run by Michael Caine. There are some terrific explosions, but the film is not well paced and is less involving than most of his other features.

The picture is presented on one side in letterboxed format, with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback, and in uselessly cropped format on the other side. Like the LD (Aug 94), the image is sharp and hues are bright, so that well lit scenes, at least, look quite nice. Unlike the LD, the DVD has a 5.1 Dolby Digital track. The standard stereo track is weaker than the LD, but the Dolby Digital track has crisper separation effects and more oomph than the LD's standard stereo, and is lively, at least in spots. The 101 minute program also has a French audio track, in standard stereo, as well as optional English and French subtitles. The chapter encoding and jacket guide are good.

Horror four-pack

Trimark Home Video has re-packaged four individual releases at a relatively bargain price and the

dubious title, **The Best of Horror DVD** (VM7140D, \$35). We have reviewed two of the films on DVD previously, **The Dentist** (Jun 99), a discomfiting psycho thriller with Corbin Bernsen, and *Stephen King's Sometimes They Come Back* (Feb 99), a moderately entertaining ghost story that gets by on the star appeal of Tim Matheson and Brooke Adams, which was originally packaged by Trimark as a double bill with its nominal sequel, though it appears in this collection by itself. The other two films featured are **Leprechaun**, which is kind of a monster movie for kids—though the gore is R-rated—featuring Warwick Davis and, delivering a viable performance, Jennifer Aniston; and **The Landlady**, another psycho thriller, with Talia Shire (in a somewhat campy performance), who gets the hots for one of her tenants and kills his girlfriend, as well as everybody else that gets in her way.

Of the two DVDs we could compare, the transfers are identical to the previous releases, and we assume that goes for the others, too. The 93 minute **Dentist**, from 1996, is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback (we mistakenly listed the original release as having no 16:9 enhancement). Colors are strong and the image is sharp. The stereo surround sound is fairly basic, but functional. There are optional French and Spanish subtitles, English closed captioning, a cast profile section and a trailer. Presented in full screen format, the 1991 *Sometimes They Come Back* looks soft, with bland fleshtones and dull hues. The stereo surround sound is also limited. The 96 minute program has optional French and Spanish subtitles and English closed captioning.

The 1993 **Leprechaun** is presented in full screen format but could probably have used a little masking. The image is fairly vivid, with bright, sharp hues and accurate fleshtones. The stereo surround sound is forceful in spots, but the separation mix is limited. There are optional French and Spanish subtitles, English closed captioning, and a trailer that tries to hide what the leprechaun looks like.

The Landlady, from 1997, is also in full screen, though the framing looks fine. Hues are a bit subdued, but the image presentation is adequate and fleshtones look okay. The musical score has a pleasant dimensionality and the stereo surround soundtrack is fine. The 98 minute program has optional French and Spanish subtitles, English closed captioning, a cast profile section and a trailer.

Come again another day

The 1975 wax makeup extravaganza, **The Devil's Rain**, has been released by VCI Home Entertainment (DVD8204, \$25). We had thought that the LD (Jan 90) looked terrific, but it is pale and bland compared to the immaculate DVD. Colors on the DVD are bright and sharp, and fleshtones are rich. The picture is in letterboxed format, with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and no 16:9 enhancement (including the opening credit sequence, which wasn't letterboxed on the LD). The source material has a few stray speckles, but is otherwise in gorgeous condition. The monophonic sound is adequate and there is no captioning. There is a trailer and a very brief still section.

William Shatner (with his fractured pauses), Ernest Borgnine (What? You mean that's makeup?) and Eddie Albert star in the nonsensical tale of Devil worship, with Tom Skerritt, Ida Lupino, Keenan Wynn and John Travolta (who has one line). Almost everybody melts at the end. The makeup effects are not good, but they are plentiful, compensating somewhat in volume for what they lack in quality. The 86 minute feature is silly and ridiculous, but that doesn't stop it from being entertaining, if you're in the mood for a movie where everything from the acting to the script to the special effects is laughably inept.

Low budget horror

The 87 minute version of **Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things**, released by VCI Home Video (DVD8208, \$25), is a couple minutes longer than the 85 minute version we reviewed on LD (Jul 98). The color quality is about the same, but blacks are purer and the image is sharper. Since the low budget feature has rather murky cinematography to begin with, the image still looks overly dark, with very bland fleshtones, but details seem about as clear as they're going to get, and hues are reasonably bright. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. The monophonic sound is a little weaker than the LD's mono track, but it seems adequate. There is also a trailer, a collection of lobby cards and profiles of the director, Bob Clark, and the star, Alan Ormsby.

The 1972 feature has two parts. In the first, a group of beginning actors on a weekend trip play horror tricks on one another, and in the second part, real zombies rise from the grave and start eating

them. The performances are a little grating and the first part is tiresome, but as silly as the zombies look, they provide an enjoyable shift in tone.

Curtis thriller

An awkwardly conceived thriller about a woman who ends up trying to kill her family, **Mother's Boys**, is available from Miramax Home Entertainment (16450, \$30). Jamie Lee Curtis is cast as the villain in the 1994 feature, with Peter Gallagher in the unlikely position as the hero, her husband, who wants a divorce.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. The color transfer looks okay, with reasonably bright hues and accurate fleshtones, though darker sequences are a little soft. The stereo surround sound is passable and the 96 minute program has optional English subtitles. We reviewed the LD in Oct 94.

Going swimming with IMAX

An excellent IMAX program that explores the great variety of life inhabiting **The Great Barrier Reef** has been released by SlingShot Entertainment (DVD9835, \$30). The 40 minute program examines lots of fascinating sea life with the vivid, reach-out-and-touch-them immediacy of the IMAX format. There are the obligatory depictions of Great Barrier Reef scientists at work, to keep the narrative moving, and the viewer will pick up plenty of informative fish trivia, but the main appeal of the program is the chance it provides to visit the exotic world beneath the waves without getting wet.

The picture quality is outstanding, particularly for a difficult-to-light underwater program. Colors are vivid and the image is crisp, even in the shadows. The 5.1 Dolby Digital sends air bubbles gurgling all around you and has a nice blend of music and water sounds, all with a bit more crispness than the standard stereo surround soundtrack. There is an alternate Japanese language track, also in Dolby Digital, and optional English subtitles.

Any program about sharks has a basic appeal, but the SlingShot IMAX presentation, **Search for the Great Sharks** (9836, \$30), doesn't offer much more than that. Most of the program depicts shark scientists trying out a new shark repellent (it doesn't work) and a Plexiglas-type shark cage (since the sharks can't smell through it, they aren't as attracted to the people inside). The film uses some cheap editing effects to enhance the excitement, and if you can't get enough of sharks, then the program certainly delivers, but its value is limited. The picture quality is fine, though there are some minor artifacting effects that create faint ratcheting and smears as the brighter sharks pass by through the dimly lit water. The Dolby Digital sound is not as consciously dimensional as **Great Barrier Reef**, but seems adequate. There are alternate French, Spanish, Castilian, German, Japanese and Chinese language tracks, as well as a music-and-effects track, all in Dolby Digital, and optional English subtitles. The program runs 38 minutes and is accompanied by an 8 minute 'making of' featurette.

And elsewhere

SlingShot Entertainment's IMAX release, **The Greatest Places** (DVD9833, \$30), seems like a collection of IMAX audition also-rans. The 40 minute program contains seven separate sequences, about Madagascar, Tibet, Greenland, the Namib Desert, the Amazon River, Iguazu Falls, and the inland Okavango Delta. Some, such as the Madagascar sequence, long for expansion, but others, such as the Greenland sequence, seem to present pretty much everything there is to display about the subject. The best sequences make good use of format's Dolby Digital 5.1 channel sound, with an earth-shaking bass (those Tibetan horns) and elaborate separation effects (the jungle sequences).

The picture looks terrific throughout, and while the standard stereo surround sound is not as dimensionally detailed as the Dolby Digital sound, it is adequate. The program is accompanied by a decent collection of still photos and has alternate French and German audio tracks, as well as a music-and-effects track and an English track that includes imagery descriptions for the blind, all of which are in Dolby Digital. There are also optional English subtitles.

A National Geographic IMAX program, from SlingShot, **Mysteries of Egypt** (DVD9839, \$30),

begins with an Egyptian grandfather telling his granddaughter about the glories of Egypt's past. It seems like a lame start, until the camera reveals that the grandfather is being played by none other than Omar Sharif, bringing the entire film a sudden air of glamour. The show looks at Egyptian ruins, speculates upon ancient Egyptian life and includes reenactments of the building of the pyramids and of the discovery of King Tut's tomb. There is also the more typical IMAX sequence, flying across the source of the Nile. The 40 minute program jumps around a lot, but it provides a decent sampling of Egypt's past glories and their remains.

The picture looks fine. The show's musical score tries very hard to evoke mystery and grandeur of its subject, but it never quite seems to break free. The stereo surround sound and Dolby Digital sound have plenty of flourish but no really involving directional effects. There are alternate French, Spanish and German language tracks, all in Dolby Digital, and optional English subtitles. A good 18 minute 'making of' featurette, which concentrates on the sequences depicting ancient Egypt, is also included.

It wasn't produced in IMAX, but the 70mm SlingShot release, **Hearst Castle • Building the Dream** (DVD9842, \$30), is the same sort of program. Running 40 minutes, it is a narrated re-enactment of William Randolph Hearst's life and the construction of his home at San Simeon, including, for example, extended views of European tourist sites that Hearst visited as a young boy. There is also a period re-creation of a typical party at the castle—suitable for family viewing, of course. The length of the program is just about right for covering the history and display of the subject.

We have no idea if the full screen presentation is cropped or not, since the image compositions always look well balanced. The picture is sharp and colors are accurate, though we did detect some very minor artifacting effects in a couple places. There are very few environmental sounds, but the music is adequately dimensional and has a reasonable flourish, with the Dolby Digital track providing a bit more energy than the standard track. The program can be supported by optional English subtitles.

Yosemite images

A very lovely 35 minute image music piece, Yosemite Watersongs, has been released by Performance Digital Laboratories and Image Entertainment (PDL5756DVD, \$20; the catalog number is not listed on the jacket or the platter—we had to look it up). Set to the music of Windham Hill artist Douglas Spotted Eagle, the deftly edited program depicts different aspects of Yosemite during different seasons with a captivating combination of water, light and nature. In one sequence, there is a rainbow formed in a waterfall by horizontal light that sets it against a dark background—quite a rarity.

The image is presented in full screen format and is exceedingly crisp, with precise colors and shadings in every shot. The standard stereo surround sound is sharper and more encompassing than many 5-channel Dolby Digital tracks. On an alternate track, there is a commentary by the video artist, Sterling Johnson, who talks about Yosemite, about how he captured the various shots, and about what he wanted to achieve. He explains that he likes to use dissolves but he once had to work for a guy who hated dissolves, so, as a result, every dissolve he employs is thoroughly justified, drawing the viewer through the images as effectively as Spotted Eagle's music does. There is also a chapter link from a map of Yosemite to sequences from the program, a couple of promo clips, and DVD-ROM materials, including screen savers, greeting cards and wallpaper.

Surf's up

The ultimate surfing DVD, **Super Slide**, has been released by Trinidad Entertainment and Image Entertainment (there is no catalog number on the jacket, we had to look it up elsewhere—TE1001DVD, \$30). It has three parts. There is a basic surfing documentary, which runs 60 minutes and talks about the transition of popularity from short boards back to the traditional—although refined—long boards, with an extensive history of the hundred year sport and lots of great surfing footage. The picture is sharp and colors are accurate. The stereo sound is fine.

There is also a 27 minute collection of interviews, with the director and with some of the experts who appear in the film (one of the film's joys is seeing the archival footage of the young, hot surfers and then seeing them now, as old guys). The most interesting segments are about the surfers who are hounding long time board makers, having them dig into their closets and pull out old templates from the

early Sixties, so they can make boards by following the older designs, but with sensible updates. Another board maker talks about how lousy wood became when aircraft manufacturers started grabbing the best lumber, and how that segued into boards made of inorganic materials. Finally, there is a 29 minute collection of nine music videos—set mostly to the images from the documentary—featuring Sly & Robbie, Birth Through Knowledge, Purple Bosco, Fantastic Planet, Solid Foundation, The Cat Mary and others.

Flair de Maal

An outstanding music DVD, **Baaba Maal Live at the Royal Festival Hall**, has been released by Palm Pictures (PALMDVD30082, \$25). Produced by Eric Silver, the 70 minute concert, by the Senegalese singer, Maal, his band, and a number of guests, has a clear-as-glass picture, with crisp, exact colors, and is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.78:1 and no 16:9 enhancement. The standard stereo surround sound is excellent and the music surrounds the viewer with a vivid immediacy. Then there is a 5.1 channel Dolby Digital track with even clearer tones and more distinctive separations, and there is a DTS track that is even clearer still, with a better defined bass. The music is lively and the concert is captivating. There is a pleasing 4 minute montage of still photos, as well.

Additionally, Maal provides an excellent commentary on another audio track, as well as an additional 7 minute interview. Admittedly, we found his accent difficult to follow in places, but most of what he had to say was understandable. He talks about the roots of his music (he has large choruses backing him up—and many of his band members dance during the performance—because that is what it is like at the parties and village get-togethers where he first got started), about his collaborators, about the songs being performed, and he explains that he wanted to give Africa, which has gotten a lot of bad press in the past, a more positive image. He certainly succeeds.

Abbey concert

After rather generic performances of Wolfgang Mozart's *Concerto No. 3*, *Symphony No.29* and *Symphony No.40* by the Picardy Sinfonietta Orchestra under Patrick Fournillier, there is a surprisingly engaging conclusion with Gioacchino Rossini's *Il Signor Bruschino Overture* on **Mozart/Rossini**, a Carlton Entertainment Image Entertainment release (ID5087GCDVD, \$25). Staged in the St. Michel De Cuxa Abbey, the entire program seems somewhat run-of-the-mill until it is enlivened by the Rossini piece, though since the DVD format is not exactly awash with this sort of programming, the 71 minute concert is still a welcome effort. The picture looks okay, though it is not as vivid as other concerts of this nature have been. Fleshtones are bland and contrasts are a bit underdeveloped. The PCM stereo sound is reasonably strong, though dimensionality is limited. There are essays about the Mozart pieces and some of the performers on the jacket, but they are printed in a black-on-dark-purple that is almost impossible to read.

His way

Six of the eight Frank Sinatra's 50 minute television specials from the late Sixties and beyond that were issued on three LD collections have now been released as individual DVDs by Warner Reprise Video, **Frank Sinatra A Man and His Music** (332012, \$25) from 1965, **Frank Sinatra A Man and His Music + Ella + Jobim** (382022, \$25) from 1967, **Frank Sinatra Ol' Blue Eyes Is Back** (382032, \$25) from 1973, **Frank Sinatra Sinatra in Concert at Royal Festival Hall** (382052, \$25) from 1971, **Frank Sinatra Sinatra The Main Event** (382062, \$25) from 1988 and **Frank Sinatra Francis Albert Sinatra Does His Thing** (382092, \$25) from 1968.

With each DVD, the picture is slightly improved over the LD (Apr 91, Jun 91, Jan 92)—retaining the inherent age-related flaws in the source material—and the stereo surround sound is substantially improved, delivering a greater range, a stronger bass and a deeper resonance. Sinatra's legendary voice is delivered with an incredible clarity and smoothness, while the video performances personalize his artistry. The older programs are a little more worn looking than the newer ones. In all, there is some grain and occasional ghosting, but well lit hues are bright and fleshtones are workable—less pale than the fleshtones on the LDs. The programs can be supported by optional English subtitles. On most of the programs,

numerics on the jacket chapter listings do not coincide with the encoded chapters.

If we had to recommend just one of the six, it would probably be **A Man and His Music + Ella + Jobim**. Not only are there the added pleasures of Ella Fitzgerald and Antonio Carlos Jobim, giving the program a satisfying variety of musical genres, but Sinatra performs what may be the best rendition of Ol' Man River he ever recorded—it is even more articulated and emotionally accurate than his exquisite Reprise studio recording. Four of the programs, including + Ella + Jobim, use the standard TV music special format, shot in front of a studio or make-believe audience with simple abstract sets, plenty of songs and amusing banter to bridge each sequence.

What was the first in this series of specials, **A Man and His Music**, is also quite good, though the program material is confined to his most ubiquitous standards and there is less exploration in his phrasing. The show's purpose, however, seems to be to introduce Sinatra to the Sixties TV viewership, and from that perspective it is an excellent accomplishment, basically defining that phase of Sinatra's career. Okay, okay, you have to get both this one and **+ Ella + Jobim**.

With **Ol' Blue Eyes Is Back**, Sinatra, who had just come out of his 'retirement,' was reinventing himself, giving up the energy his stamina could no longer maintain for more segmented phrasings that allowed his voice to explore each song deeply without strain. He had entered the autumn of his years, but found a manner of singing that could stave off winter indefinitely. The program includes some of his standards (you can compare I've Got You Under My Skin and I Get a Kick out of You with his renditions on **Man and His Music** to see his strategic adjustments) and he has an extended and enjoyable sequence with Gene Kelly. Okay, okay, you have to get this one also.

Although musically he never lost his footing, Sinatra was thrown for a loop by the upheaval in popular music formats that occurred in the Sixties and **Francis Albert Sinatra Does His Thing** is an example of how he attempted to tread the water of the times. He is joined by Diahann Carroll and by The Fifth Dimension, and tries very hard to seem hip. Still, the musical selection has fewer repetitions from the other programs and features Lost in the Stars, Baubles Bangles and Beads, and Angle Eyes.

The two concert programs are less satisfying than the studio programs, though they still have plenty to offer. Unlike the studio performances, Sinatra's delivery is erratic, varying between fantastic and just plain terrific. **Concert at Royal Festival Hall** is a straightforward performance before a calm audience that responds pleasantly to his presence. The Main Event is fascinating for its errors. An extravaganza shot in Madison Square Garden, Sinatra sometimes stumbles through the songs, rarely extends himself and seems antagonistic now and then to the huge audience. If it were the only Sinatra concert available, it would be a rewarding program, but in the context of the five other programs, it is anti-climactic.

A reasonably thorough five-part biography of Sinatra entitled **Sinatra Gold Collector's Edition** has been issued by Triton (DVD9826, \$40). The images are compiled from trailers, Sinatra's old TV shows, newsreels and other public domain sources, but there are some terrific interviews (particularly from the actresses who worked with him) and a lot of rarely seen footage. Each episode runs about 46 minutes, apparently designed for an hour TV slot. There is some repetition of material from one episode to the next, but it is always presented from a slightly varied angle so as not to be a direct copy of the previous coverage. The size of the program accommodates a reasonably complete telling of the public aspects of Sinatra's life and still allows for comprehensive coverage of his music career, his film career and his television and performance career. It doesn't dig too deeply, but as an overview of his life, it is a reasonable place to start.

Three episodes are presented on one single-sided platter, and two episodes are on another. Each platter also has two karaoke numbers (Come Fly with Me and Witchcraft) set to a very nice collection of still photos, as well as very complete discographies and filmographies. The quality of the source material varies from one clip to the next. Most aren't in bad shape and artifacting is rarely evident. The DVD has a 5.1 Dolby Digital channel, but the Dolby Digital track is indistinguishable from the standard track. The narration is stereophonic, as is some of the music, but most of the source material is monophonic and remains centered. Tonal quality is smooth and nicely detailed, however, and while no songs are played from start to finish, there are enough excerpts to satiate even the most demanding fans. The presentation is not captioned.

A lousier half hour look at Sinatra's career, using movie trailers that are in much poorer condition, is combined with the entertaining assassination thriller, **Suddenly**, on **Frank Sinatra**, a Brentwood Home Video release (BDVD921, \$15). Maybe we would have found the Hollywood Hall of Fame documentary more interesting if we hadn't watched the long one first, but the quality of the clips is alienating (facilitating noticeable artifacting) and the narrative, which focuses on his film career, is superficial. The monophonic sound is tentative and a little noisy in places. The DVD is not captioned and comes with a Sinatra trivia quiz.

Suddenly is also available as a Master Movies Silver Screen Collectors Edition title (DVD5529, \$15). The 75 minute film runs just 72 minutes on the Master Movies presentation, which appears to be time compressed, because we could never get it to synch up with the Brentwood version. Brentwood's presentation is letterboxed, with an aspect ratio of about 1.68:1 and no 16:9 enhancement, and the Master Movies version is presented in full screen format, losing nothing on the sides and unmasking the top and bottom compared to the Brentwood version. The black-and-white image on the Master Movies presentation, however, looks gorgeous. Brentwood's presentation is typical of what one usually sees of the public domain title. Although watchable, the reel-change points are battered, there are other stray scratches and speckles, contrasts are weak, losing details in shadows and overlit portions of the screen, and the image is soft. On the Master Movies presentation, the source material is spotless, the picture is crisp and contrasts are finely detailed. The monophonic sound is louder on the Brentwood version and you pick up more atmosphere, but it is also somewhat nosier than the Master Movie's audio, which is thinner, but cleaner. The Master Movies presentation is not captioned and is accompanied by a few text supplements.

The Madacy Entertainment version of **Suddenly** (DVD99040, \$10) is substantially blurrier than even Brentwood's version, and the monophonic sound is more muffled. The full screen presentation runs 75 minutes and is not captioned.

Sterling Hayden and James Gleason are the heroes in the 1954 feature, caught in a **Desperate Hours** situation when Sinatra, as a contract hit man accompanied by a pair of cronies, takes over a house with a view of a train station where the U.S. president is scheduled to pull in. It is a tense and enjoyable thriller, and Sinatra gives a very believable performance as the frustrated villain.

MusikLaden nostalgia

Pioneer's nostalgic The Best of MusikLaden Live series is a collection of rare live performances in intimate settings by popular rock groups in the Sixties and Seventies. The programs are not captioned and are in 5-channel Dolby Digital.

Since the shows were shot in Germany, an all-white audience can be seen trying fitfully to boogie to **Kool & the Gang** (PA99612D, \$25), though that doesn't stop the popular Seventies dance group from delivering a terrific performance. The 45 minute show is an ideal live performance, free of the slickness imposed by a studio recording, but still fully melodic. It is delivered in a setting that is still sufficiently confined to bring out the details in the contributions by the individual performers, and every camera angle captures two or three of them doing something interesting. Colors are reasonably bright, but fleshtones are a little bland and there is some video smearing, more apparently a flaw of the original taping than of the DVD transfer. As we implied, the stereo surround sound is clear and nicely defined. The bass is subdued, but it helps you hear everything else better.

Tina Turner always seems to be full of energy, but she looks like she's got even more energy than usual in **Ike & Tina Turner** (PA99611D, \$25). She also has a body suit that seems to leave nothing to the imagination. The picture on the 30 minute program is heavy with video effects, which limit contrasts and remove details, but when the effects subside, the picture looks okay. The colors aren't fresh, but details are reasonably good and fleshtones are workable. The stereo surround sound is great, with a strong dimensionality and plenty of thrust. They seem to sing a lot of reverse cross-over numbers, including Get Back, Honky Tonk Woman and (from later, without Ike) Acid Queen. In any case, the set is very enjoyable.

Only hardcore fans will be interested in **Hall & Oates** (PA99610D, \$25). On the positive side, the 45 minute program provides a clear view of the performers and a number of their biggest hits are included

in the set. On the downside, the live environment flattens their already harmonically challenged vocals and the instruments have a tinny, clipped sound, giving the recording a garage tape ambience. Colors are also dull, with pale fleshtones and background grain.

LD Reviews

Saving Private Ryan for LD

You come away from some movies elated and from others saddened. Sometimes when a movie is over, you feel like you could shoot a dozen bad guys and drive 70mph down a curvy road. Other times, it's like you're in love with every friend you see. But Steven Spielberg's **Saving Private Ryan** is the only movie we can recall that you step away from vowing to yourself that you will try to be a better person, a feeling that stays with you for at least a half hour or so.

The prolog and epilog of Spielberg's gripping World War II story have been widely put down and belittled—they may very well have cost the movie its Best Picture Oscar—but they are the soul of the entire movie—the reason why the hero's quest is not an arbitrary undertaking—and together they are as wrenching as anything within the movie itself. Perhaps people put it down because they're embarrassed about how it makes them feel. Well, those sequences, contrary to what you may have read elsewhere, are not misguided efforts in filmmaking, they are emotional and moral perfection, as perfect, that is, as humans can be.

It doesn't look like **Saving Private Ryan** is going to be coming out on DVD any time soon, so if you want a spellbinding, fabulous presentation of the movie as soon as possible, you may want to splurge for the DreamWorks Home Entertainment Image Entertainment THX Laser Disc release (ID5916DW, \$40). We thought the cinematography looked horrible in the theater and we couldn't understand how anybody could like the murky, grainy image, but the LD picture doesn't look anything like that at all. Colors are subdued, sometimes to the point of being monochromatic—and it is quite possible that you may remember the film as a black-and-white movie rather than a color movie—but the image is sharp and with the LD's transfer, the hues remain distinctive, capturing the film's overcast atmosphere without distortion. The presentation is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1.

The Dolby Digital sound is just incredible. The hundreds of bullets that go whizzing past you every which way are positively frightening, and the other battle noises are as detailed as they are deafening, but even standard things, like dialog, have a clarity and power that few other audio tracks can match. The 169 minute program is adequately closed captioned and is spread to four sides with the finale in CAV, although the opening half hour would have been more advantageous to have in that format. Tom Hanks, in a magnificent performance, stars with Edward Burns and Tom Sizemore, and Matt Damon gives a nifty performance as the title character.

Driving

Much in the same way that **MASH** stole the thunder from **Catch-22**, so did **Vanishing Point** (Aug 90) undercut the unique appeal of **Two-Lane Blacktop**, a film that, upon its release in 1971, was expected to be a huge boxoffice hit, but turned out to be, instead, a road film so devoid of tangibilities it attracted neither the drive-in crowd nor the art house crowd. Still, as baffling as it may have seemed to some, and as typical as it was of director Monte Hellman's enigmatic career, it is a highly repeatable entertainment that makes ideal home video, and we are thrilled that the Roan Group has managed to release the movie on LD (RGL9652, \$50). The disc was produced by William Lustig.

James Taylor and Dennis Wilson, both so laconic they make Sam Shepard seem like a chatterbox, portray hustlers who drive across the country in a souped-up '57 Chevy, earning money from back street drag race challenges. Warren Oates, driving a newer Pontiac, has no apparent income and tells a different story about his background to every person he meets. The three agree to a cross-country race, but they never really get into it, and they never finish. Most of the film is about their interaction along the way. A drifter, played by Laurie Bird, also tags along.

The film's aimlessness is its essence. As we mentioned, the earlier theatrical release of

Vanishing Point stole one of its primary trump cards—the extended sequences of high speed driving for the sake of high speed driving. One could make an easy argument that Hellman miss-filmed the racing sequences, not getting the shots he needed and not editing them right. But if you approach the races with the assumption that Hellman did know what he was doing, then they become not about winning, but about moving at high speed. The whole film is about moving at high speed and going nowhere—not in the shove-it-in-your-face kind of way that **Vanishing Point** presented it, but in a subtle way that grows on you and obligates you to ponder the spiritual value of such thrills. The symbolism, about Life, is potent, and the performances, however wordless, are beguiling. The cars are cool, too.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. Darker scenes are a little murky, fleshtones are somewhat pale and the image is soft, but other colors are bright and the source material appears to be free of wear. The film's original mono track has been given a very slight stereo enhancement. Only the heaviest audio sequences have any kind of dimensionality, and nothing is harmed by the enhancement. There is also a Dolby Digital track, but it doesn't seem significantly different from the standard track. The film's sound mix is marvelous, with realistic car noises and other distinctive environmental touches. The 102 minute program is not captioned and is accompanied by an interesting theatrical trailer.

Hellman and producer Gary Kurtz provide a very good commentary track, never discussing the story and focussing instead on how the film was made and the experiences they had making it. They also talk about the long time it took to clear the music rights (including numbers by The Doors, Arlo Guthrie and Kris Kristofferson) for a home video release, and how, even without the stereo reprocessing, the film sounds better now than it ever has before (they only made one mag print, for studio use only).

Two times Seven

In the retrospective documentary that accompanied the DVD release of **Seven Brides for Seven Brothers** (Jun 99), director Stanley Donen declared that he preferred the non-widescreen version of the film—which was shot and cut together, but not released—to the simultaneously produced standard Cinemascope version. His reasoning was that the film's artificial backgrounds were less noticeable on the squarer screen and less distracting to the viewer. Well, thanks to Warner Home Video, anybody who has an LD player can now see if Donen was right or wrong. Warner has issued **Seven Brides for Seven Brothers** (65065, \$50) in a two-platter set, with the standard 2.35:1 aspect ratio version on one platter and the less wide version, letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1, on the other platter. There was no room for the documentary or other special features, except a trailer.

The 2.35 version looks identical to the DVD presentation. We had thought the colors on the DVD looked outstanding, but they appear drained and bland compared to the somewhat over-saturated colors on the 1.85 version. Fleshtones on the 1.85 are warmer, and other hues are richer, but they also tend to look a bit fuzzy, and the borders between colors are less distinct. The 1.85 version also has a bit more wear. The 2.35 version is almost as sharp as the DVD presentation, but it does look a bit soft at times. Only the 2.35 version has Dolby Digital encoding, which brings a slightly wider sound to the music than the standard stereo surround soundtrack, though the two are often indistinguishable. The Dolby Digital track is identical to the DVD's Dolby track, though the DVD's standard stereo track is a bit weaker than the LD's track. Surprisingly, the standard stereo sound on the 1.85 version has a fuller timbre and stronger bass than any of the other tracks. Both versions on the LD are closed captioned, with some paraphrasing. The chapter encoding is identical on both, and there is just one listing.

Both LD versions run 102 minutes, but there are minor timing differences in many scenes. If you want our opinion, the image composition on the 2.35 version is superior to the 1.85 version. The artificiality of the backgrounds are just as evident (and it is, contrary to Donen's opinion, one of the film's enduring charms—the 'movie set' environment actually helps sell the idea that the kidnapped women would fall for their kidnappers). While there are specific incidences where the 1.85 framing works better—there is more vertical business in the barn raising fight; and when Russ Tamblyn's character faints after the baby is born, you can see his face while he's on the floor on the 1.85 version, but you can't on the 2.35 version—most of the time the 2.35 framing is more beguiling. The stretched balance of the shorter, wider image pulls the viewer deeper into the movie, and it also conveys a sense of importance that the 1.85 framing loses. But why take our word for it? With the LD, you can revel in the joys of both, and it gives you an excuse to

watch the 1954 classic again and again.

LD roundup

The Universal Studios Home Video *Signature Collection* LD release of **Patch Adams** (44421, \$35) replicates the supplementary materials that appeared on the DVD (Jul 99). There is a 21 minute documentary about the film (in CAV), accompanied, on the analog channel, by 20 minutes of music from Marc Shaiman's score. There are also some outtakes and bloopers, and there is a commentary track by the movie's director, Tom Shadyac. The 116 minute movie itself is in letterboxed format, with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 (Shadyac explains that he wanted to 'open up' the cramped hospital sets). The picture is somewhat blurrier than the DVD, but the color transfer is about the same, with accurate fleshtones and well-defined hues. The Dolby Digital sound seems identical to the DVD's Dolby Digital track, though not much other than the musical score is all that dimensional. The film and the documentary are adequately closed captioned. The chapter encoding and jacket guide are passable.

Two of the primary supplementary features that were included on the collector's edition DVD of **The Last Starfighter** (Jul 99) are also included on the Universal *Signature Collection* LD (44420, \$35), a commentary channel by director Nick Castle and production designer Ron Cobb, and a 32 minute retrospective documentary. The still image section from the DVD, however, has not been replicated. The 101 minute film is windowboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, giving most viewers a little more picture information on the sides than the DVD's standard letterboxing. Otherwise, however, the image on the DVD looks a bit stronger, with slightly richer colors. The hues on the LD are a touch lighter and the image is a bit fuzzy. We also preferred the Dolby Digital track on the DVD, which sounded a little sharper than the Dolby Digital track on the LD. The 1984 feature's audio mix is not all that elaborate, however, and either soundtrack is acceptable. Both the film and the documentary are adequately closed captioned. The chapter encoding and jacket guide are somewhat generalized.

The Dolby Digital sound on the DreamWorks Home Entertainment Image Entertainment *Widescreen Edition* release of **The Peacemaker** (ID5910DW, \$30) is much better than the Dolby Digital track on the DVD (Jan 99). It has more power, a better bass, stronger separation detail and a clearer high end. The picture is identical to the DVD. The image is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. Color quality is fine and the image is sharp, with accurate fleshtones. The 124 minute program is spread to three sides in CLV (side three runs just a few seconds over a half hour) and is not accompanied by any special features. It is adequately closed captioned. The chapter encoding and jacket guide are modest. George Clooney and Nicole Kidman star as American intelligence specialists chasing around Eastern Europe after a stolen nuclear bomb. Fun stuff.

The Dolby Digital soundtrack on the Universal Pioneer release, **October Sky** (LD83750WS, \$30), is a little fuller than the Dolby Digital track on the DVD (see page 6), but the standard stereo track remains stronger, with more rear channel activity and more dimensionality. The color transfer looks identical, although the image is a little softer. The presentation is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The 108 minute program is adequately closed captioned.

A plain version of **Virus**, without extras, has been issued by Universal and Pioneer as a *Widescreen Edition* (LD83264, \$30). The picture and sound are identical to the DVD (see page 3). The image is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The color transfer looks good, with bright hues and accurate fleshtones, though weaknesses in blacks make the LD a little murkier in darker sequences than the DVD is. The Dolby Digital soundtrack has the same amount of thrust and the same entertaining surround effects that the Dolby Digital soundtrack on the DVD has. The standard stereo track is a little stronger than its DVD counterpart, but it isn't as crisp as the Dolby Digital track. The 100 minute program is adequately closed captioned.

An abridged version of **The Paris Concert for Amnesty International: The Struggle Continues...** has been released on LD by Amnesty International and Image Entertainment (ID5637AM, \$30). We reviewed a 170 minute DVD in Jul 99. The single-platter LD runs a full 120 minutes. Like the DVD, it separates performance sequences with commercial-style short films, and all the performance artists that appeared on the DVD appear on the LD, but most sing fewer numbers, and there are fewer short films. The picture quality looks identical to the DVD and is very good, with bright, crisp colors and accurate fleshtones (the audience, which isn't as well lit, looks a little murkier). The DVD had Dolby Digital

sound, but the LD is stuck with a standard stereo track only, which is nowhere near as good. There is no captioning. Bruce Springsteen, Alanis Morissette, Radiohead, Tracy Chapman and others appear.

The space opera continues

The rousing conclusion to the first season of **Babylon 5** is contained in the three Warner Home Video LD releases, **Babylon 5 1.10: Legacies/A Voice in the Wilderness Part I** (17077, \$30), **Babylon 5 1.11: A Voice in the Wilderness Part II/Babylon Squared** (17078, \$30) and **Babylon 5 1.12: The Quality of Mercy/Chrysalis** (14315, \$30). All of the episodes wrap up a number of mysteries about the characters and their political conflicts.

In *Legacies*, the corpse of an alien warrior that is being paraded through the galaxy on its way to a final resting spot arrives at the station and disappears, while, in a subplot that eventually contributes to the solution of the mystery, a young woman in the station is discovered to have psychic powers, and several interests vie for control of her future. In the two-part *Voice in the Wilderness*, the supposedly inert planet that the station orbits starts sending out mysterious signals and an investigation leads to a three-way showdown. The mysterious disappearance of the station that preceded *Babylon 5* is explained in *Babylon Squared*, which concludes with a tantalizing glimpse of the hero's future. *The Quality of Mercy* is sort of a standard episode, about a doctor who has an alien device that transfers good health from one person to another. A serial killer breaks free after his trial, gets shot, and ends up in the doctor's office. The device is retained for future episodes. June Lockhart guest stars. In the very exciting final episode, the heroes uncover an attempt to assassinate the Earth's 'president,' one of the aliens unknowingly makes a pact with a group of evil aliens, and the alien who had been sponsoring the hero builds herself a cocoon.

There had been, throughout the first season, the tantalizing suggestion that the entire series was merely taking place in the hero's head, and that aliens were probing him to measure human values. That plot element pretty much disappears in the second season, however, because the hero, Michael O'Hare, is replaced by Bruce Boxleitner (who performance, in the initial episodes, is very stilted). In both episodes on **Babylon 5 2.0: Points of Departure/Revelations** (17202, \$30), Boxleitner's character is introduced and the other cliffhanger elements from the previous season are sorted out. The dark villains make more appearances, the alien comes out of her cocoon slightly changed and the (new) hero's quick thinking prevents the humans from becoming involved with a battleship of suicidal martyrs.

If you want to see really bad acting, check out Russ Tamblyn in *A Distant Star* on **Babylon 5 2.1: The Geometry of Shadows/A Distant Star** (17203, \$30). He's supposed to be playing the captain of a huge exploration ship and with his beard and everything he certainly looks the part, but he can't keep a straight face, so as his ship get crippled in hyper-space and crewmen are dying, he's like smiling and laughing as he asks for status reports and gives out orders. Michael Ansara, much more competently, appears in the companion episode as the leader of a mysterious band technological magicians who are high-tailing it out of the galaxy because they are sensitive to an ominous foreboding. At the same time, one of the heroines must mediate a conflict that is based entirely upon arbitrary choices, as a group wearing green has fights with a group wearing purple.

The series became increasing adept at blending freestanding plot elements with the continuing saga it is unfolding and two good examples of this are contained on **Babylon 5 2.2: The Long Dark/A Spider in the Web** (17204, \$30). In *Dark*, a mysterious force is committing murders, and the heroes have to figure out what is happening before they can confront it—the force also has something to do with the mysterious 'evil' beings mentioned in the other episodes. In *Spider*, an assassin who turns out to be a cyborg-enhanced human kills a prominent businessman and then targets the psychic heroine when she gets a peak at who it was that programmed him.

As we proved in our review of the previous episodes (Apr 99) by comparing the opening credit sequence montage with the episode sequences from which the montage was created, the presentations are slightly cropped. As with the previous episodes, the picture is often soft and murky, with bland fleshtones and a mild grain. The stereo surround sound, on the other hand, is excellent, particularly on the *Voice in the Wilderness* episodes, which are worth substantial amplification. The programs are adequately closed captioned. Each one seems to have about three endings and runs 44 minutes. (Warner has also been systematically releasing episodes from the fourth and fifth seasons of the series, but we'll be darned if we watch them out of order.)

Errol Flynn goes to war

Two classic Errol Flynn Warner Bros. war movies have been released on LD by MGM Home Entertainment, **The Dawn Patrol** (ML102820, \$40) and **Objective, Burma!** (ML102411, \$40).

The 1938 **Dawn Patrol**, about World War I pilots, co-stars David Niven and Basil Rathbone. Flynn and Niven are the aces, who live a wild life between missions to numb their feelings, as new recruits arrive and are sent into the air without enough experience to defend themselves. Then the commander, played by Rathbone, is promoted and Flynn's character is moved into his position, forced to make the choices he previously resented others making. The narrative is not elaborate, the dogfights are limited (though entertaining) and Niven almost steals the picture from Flynn, but the situation gives Flynn a chance to stretch himself dramatically, and the reliable Warner production formula provides a basic, entertaining atmosphere.

The black-and-white picture is a little soft, but there is only one sequence that is noticeably damaged and otherwise the image is in fairly good condition. The monophonic sound is also pretty good, providing a strong bass for some of the closer fly-bys and flak. The 103 minute program is not captioned and is accompanied by a trailer.

Once he gets into the jungle, Flynn's familiar visage becomes buried in whiskers and mud in Raoul Walsh's 1945 **Objective, Burma!** Flynn is the leader of a commando group that destroys a Japanese target deep in the jungle. Their success is tempered, however, when their extraction point is overrun by the enemy and they have to travel hundreds of miles to reach safety. Flynn is not his normal, dashing self ("Perhaps his most honest and restrained performance," says the jacket copy), but the film is a reasonably effective adventure, mixing a few engaging action scenes with a legitimate meditation on the costs and strains of war.

The first half of the film looks a little worn and grainy, but the second half is stronger. Contrasts remain a little soft, but the black-and-white image is sharp and speckles are minimal. The monophonic sound is fine and the program is not captioned. The film runs 142 minutes (there's a Franz Waxman score to keep things moving) and side three is in CAV. An interesting trailer, using narration that is not in the film, is also included.

Howard Hawks goes to war

Not one of Howard Hawks' better films, **Air Force**, an MGM Home Entertainment LD release (ML102412, \$40), still bristles with interruptions, overlapping dialog, terrific actions scenes and a momentum that is hard to resist. Set during the weekend of the Pearl Harbor attack and the days that followed, the film is about one B-17 and crew that travels from San Francisco to Hawaii, Wake Island, and the Philippines before heading on to Australia. John Garfield is given sole billing on the LD's jacket cover, but the 1943 production is a true ensemble effort, with Garfield given no more prominence than Gig Young, Arthur Kennedy, Harry Carey, George Tobias and other cast members. The film contains a number of wartime exaggerations, including an elaborate final battle in which an entire Japanese convoy is wiped out, and the story isn't about much more than getting the plane across the Pacific in one piece, but Hawks' efficiency at creating entertainment overcomes all obstacles, and the film is enjoyable despite its limitations.

The black-and-white picture looks quite nice. There is some age-related wear, and a little jitter here and there but, for the most part, contrasts are very sharp. The picture is usually quite clear and details are crisp. The monophonic sound is adequate and the program is not captioned. The film runs 124 minutes and side three is in CAV.

DVD adults only

A female cat burglar takes advantage of distracted couples to go about her business, although sometimes she just can't help but get in on the distractions in **Taboo 17**, a Metro release (UPC#5135312682, \$30). The narrative is not elegantly executed, but the erotic sequences are imaginative. The 90 minute film is split to two sides, running a little over 50 minutes on one side and a bit over 30 minutes on the other. The picture quality is outstanding, with bright, vivid hues and fleshtones, and

the stereo sound is fine. The program is also accompanied by about 20 minutes of behind-the-scenes footage, which lets you see the performers with their guards down, and a jokey commentary track by the director and a couple other members of the crew. There is some valid production information within the commentary about the camera setups, the length of the working day, and other such details, but there is also a lot of fooling around, so it is difficult to tell when they are being serious and when they are not. The program also has a multiple angle option and other hardcore promotional materials. Misty Rain, Roxanne Hall, Syndee Steele, Inari Vachs and Caressa Savage are featured.

Yet another of the many direct steals from **Belle de Jour**, **Red Vibe Diaries Object of Desire**, from Metro (UPC#5135312290, \$30), is about the wife of a doctor who gets a day job when her husband becomes too busy at work to give her the attention she desires. Designed, apparently, for couples, the cinematography is extra artistic and the erotic sequences are stretched out and somewhat uninteresting. The picture is a little blurry at times and fleshtones look overly pinkish in places. There is an occasionally stereophonic musical score, though all other sounds remain centered. The program runs 103 minutes and features Stacy Valentine and Misty Rain.

Two former girlfriends of a dead millionaire battle over his will in Vivid's Wave DVD, **American Pie** (UPC#0073215582, \$30). Jeanna Fine and Nikki Tyler star. The erotic sequences are reasonably creative, but the story isn't very elaborate. Colors and fleshtones are a little light. The sound is okay and the program runs 74 minutes.

A young wanderer in a rustic setting comes upon a farmhouse run by a man and four beautiful daughters in **Country Comfort**, a Vivid release (UPC#00733215555, \$35). It turns out the relationships are more elaborate than that, but there really isn't much of a plot. Colors are light and fleshtones are a little dull. The sound is a little flat, too. The 73 minute program features Devon, Halli Aston, Gwen Summers, Phyllisha Anne and Racquel Devine.

A collection of six erotic interludes, each involving a supposedly Asian actress, **Raw #2**, from Vivid (UPC#0073215564, \$35), runs 83 minutes. Most are interviewed by the filmmakers before they begin, but only one of the interviews seems genuine, and the others are too staged to be effective. Some of the erotic sequences are reasonably energetic, but others seem uninspired. The picture also varies from sequence to sequence. The worst ones are grainy, with bland colors and dull fleshtones, but others are a bit sharper, with somewhat stronger hues. Interviews are echoey and difficult to follow, and the audio is a little scratchy.

A half dozen erotic interludes are featured on the 113 minute Vivid release, **Action Sports Sex 3** (UPC#0073215597, \$35). Most are set or at least begin, in sport-oriented locations, such as a basketball court, a soccer field, a gym and a sporting goods store. The cameraman is an active participant in each interlude. The picture is reasonably good and the sound is okay. **Action Sports Sex 2** (UPC#0073215573, \$35) has the same format and includes interludes in a motorcycle shop, out on a dirt bike trail, at a cross-country bicycle race, a San Francisco massage parlor, at batting practice and elsewhere. One sequence looks very grainy, and a couple others are somewhat grainy, though colors look okay. The program also runs 113 minutes.

All Vivid programs are accompanied by elaborate interactive hardcore promotional features.

DVD & LD News

AND THE BAND BEGINS TO PLAY: MGM Home Entertainment will be releasing the animated classic, **Yellow Submarine**, on DVD and on LD. The DVD will include a commentary channel, retrospective documentary and other extras, and will be priced at \$30.

SURRENDER DOROTHY: Warner Home Video will be releasing an elaborate collector's edition of **The Wizard of Oz** that is said to have more supplementary features than MGM's famous **Ultimate Oz** LD. It will be priced at \$50.

MORE SENSE: Columbia TriStar Home Video's forthcoming release of **Sense and Sensibility** will include a commentary track featuring Emma Thompson, Ang Lee and others, and will also include a couple of deleted scenes. It will be priced at \$28. **Idle Hands** will also have a commentary track, deleted scenes and other extras, and will be priced at \$25.

THE DEAD COME BACK AGAIN AND AGAIN: Anchor Bay is releasing **Night of the Living Dead** with '15 minutes of new scenes and a new musical score.' It will be available as a standard release,

priced at \$25, and as a **Collector's Edition** that has a number of special features and is bundled with an audio CD, priced at \$35.

DELUXE BRIDE: Artisan Entertainment is releasing a collector's edition of **Bride of Re-Animator**, including a commentary track, a deleted scene and other extra features. It will be priced at \$30.

DELUXE BEANIE: Image Entertainment is releasing an elaborate DVD collection of **Beanie and Cecil** with loads of extras.

DTS UPDATE: **Virus**, **The Bee Gees Live** and **Joni Mitchel Painting with Music** are being released on DVD with DTS encoding. We will not be listing the titles in our *Coming Attractions* section.

CLOSED OUT OF TOWN: *Any Place But Home* (Universal LD), **Boy's Town** (MGM DVD), **Dr. Zhivago** (MGM DVD), **That's Entertainment** (MGM DVD), **Some Like It Hot** (MGM DVD), **Speechless** (MGM DVD), **The Magnificent Seven** (MGM DVD), *Memorial Day* (Artisan LD), *Arrival II* (Artisan LD), *Brooklyn State of Mind* (Artisan LD), *The 24-Hour Woman* (Artisan LD), **Dragonball Z 3: Tree of Might** (Pioneer LD), **Neon Genesis Evangelion 2** (LD), **Reservoir Dogs** (Pioneer LD), **Total Recall** (Pioneer LD), **Dancer Texas** (Columbia TriStar LD), **Jackie Chan Who Am I** (Columbia TriStar), **Run Silent Run Deep** (MGM LD), **The Beach Boys The Lost Concert** (Image LD), *The Crazies* (Anchor Bay DVD), **House of the Spirits** (Artisan DVD), **Wagons East!** (Artisan DVD), **Eddie and the Cruisers** (Artisan DVD), and everything from Digital Disc Entertainment and Digital Multimedia, Ltd have been removed from our *Coming Attractions* listing.

CORRECTIONS: The forthcoming release of Alejandro Jodorowsky's **Fando & Lis** is being released by Fantoma and will be priced at \$40.

SIXTY YEARS ON: This doesn't have anything to do directly with DVDs or LDs, although consumers will be reaping the benefits soon enough, but 1999 is shaping up to be the best year movies have seen since 1939, and they're going to have to double the number nominations they allow for Oscars to fit everybody in by the time the year is over. Forget boxoffice, which is also going strong, but the quality of even the lousy movies has been exceptional, and there are many, many gems destined to endure and enchant viewers for years to come.

DVD & LD Ads

(All DVD and LD Ads are 50 cents a word. Deadline is 5 business days before the end of the month. Address all ads: DVD & LD Ads, The DVD-Laser Disc Newsletter, PO Box 420, East Rockaway NY 11518-0420.)

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WANTED: DTS copy of Jurassic Park on LD. Copy on any format of Mr. Scoutmaster (Clifton Webb). (949)455-3303. Execmktng@earthlink.net.

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WANTED: STNG disc 82 episodes 163/164.
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\$90 –Aliens Box –Back to School –Back to Beach –Better Tomorrow: Uncut Import –Better Tomorrow II: Uncut Import –Better Tomorrow III: Uncut Import –Cat's Eye –Creepshow –Deepstar Six –Disney Best 1931-1948 –Django Kill: Import –Edge of Sanity –Head –Love Happy –Maniac Cop Two –McCartney Movin On –McCartney Special –Roy Orbison and Friends –Pink Floyd Delicate Sound Thunder –Railroaded –Raw Deal: Uncut Import –Rawhead Rex –Rolling Stones Rolling: Import –Roxy Music High Road –Tripods –Who Rocks America

\$120 –Android –Asylum –Bachelor & Bobbysoxer –Betty Blue –Black Caesar –Blacula –Blob (1988) –Body & Soul –Boxcar Bertha –Bride of Reanimator –Brood –Chinese Connection: Uncut –C.H.U.D. –Count Yorga Vampire –Creeping Flesh –Cujo –Devil's Daughter –Disney Donald's Bee Pictures –Disney How Best Was Won –Disney Life with Mickey –Dreamscape –Easy Money –Fiend without Face –Fists of Fury: Uncut –Frankenhooker: Unrated –Gorgon –Hardware –King Kong/Son Kong –Kronos –Laurel & Hardy: Saps Sea/Oliver 8th –Laurel & Hardy Way Out West/Brats –Leon Professional: Uncut Import –Lifepod –Lone Wolf McQuade –Mask 3D –Metropolis –Miracle Mile –Mr. Blandings Dream House –Monster Squad: Import –Nightbreed –Operation Petticoat –Pippin –Relentless –Residents: Music –Return Living Dead II –Rich & Strange –Secret Policeman's Other Ball –Serial –Silent Night Deadly Night –Space Raiders: Import –Streetfight: Ralph Bakshi –Tie Me Up Tie Me Down –Velvet Vampire –Willard

\$150 –Andy Warhol's Bad –Angels Die Hard –Blood Feast –Bride of Frankenstein –Burn Witch Burn –By Dawn's Early Light –Captain Blood –Chained Heat –Charge of the Light Brigade (1936) –Code of Silence –Coffy –Crawling Eye –Day of the Triffids –Death Warmed Up: Import –Destination Moon –Donovan's Brain –Dracula (1931) –Dracula's Daughter/Ghost Frankenstein –Dr. X/Mystery of Wax Museum –Endless Summer –Fantastic Voyage –Flowers in Attic –Frankenstein (1931) –Frankenstein Meets Wolfman –From Beyond –Galaxy of Terror –Godzilla 1985 –Godzilla vs. Biollante –Hills Have Eyes –Holy Mountain: Import –House

Frankenstein/House Dracula –Ilsa Harem Keeper –Ilsa She Wolf –Ilsa Wicked Warden –Invisible Man (1933) –Johnny Guitar –Jonny Quest TV#1 –Jonny Quest TV#2 –Journey 7th/Angry Red Planet –Kind Hearts/Captains Paradise –King of Comedy –Koyaanisqatsi –Last House on Left –Lavender Hill/Man White Suit –Liquid Sky –Long Hot Summer –Lust for a Vampire –Making Star Wars Saga: Import –Maltese Falcon –Man Who Knew Too Much –Marnie –Mondo Cane –Mummy (1932) –Name of the Rose –Near Dark –Nightmare Elm Street: Special –Night Living Dead 1990 –Phantom of the Paradise –Picnic –Rancho Notorious –Raven/Black Cat –Rear Window (1954) –Return of Vampire –Return to Oz –Rocketship XM –Rope –Saboteur (1942) –Savage Streets –Scars of Dracula –Seahawk –Seventh Voyage Sinbad: Special –Shadow of a Doubt –Siesta –Son of Dracula –Son of Frankenstein –Tarzan (1932) –Tarzan and His Mate –Terror Train –Them –This Gun for Hire –Torn Curtain –Trancers –UFO TV#1 –UFO TV#2 –UFOR TV#3 –Ulysses (1967) –Under Capricorn –Vampire Hunter D –Werewolf of London –When a Stranger Calls –While the City Sleeps –Wolfman –Zombies on Broadway

\$180 –8 _ –Big Heat –Black Narcissus –Black Sunday: Bava –Bob Le Flambeur –Cherry 2000 –Clash by Night –Gary Cooper Adventure Box –Countess Dracula –Dead of Night –Detour –Devil in the Flesh –Dinosaur Island –Dona Flor & Two Husbands –Dracula AD 1972: Import –Flesh & Blood –Gilda –Grey Fox –Hail Mary –Hidden Fortress –House of Games –Il Bidone –I Vitelloni –Kwaidan –Labyrinth of Passion –La Chienne –Law of Desire –Life & Death Colonel Blimp –Looney Tunes Box: Uncut –Lust in the Dust –Ninth Configuration –Phantasm: Autographed Box –Phase IV –Prospero's Books –Queen of Blood/Planet Vampires –Quo Vadis –Rashomon –Return of Living Dead –Sawdust & Tinsel –Sodom & Gomorrah –Space 1999 TV#2 –Suspiria –They Live by Night –Tom Jones: Letterboxed –Traci Lords: Import –Un Chien Andalou –Unknown Chaplin –Vampire Circus

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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:

LD Releases

From MGM Home Entertainment:

Tomorrow Is Forever

United Artists Horror Classics Vol.2 (Neanderthal Man, The Vampire, Curse of the Faceless Man, Dr. Blood's Coffin)

Bataan

Dive Bomber

The VIPs

Carrie 2: The Rage

The Mod Squad

èYellow Submarine

From Elite Entertainment:

Psychic Killer (Jim Hutton)

Eaten Alive (Tobe Hooper)

From Box Office Spectaculars:

The Beyond

City of the Living Dead

Massacre Mafia Style

From The Roan Group:

The Car

From Cult Video:

New York Ripper

Eaten Alive

From Image Entertainment:

The Hi-Lo Country

Police Story 2

X-The Man with X-Ray Eyes

The Corruptor

Lock, Stock and Smoking Barrel

Last Man on Earth/Panic in the Year Zero

From Buena Vista Home Video:

Celebrity

Life Is Beautiful

Shakespeare in Love

My Favorite Martian

Twin Dragons

The Other Sister

From Warner Home Video:

Babylon 5 All Alone in the Night/Acts of Sacrifice

Babylon 5 The Coming of Shadows/GROPOS

Babylon 5 The Hour of the Wolf/Whatever Happened To Mr. Garibaldi?

Babylon 5 The Summoning/ Falling Toward Apotheosis

Babylon 5 The Long Night/ Into the Fire

Ice Palace (Richard Burton)

Purgatory

Kung Fu (TV pilot)

Analyze This
Message in a Bottle
True Crime
Gypsy (special edition)
The King and I
King Richard and the Crusade
The Silver Chalice
Trog
A Star Is Born (lb)
èThe Matrix

From Dreamworks Home Entertainment:

In Dreams
Small Soldiers
Prince of Egypt
Antz
Mousehunt
Paulie
Amistad
èForces of Nature

From Universal Studios Home Video:

Ed-TV (collector's)
èThe Mummy (Collector's)

From Paramount Home Video:

Star Trek Deep Space Nine · Episode 51 Second Skin Episode 52 the Abandoned
Star Trek Deep Space Nine · Episode 53 Civil Defense Episode 54 Meridian
Star Trek Deep Space Nine · Episode 55 The Defiant Episode 56 Fascination
èStar Trek Deep Space Nine · Episode 57 Past Tense Episode 58 Past Tense Part II
èStar Trek Deep Space Nine · Episode 59 Life Support Episode 60 Heart of Stone
Payback
200 Cigarettes
Out of Towners 1999

From Artisan Entertainment:

No Way Home
Niagara Niagara
Wishmaster 2

From Tai Seng Video:

Once upon a Time in China and America

From Troma:

Chosen One: Legend of the Raven
Mother's Day

From World Vision:

Happy Together
Naked Killer

From Synapse Films:

Gamera vs. Barugon
Gamera vs. Gaos
Gamera vs. Guillon
Gamera vs. Zigra
Brain Damage
Vampyros Lesbos
Deadbeat at Dawn

Music:

The Judy Garland Show Vol.1

DVD Releases

From A&E:

The Avengers '65 Complete Set Vol.1
The Avengers '65 Complete Set Vol.2
The Avengers '66 Complete Set Vol.1
The Avengers '66 Complete Set Vol.2
Monty Python's Flying Circus Set 1 (episodes 1-6)
Monty Python's Flying Circus Set 2 (episodes 7-13)

From ADV Films:

èSonic The Hedgehog The Movie

From Allday Entertainment:

The Edgar Ulmer Collection Vol.1 Strange Woman, Moon over Harlem
The Edgar Ulmer Collection Vol.2 Bluebeard, Strange Illusion

From Anchor Bay:

Halloween 4: Return of Michael Myers
Spellbound
Notorious
The Paradine Case
Rebecca
X The Unknown
Quatermass 2
Four Sided Triangle
The Abominable Snowman
Flesh and Blood: The Hammer Heritage of Horror
A Challenge for Robin Hood
Trilogy of Terror (Karen Black)
Out of the Blue
Halloween (collector's)
èNight of the Living Dead
èNight of the Living Dead (Collector's)

From A-Pix Entertainment:

Six Ways to Sunday
Razorblade Smile

From Artisan:

The Lair of the White Worm
Masterpiece
Once When We Were Colored
Little Odessa
The Stand
Cleopatra (miniseries)
Queens Logic
Saturn 3
I Just Wasn't Made for These Times
The Bedroom Window
The Cassandra Crossing
èWishmaster/Wishmaster 2
èJoan of Ark
èSalome's Last Dance
èArmy of One
èOne Man's Justice
èBride of Re-Animator (w/extras)
èRawhead Rex
èFoolish

From Brentwood:

James Bond (promos & TV Casino Royale)

From Buena Vista:

Adventures in Babysitting

Albino Alligator

Blackjack

Celebrity

Color of Night

Cool Runnings

The Crossing Guard

The Distinguished Gentlemen

Eddie

Encino Man

The Englishman Who Went Up a Hill and Came Down a Mountain

Everyone Says I Love You

Exotica

54

Fresh

From Dusk till Dawn 2: Texas Blood Money

Georgia

Halloween H2O

Hocus Pocus

The House of Yes

I Love Trouble

I Love You, I Love You Not

Il Postino

Like Water for Chocolate

Little Buddha

Medicine Man

Mr. Holland's Opus

My Favorite Martian

Operation Condor

Operation Condor 2

The Other Sister

The Pallbearer

Playing by Heart

Powder

A Price above Rubies

Priest

The Program

The Prophecy II

Quiz Show

Restoration

The Rocketeer

Romy and Michelle's High School Reunion

Senseless

Shakespeare in Love

Smoke Signals

Son-In-Law

Switchblade Sisters

Tale of the Mummy

The Three Musketeers

Twin Dragons

Up Close and Personal

What's Love Got to Do with It
Who Framed Roger Rabbit
Wings of the Dove

From Central Park Media:

Silent Service
Strange Love
Cybernetics Guardian
The Legend of Crystania: The Motion Picture
Enter the Fat Dragon
Return of the 5 Deadly Venoms
Return of the Chinese Boxer
Shaolin Master Killer
Urotsukidoji: Legend of the Overfiend

From Columbia TriStar:

And Now for Something Completely Different
Baby Geniuses
The Bear
Christine
City of Lost Children
Close Encounters of the Third Kind
Cruel Intentions (w/extras)
èThe Dark Crystal (98 min.)
The Deep End of the Ocean
èThe Dreamlife of Angels
Easy Rider
Finding Graceland
From Here to Eternity
Funny Girl
Go
Hard Eight
Hero
Hey Mr. Producer! Royal Gala
èIdle Hands
Immortal Beloved
èIron Eagle
Just Dance
èLabyrinth
èLost Horizon
A Man for All Seasons
Milo and Otis
Monty Python & The Holy Grail
èMuppets from Space
Nicolas and Alexandra
The Nuttiest Nutcracker
Orlando
èOnly Angels Have Wings
The Pillow Book
Red Rock West
Sense and Sensibility (w/extras)
Seven Years in Tibet
èA Soldier's Story
Tango (w/commentary)
Tommy
èThe Thirteenth Floor

èThis Is My Father
The Way We Were
Welcome to the Dollhouse

From Criterion:

Grand Illusion
Lord of the Flies
And the Ship Sails On
Sanjuro
Yojimbo
For All Mankind
The Unbearable Lightness of Being
The 39 Steps
Charade
Autumn Sonata
Sisters
Carnival of Souls
Peeping Tom
Spartacus
Passion of Joan of Arc
The Lady Eve
Orpheus
The Third Man
Written in the Wind
All that Heaven Allows

From Cult Epics:

Driller Killer

From Digital Versatile Disc, Inc.:

Desert Passion
Devotion
Hollywood Dreams
Prelude to Love

From Dreamworks:

The Prince of Egypt

From DVD, Ltd:

Reaches

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
The Ape
Werewolf Vs. The Vampire Women
The Wasp Woman
Night of the Blood Beast
Masterworks of the German Cinema: Noseratu, Der Golem, The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari
èTower of Evil/Horror Hospital

From Fantoma:

Fando & Lis (Jodorowsky w/extras)

From First Run Features:

èSomewhere in the City

èLike It Is

From FocusFilm Entertainment:

Hard and Heavy Vol1-2

èChallenge of Flight

From Fox Lorber:

Revival of the Dead

Dead Heart

North Shore Fish

La Sentinelle

èThe Woman Next Door

èJules and Jim

èThe Soft Skin

èStolen Kisses

èBed & Board

èTwo Short Films by Francois Truffaut: Les Mistons/Antoine & Colette

èPaul Robeson: Here I Stand

èLa Séparation

èDesolation Angels (w/commentary)

èAntonia's Line

èBoiling Point

èCartoons The Envelope Please

èCartoons Fairy Tales

èCartoons Gulliver's Travels

èDashiell Hammett Detective Writer

èDizzy's Dream Band

èHabit

èHugo Pool

èKurt & Courtney

èLadies and Gentlemen Leonard Cohen

èMcCourts of New York

èMrs. Dalloway

èTie Died

èViolent Cop

From Front Row Entertainment:

Desperate for Love

Who Shot Pat?

Trinity is Still My Name

Zulu

Naked Space

Mister Johnson

From Full Moon Pictures:

The Creeps

Hideous

From Goldhil Home Media:

Trinity and Beyond: The Atomic Bomb Movie (in 3-D)

From Goodtimes Home Video:

Fists of Fury

Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer

The Wind in the Willow/The Willows in Winter

March of the Wooden Soldiers (colorized)

Peter Pan (Mary Martin)
Munster, Go Home!
Problem Child
Bustin' Loose
Rough Night in Jericho
Nighthawks
The Sentinel
Psycho III
The Funhouse

From HBO:

Spawn 3: The Ultimate Battle
Best of the Chris Rock Show
The Jack Bull
èEarthly Possessions
èJerry Seinfeld: I'm Telling You for the Last Time

From Image:

Alice Cooper Prime Cuts
Animal Crackers
Dark Odyssey
Eight Man
An Evening with Lena Horne
Fatal Pursuit
Little Mother
Movie Magic: Disasters at Sea
Object of Obsession
Pavarotti Hyde Park
Playboy Erotic Underground
Playboy Girls of the Internet 2
Playboy Playmates The Early Years
Playboy Twins & Sisters Too
The Princess and the Call Girl
Requiem for a Vampire
The Slayers (all 13 episodes)
Space Adventure Colony
Terrified
20,000 Leagues under the Sea (animated)
Twisted
Ultraman
Umberto D.
Women of Revolt
Across the Moon
The Adventures of Young Brave
AFI 100 Years of Movies
Alien Chaser
The Alley Cats (Metzger)
Allyson Is Watching
Alien Seed
America's Atom Bomb Tests 2
America's Atom Bomb Tests 3
Animal Instincts 3
Bad Love
Beethoven Missa Solemnis
The Best of British Cinema Five Decades
Beyond Suspicion

Body Puzzle
Body Shot
Boy's Life
Boy's Life 2
Brain Damage
Carman Baby (Metzger)
Carolina Skeletons
The Cat and the Canary (remake)
Chaplin ESSANY Vol.1
Chaplin ESSANY Vol.2
Chaplin ESSANY Vol.3
Classic Albums Paul Simon Graceland
Classic Albums The Band
Cobra (silent)
Dandelion Crown: Janacek
The Demoniacs (Rolin)
Devil Bat's Daughter
Die Watching
The Dirty Girl (Metzger)
The Elm-chanted Forest
Enchanted Forest
Fascination (Rolin)
The Fence
Great Milestones

Coming Attractions

An index to the reviews contained in this issue

DVD reviews

Action Sports Sex 2 (X-rated) p16
Action Sports Sex 3 (X-rated) p16
Affliction p3
Alien p1
The Alien Legacy p1
Alien Resurrection p1
Aliens p1
Alien³ p1
American Pie (X-rated) p16
Baaba Maal Live at the Royal Festival Hall p13
Barry Lyndon p4
The Base p9
Bataan p8
The Best of Horror DVD p11
The Black Pirate p7
Brazil p2
A Bright Shining Lie p8
Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things p11
Clerks p2
A Clockwork Orange p4
Country Comfort (X-rated) p16

(The Dentist) p11
The Devil's Rain p11
Dr. Strangelove p5
Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb p4
Fantastic Planet p10
For Love of Ivy p10
Frank Sinatra p12
Frank Sinatra A Man and His Music p12
Frank Sinatra A Man and His Music + Ella + Jobim p12
Frank Sinatra Francis Albert Sinatra Does His Thing p12
Frank Sinatra Ol' Blue Eyes Is Back p12
Frank Sinatra Sinatra in Concert at Royal Festival Hall p12
Frank Sinatra The Main Event p12
Full Metal Jacket p4
Funny Games p9
Gallipoli p8
Ghostbusters p2
Ghostbusters 2 p2
The Great Barrier Reef p13
The Great Rupert p6
The Greatest Places p13
Gunshy p9
Hall & Oates p12
Hamburger Hill p8
Hearst Castle • Building the Dream p13
Ike & Tina Turner p12
In Dreams p6
(Kept Husbands) p10
Killer's Kiss p4
The Killing p4
Kool & The Gang p12
(The Landlady) p11
(The Last Don) p7
(The Last Don II) p7
The Last Flight of Noah's Ark p10
(Leprechaun) p11
The Littlest Horse Thieves p6
Lola Montes p6
Lolita p4
Mallrats p2
Mario Puzo's The Last Don p7
Mario Puzo's The Last Don II p7
Master P MP Da Last Don The Movie p7
Men in War p8
(Millie) p10
The Most Dangerous Game p5
Mother's Boys p11
Mozart/Rossini p13
Mr. Ace p9
The North Avenue Irregulars p11
October Sky p6
(Of Human Bondage) p10
On Deadly Ground p11
Out for Justice p11

Paths of Glory p4
The Patriot p11
Pork Chop Hill p8
Pre-Code Hollywood The Risqué Years #1 Of Human Bondage · Kept Husbands · Millie p10
Raw #2 (X-rated) p16
Red Vibe Diaries Object of Desire (X-rated) p16
Robin Hood p7
Run Silent, Run Deep p8
The Sands of Iwo Jima p8
Search for the Great Sharks p13
The Secret Adventures of Tom Thumb p6
Sinatra Gold Collector's Edition p12
The Shining p4
The '60s p7
(Sometimes They Come Back) p11
Space Truckers sp9
Stanley Kubrick Collection p4
Stephen King's Storm of the Century p3
(Stephen King's Sometimes They Come Back) p11
Stepmom p5
(Storm of the Century) p3
Storm over Asia p7
Suddenly p12
Super Slide p13
Taboo 17 (X-rated) p16
Take the Money and Run p7
They Were Expendable p8
The Three Musketeers p7
Two Lost Worlds p10
2001: A Space Odyssey p4
Two Undercover Angels p10
The Untold Story. p9
Virus p3
Waking Ned Devine p3
The War of the Worlds p6
Yosemite Watersongs p13

LD Reviews

Air Force p15
Babylon 5 1.10: Legacies/A Voice in the Wilderness Part I p15
Babylon 5 1.11: A Voice in the Wilderness Part II/Babylon Squared p15
Babylon 5 1.12: The Quality of Mercy/Chrysalis p15
Babylon 5 2.0: Points of Departure/Revelations p15
Babylon 5 2.1: The Geometry of Shadows/A Distant Star p15
Babylon 5 2.2: The Long Dark/A Spider in the Web p15
The Dawn Patrol p15
The Last Starfighter p14
Objective, Burma! p15
October Sky p15
The Paris Concert for Amnesty International: The Struggle Continues... p15
Patch Adams p14
The Peacemaker p15
Saving Private Ryan p14

Seven Brides for Seven Brothers p14
Two-Lane Blacktop p14
Virus p15

Current Attractions

The following titles recently appeared for the first time:

DVD Releases

Aelita Queen of Mars (Image)
Affliction (Universal)
Algebra #1: The Standard Deviants (Cerebellum; did not appear on last month's *Coming Attractions* listing)
Alien Files (MTI)
Altius On Air Extreme Sports 2 (Pioneer)
Always (Universal)
And Then There Were None (VCI)
Aria (Image)
As You Like It (Image)
The Associate (Disney)
Baaba Maal: Live at the Royal Albert Hall (Rykodisc)
Baby Geniuses (Columbia TriStar)
Barney Let's Play School (Lyrick)
Barry Lyndon (Warner)
Basic Math #1: The Standard Deviants (Cerebellum; did not appear on last month's *Coming Attractions* listing)
Battlecade 1 (Image)
Battlecade 2 (Image)
Bed of Roses (New Line)
Best of MusikLaden Black Sabbath (Pioneer)
Best of MusikLaden Procol Harum (Pioneer)
Bill Monroe: Father of Bluegrass (Fox Lorber)
Blast from the Past (New Line)
Brazil (Criterion)
Bruckner Symphony No.8 (Image)
Brute Force (Image)
The Brute Man (Image)
Bye Bye Birdie (Columbia TriStar)
Captured (MTI)
The Car (Anchor Bay)
Carnal Crimes (Image)
Cartoons That Time Forgot Ub Iwerks Vol.1 (Image)
Cartoons That Time Forgot Ub Iwerks Vol.2 (Image)
Cat City (Image)
Central Station (Columbia TriStar)
Chariots of the Gods (VCI)
Chihuly over Venice (Criterion)

City Hall (Warner)
A Civil Action (Disney)
Clerks (Disney)
A Clockwork Orange (Warner)
Congo (Paramount)
Corey Hart: The Complete Aquarius Years 1983-1990 (Magada; did not appear on last month's
Coming Attractions listing)
Cry Uncle (Troma)
Dangerous Minds (Disney)
David & Lisa (Fox Lorber)
Deathtrap (Warner)
Don's Party (Fox Lorber)
Don't Do It (Image)
Don't Look in the Basement (VCI)
Double Platinum (Columbia TriStar)
Down on the Delta (Disney)
Dragon Ball Z Destruction (Pioneer)
Dragon Ball Z Doom (Pioneer)
Dragon Ball Z Immortals (Pioneer)
8mm (Columbia TriStar)
The Eternal Kiss of the Mummy (Trimark)
Extro 3 (Image)
Fall Time (Pioneer; did not appear on last month's *Coming Attractions* listing)
Farewell, My Lovely (Pioneer)
Felicity Lott in Recital (Image)
The Flying Serpent (Image)
For Hire (Pioneer)
The 47 Ronin Parts 1 & 2 (Image)
Full Metal Jacket (Warner)
Funeral (Fox Lorber)
Gallipoli (Paramount)
Gardens of the World with Audrey Hepburn (Ark; did not appear on last month's *Coming
Attractions* listing)
The General (Columbia TriStar)
Ghostbusters (Columbia TriStar)
Ghostbusters II (Columbia TriStar)
The Girl Next Door (Eaton; did not appear on last month's *Coming Attractions* listing)
Golfballs (Victory)
Gray's Anatomy (Fox Lorber)
The Happiest Millionaire (Anchor Bay)
The Happiest Millionaire Road Show Version (Anchor Bay)
Haydn the Creation (Image)
Heat (Warner)
Heaven Can Wait (Paramount)
Hillary and Jackie (PolyGram; did not appear on last month's *Coming Attractions* listing)
Human Condition II (Image)
Iain-Navi (Pioneer)
In Country (Warner)
In Love and War (New Line)
In Search of Dracula (Image)
The Indomitable Teddy Roosevelt (Image)
Into the Thin Air of Everest (Ark; did not appear on last month's *Coming Attractions* listing)
Jazz Scene USA: Cannonball Adderly & Teddy Edwards (Shanachi; did not appear on last month's
Coming Attractions listing)

Jerry Springer: Too Hot for TV! 2000 Welcome to the Millennium (Real)
Jimi Hendrix Live at Filmore East (Universal; did not appear on last month's *Coming Attractions*
listing)
Jimi Live at Woodstock (Universal; did not appear on last month's *Coming Attractions* listing)
Ju Dou (Pioneer)
Jungleground (Image)
Killer's Kiss (MGM)
The Killing (MGM)
The King and I (Warner)
King Kong (Paramount)
Lansky (HBO)
Lap Dancing (Image)
Laserblast (Full Moon)
The Last Flight of Noah's Ark (Anchor Bay)
The Late Great Planet Earth (VCI)
The Littlest Horse Thieves (Anchor Bay)
Little Voice (Disney)
Lolita (Warner; did not appear on last month's *Coming Attractions* listing)
Louise Brooks Looking for Lulu (Image)
Love after Love (Fox Lorber)
The Love Goddesses (Image)
Love Jones (New Line)
Majestic Journeys (Fox Lorber)
Mallrats (Universal)
The Mask of Dijon (Image)
Mass Extinctions (Simitar)
The Masseur (Image)
The Mighty (Disney)
Monkey Magic 2 Celestial Heaven (Pioneer)
Monsoon (Abrams; did not appear on last month's *Coming Attractions* listing)
Mozart/Rossini (Image)
Mr. Ace (Image)
Murder of Crows (Sterling)
Naked City (Image)
Netforce (Trimark)
Never Talk to Strangers (Columbia TriStar)
New Kids on the Block (Sony)
Night Caller from Outer Space (Image)
Noah's Ark (Artisan)
The North Avenue Irregulars (Anchor Bay)
The Nutthouse (Image)
Nymphoid Barbarian in Dinosaur Hell (Troma)
The Object of Beauty (Pioneer)
October Sky (Universal)
Over the Wire (Image)
Paths of Glory (MGM)
Payback (Paramount)
Petticoat Planet (Full Moon)
Phil Coulter A Touch of Tranquility (Shanachi; did not appear on last month's *Coming Attractions*
listing)
Physics #1: The Standard Deviants (Cerebellum; did not appear on last month's *Coming*
Attractions listing)
Playboy Best of Strip Search (Image)
Playboy Erotic Fantasies (Image)

Playboy Hot City Girls (Image)
Playboy Wet & Wild Hot Holidays (Image)
Pleasurecraft (Full Moon)
Pokémon Psi Surprise (Pioneer)
Pokémon Seaside Pikachu (Pioneer)
Pre-Code Hollywood: The Risqué Years Of Human Bondage · Kept Husbands · Millie (Roan)
Private Obsession (Image)
The Professionals (Columbia TriStar)
Project A-Ko (Image)
Psycho Killer (Elite; did not appear on last month's Coming Attractions listing)
Pushing Hands (Image)
Ready to Wear (Disney)
Red Cherry (Fox Lorber)
The Return of the Pink Panther (Artisan)
Revolutionary Girl Utena (Central Park)
Rock-A-Doodle (HBO)
Rushmore (Disney)
School Ties (Paramount)
Schubert: Die Winterreise (Image)
Serial Mom (HBO)
She's All That (Disney)
The Shining (Warner)
Sinatra Gold Collector's Edition (Triton)
Somewhere over the Rainbow: Harold Arlen (Fox Lorber)
Sorority Babes Slime Bowl (Full Moon)
Soul Taker (Image)
South Central (Warner)
Space Ace (Delos)
Spanish #1: The Standard Deviants (Cerebellum; did not appear on last month's *Coming Attractions* listing)
Spice Naughty Amateur Home Video (Image)
Spoiler (York; did not appear on last month's *Coming Attractions* listing)
Spy Hard (Disney)
Still Crazy (Columbia TriStar)
Stir Crazy (Columbia TriStar)
Stoned Age (Trimark)
Striptease (Warner)
Sublime: Stories, Tales, Lies & Exaggerations (Music Video Dist.; did not appear on last month's *Coming Attractions* listing)
Super Slide (Image)
Supreme Sanction (Sterling)
Tarzan and the Lost City (Warner)
Teenage Space Vampires (Full Moon)
Terror of Frankenstein (Image)
Tetsuo 2: Body Hammer (Rykodisc)
Texas Chainsaw Massacre The Next Generation (Columbia TriStar)
Things to Do in Denver When You're Dead (Disney)
36 Fillette (Fox Lorber)
Timegate: Tales of Saddle Tramps (Full Moon)
Tokyo Fist (Rykodisc)
Top Dog (Artisan)
Tourist Trap (Full Moon)
Trigger Effect (Universal)
True Friends (MTI)

Twentieth Century Blues: The Songs of Noel Coward (Image)
Two Lost Worlds (Image)
An Unlikely Angel (Image)
Varsity Blues (Paramount)
Velocity 1, 2, 3 (Simitar)
VH1 Pop-Up Videos 80's (Sony)
Virus (Universal)
Wind (Simitar)
Wing Commander (Fox)
Wings of JSDF Raptors (Pioneer)
Witchcraft 10 (MacDaddy)
Witchhouse (Full Moon)
Witness (Paramount)
Xanadu (Universal)
Yosemite Watersong (Image)
Your Friends and Neighbors (PolyGram)

LD Releases

All through the Night (MGM)
Blast from the Past (Image)
A Civil Action (Disney)
Enemy of the State (Disney)
Fandango (Warner)
First Time Felon (HBO)
Kiss or Kill (Universal)
The Last Starfighter (Universal)
Little Voice (Disney)
National Lampoon's Animal House (Universal collector's)
October Country (Universal)
Paris Concert for Amnesty International (Image)
Patch Adams (Universal)
The Peacemaker (DreamWorks)
Psycho (Universal)
Rushmore (Disney)
Saving Private Ryan (DreamWorks)
Seven Brides for Seven Brothers (MGM collector's)
She's All That (Disney)
A Simple Plan (Paramount)
Star Trek Deep Space Nine · Episode 43 Crossover Episode 44 The Collaborator (Paramount)
Star Trek Deep Space Nine · Episode 45 Tribunal Episode 46 The Jem Hadar (Paramount)
Star Trek Deep Space Nine · Episode 47 The Search, Part I Episode 48 The Search, Part II
(Paramount)
Star Trek Deep Space Nine · Episode 49 the House of Quark Episode 50 Equilibrium (Paramount)
V (Warner)
V The Final Battle (Warner)
Virus (Universal)