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Books: Alex Grecian's The Yard Measures Up as Satisfying Mystery

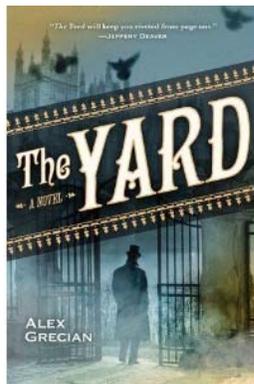
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The Yard by Alex Grecian

Putnam; May 29, 2012

Jack The Ripper has disappeared into the mist of Victorian London. But Scotland Yard -- shamed and embarrassed over its failure to catch the taunting madman -- must carry on. In this debut novel by comic book author Alex Grecian (Proof), the Yard is an absorbing launch pad for a new series built around the detectives who are finding their way in the new business of criminology.

Fingerprinting, saving evidence, comparing notes from different crimes to see if there's a pattern, even something as simple as working in pairs are all novel, untested ideas tried out for the first time.

Our heroes include the new kid on the staff, Walter Day; a passionate journeyman cop named Hammersmith and the doctor who has taken it upon himself to be a de facto medical examiner. At the top is Colonel Sir Edward Bradford, the one-armed man leading his team with grim humor and determined insight into both his men and the dangerous new strain of violent, unhinged murderers spawned by the festering atmosphere of the most crowded city in the world.

They're all focused on the brutal killing of one of their own -- a detective found dismembered and crammed into a piece of luggage at a train station. But other crimes soon weave their way into the narrative, from a little boy abducted by an unhinged lunatic to a pair of slightly mad prostitutes getting their revenge on the police who couldn't capture Jack The Ripper. Grecian's world is also populated by

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the colorful denizens of the streets from a lumbering gentle giant who dances to amuse to Blackleg, a burglar who can't look away when he stumbles across an innocent boy left stuffed in a chimney to die.

Caleb Carr's *The Alienist* is an obvious comparison, thanks to *The Yard's* attention to detail and mix of historical facts and vivid fictional creations. It's great fun, despite a dramatically over-stuffed finale. Grecian's debut is the promising start of a new series and should be one of the most acclaimed and popular mysteries of the year.

BOOKS I'VE READ SO FAR IN 2012

1. The Underneath by Kathi Appelt ***
2. Jack Holmes and His Friend by Edmund White ***
3. The Last Unicorn by Peter S. Beagle **
4. Fun Home by Alison Bechdel ***
5. Death Walks In Eastrepp by Francis Beeding ***
6. Lumious Airplanes by Paul La Farge ***/
7. The Professionals by Owen Laukkanen ** 1/2
8. Unterzakhn by Leela Corman **
9. The Child Who by Simon Lelic ***
10. Hinterland by Caroline Brothers ***
11. The Yard by Alex Grecian *** 1/2
12. The Alienist by Caleb Carr ***
13. On The Wings Of Heroes by Richard Peck *** 1/2
14. A Princess Of Mars by Edgar Rice Burroughs *
15. The Gods Of Mars by Edgar Rice Burroughs **
16. The Warlord Of Mars by Edgar Rice Burroughs ** 1/2
17. Undefeated: America's Heroic Fight For Bataan and Corregidor by Bill Sloan ** 1/2
18. Stoner by John Williams ****
19. The Sisters Brothers by Patrick DeWitt *** 1/2
20. The 500 by Matthew Quirk **
21. The Age Of Innocence by Edith Wharton ****
22. The Alienist by Caleb Carr ***\
23. Crispin: The Cross of Lead by Avi **
24. Rogue Male by Geoffrey Household ***
25. The Perks Of Being A Wallflower by Stephen Chbosky **
26. Traitor's Gate by Avi ** 1/2
27. Cogan's Trade by George V. Higgins ***
28. 2312 by Kim Stanley Robinson *** 1/2
29. The Twelve Rooms Of The Nile by Enid Shomer ** 1/2
30. Bring Up The Bodies by Hilary Mantel *** 1/2
31. In One Person by John Irving **
32. A Million Heavens by John Brandon ***
33. The Case Of The Deadly Butter Chicken by Tarquin Hall ***
34. Seward: Lincoln's Indispensable Man by Walter Stahr *** 1/2
35. The Kings of Cool by Don Winslow ***
36. The Case of The Missing Servant by Tarquin Hall ***
37. Savages by Don Winslow ***

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Note: Michael Giltz is provided with free galleys and/or final copies of books to consider for review.

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August 29, 2012

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NYMF 2012 Roundup #5: The Lindbergh Baby Kidnapping and the Lure of Eternal Youth

Posted: 07/25/2012 12:11 pm

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This is the fifth in a series of roundups covering shows appearing in the *New York Musical Theatre Festival*, or *NYMF*. Every year I attend as many shows as I can and invariably see one or two that will rank among the best of the year, as well as discovering some new talented performers and behind the scenes artists I'll want to keep an eye on in future productions. Go to the *NYMF* website for more info on inexpensive tickets.

BABY CASE ** 1/2 out of ****
FOREVERMAN * 1/2 out of *****

BABY CASE ** 1/2 out of ****
SIGNATURE THEATRE

This is perhaps the most ambitious and potentially most exciting show I've seen at NYMF this year. It's clearly in the vein of Kander and Ebb, a cynical, smart, unexpected tale that bites off quite a bit -- media frenzy, prejudice, celebrity and much more. It will be fascinating to see if this show develops further. Creator [Michael Ogborn](#) has been working on it for a decade and the passion and care shows.

It centers on the kidnapping of the baby of Anne and Charles Lindbergh, one of the most famous couples in the world because of his trans-atlantic flight. The baby was ultimately found dead (hello, Kander and Ebb, building a musical around the death of a baby!) and an immigrant carpenter Bruno Hauptmann was found guilty and executed in what was dubbed "the trial of the century" back in the 1930s.

The musical *Chicago* looms large over this effort, with their similar takes on the frenzy surrounding crimes that capture the public imagination. Act One focuses on the crime and Act Two on the trial, with caustic takes on the media sprinkled throughout, whether it's the reporters and photographers that won't even leave the Lindbergh couple alone on their honeymoon or the even more vulture-ish people who snap photos of the baby's corpse and others who pretend to hawk locks of the baby's hair for profit.

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In a smart bit of double casting, Will Reynolds plays both Charles Lindbergh and Bruno Hauptmann, while Anika Larsen plays both Anne Morrow Lindbergh and Anna Hauptmann. Interestingly, Reynolds has more success with the passionately defensive Hauptmann than the tight-lipped Lindbergh while Larsen enjoys her best moments as the stolid Mrs. Lindbergh rather than the wife who spends her life protesting her husband's innocence.

Michael Thomas Holmes has great fun as the ringmaster Walter Winchell, setting up the story and informing us of developments (and the general public opinion) in the rat-a-tat manner of a newsman. For me, the emotional high point was Hannah Elless as reporter Adela St. Johns describing Anne Lindbergh on the day of her testimony in "Hour Of Gold" (a song named after Lindbergh's memoir). Their duet has the wrenching emotional power you want and expect, anchoring a story that often has razzle dazzle but not always the undercurrent of genuine heart that such a story needs to make us care.

Indeed, the many songs of cynicism begin to blend a bit, with one piece after another mocking the media frenzy that erupted around the case. Other times, the much-needed heart is attempted but not reached, such as Melissa van der Schyff's passionate delivery of "Dirty Dishes," a song by a servant badgered by the police and the media which stretches a modest image to the breaking point.

The set and costume design by Martin Lopez is top-notch, with stacks of newspapers cleverly used in numerous ways throughout, always reminding us that however painful the story, at least it sells papers. Ditto the lighting by Zach Blane and the graphic design by Ben Spriggs. Above all, the choreography by Warren Adams and the sterling direction by Jeremy Dobrich take a large cast and a complicated tale and deliver it with pizzazz.

The performance I saw was unfortunately plagued with audio problems throughout. And now that I know it's been in development for a decade, I'm not certain they're ready to somehow tighten and focus the story even more, uncovering the beating heart that lies at its center without losing the caustic take on the media that drives it along.

Certainly, the umpteenth scene of corruption in "Lawsuit Daddy" felt like overkill, as fun as it was for the actors to perform. And the title is a bother throughout. I've no idea what rights are at issue, but surely a better title than *Baby Case* could be found. It also proves a weak chorus in the title song. Many other songs, however, are strong, and the sense that something needs to be focused more tightly is a common complaint of Kander and Ebb shows... the first time around. And like most Kander and Ebb shows, I'd love the chance to see *Baby Case* -- whatever it's called -- again. It's an intelligent, sometimes truly exciting piece of theater. If it falls short in some ways, that's because it attempts so very much.

FOREVERMAN * 1/2 out of ****
THE PEARL ON 42 ST.

Fans of Frank Wildhorn should rush to catch *Foreverman*, a new musical very much in the vein of *Jekyll and Hyde* and the like. Brett M. Boles wrote the book, music and lyrics and while his tale is rooted in the romantic potboilers of Robert Louis Stevenson and the like, at least he came up with an original story: two young men, one wealthy and one poor, become fast friends, discover an elixir that can offer eternal youth and then bitterly part ways over the love of a woman. Their struggles to achieve happiness and true love will take hundreds of years to reach its climax.

Foreverman is handsomely mounted with a serviceable scenic design by John McDermott, so-so projections by Mark Costello and excellent costumes by Anne Liberman and Barry Doss. Those clothes do the heavy lifting when it comes to setting the period and the high adventure mood of a costumer. The cast is strong-voiced and does their best while director Stephen Nachamie ably keeps this ambitious work focused and moving along.

Unfortunately, Boles is akin to Wildhorn in spirit and deed. His book takes forever to get going and continually must stop and explain itself. Plot twists are downright silly -- a kiss immediately reawakens one character's suppressed memories of a past life? Sure, you'd go with it in some context but not here. The cuts back and forth between centuries in the first act feel random and unnecessary. And most damning of all, the songs are filled with tepid lyrics that all the passion in the world can't ignite.

"You're a sun and I'm a shooting star" is perhaps a fine distinction between a woman cursed to die young and a man who will live forever. But the shooting star image is repeated again and again, 'til you're sick of it. Pedestrian rhymes abound. "She's a mystery and a danger/ Now she's here to stay" or "Fiona/ The world bursts into blossom at the sound of her name" or "I know this isn't what we planned/The way we thought our lives would go/ What stranger's footprints in the sand/ Have caused an elemental chain reaction" or "It's madly taunting and strangely haunting" and so on. Like the book, the lyrics spend a great deal of time simply spelling out what is going on. By the fourth or fifth explanation that they've discovered an elixir that grants eternal life etc. etc. your attention begins to flag.

Further, the suspense and drama of those hundreds of years is rather mild. [SPOILER} Our two heroes simply avoid each other for that entire time, meet up again unexpectedly and then rather confusingly make amends in a finale that left me a tad confused as to exactly what noble adventure they're embarking



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The 'Dumbest Drug Law'
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on together. [END SPOILER}

Despite this, the cast commits themselves wholly to the project with admirable passion. Kelly McCormick and Glory Crampton are the love interests, pretty and passionate when called for. In the small role of Lord Fairwright, Nat Chandler has weight and actually makes a scene of betrayal carry the night's lone source of emotion. Larry Cahn and Karen Elliott as two servants enjoy the brief bit of humor in the piece when they embark on a romance. Adam Monley is the voice of reason as the poor but resolute Jack Mercer. And as Will Timeson (get it?), Omar Lopez-Cepero cuts a dashing romantic figure and has the voice for this sort of popera endeavor. It's a pity he and the rest of the cast don't have songs and story more worthy of their talent.

THE THEATER SEASON 2012-2013 (on a four star scale)

As You Like it (Shakespeare In The Park w Lily Rabe) ****

Chimichangas And Zolof *

*Closer Than Ever****

Cock ** 1/2

Harvey with Jim Parsons *

My Children! My Africa! ****

*Once On This Island****

Potted Potter *

Storefront Church ** 1/2

*Title And Deed****

Picture Incomplete (NYMF) **

Flambe Dreams (NYMF) **

Rio (NYMF) **

The Two Month Rule (NYMF) *

Trouble (NYMF) ** 1/2

Stealing Time (NYMF) **

Requiem For A Lost Girl (NYMF) ** 1/2

Re-Animator The Musical (NYMF) ***

Baby Case (NYMF) ** 1/2

How Deep Is The Ocean (NYMF) ** 1/2

Central Avenue Breakdown (NYMF) ***

Foreverman * 1/2

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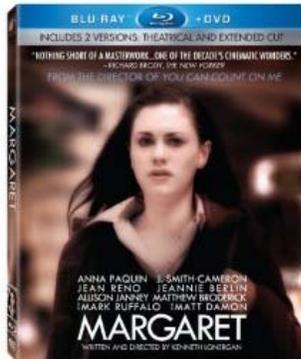
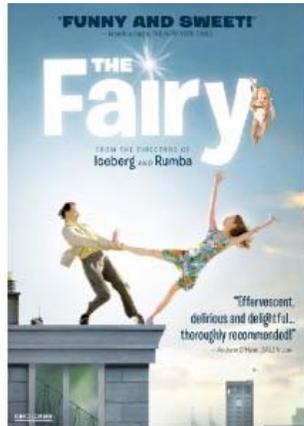


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FOOTNOTE (\$35.99 BluRay; Sony Pictures Classics)

THE DEEP BLUE SEA (\$38.94 BluRay; Music Box)

THE FAIRY (\$29.95 DVD; Kino Lorber)

MARGARET (\$39.99 BluRay; Fox) -- Seriously, has there ever been a better time to be a movie buff? Even if you're not wowed by Hollywood's current blockbusters, you have the entire history of cinema virtually at your fingertips. Art house and foreign films get wider distribution than ever via independent chains, streaming and on-demand. And even if you live in a city where tiny but acclaimed movies are shown and still don't get to the theater in time (hey, nobody's perfect) you still get to see virtually every well-reviewed film on DVD, BluRay or some other online source. A gal in Montana can legitimately put out a diverse, sophisticated best of the year list as knowing and smart and on-the-money as every major film critic. Even better, unlike most major film critics, she doesn't have to wade through a big chunk of clearly inferior studio releases. She can just wait for the critical consensus and favorite taste-makers to point her towards the movies worth checking out. So now the onus is on movie fans.

You have no excuse not to rent or buy or stream these four films if you haven't seen them already. Three of them are on my shortlist for the best films of 2012 and the fourth is one I'm eagerly anticipating.

Footnote is a very funny drama perfect for anyone who knows the world of academia or office politics. At its heart it is a movie about fathers and sons. Both are scholars. The father is a dutiful student, very good at the actual work of scholarship (we think) but terrible at playing the games that curry favor, get you on boards and win grants and the like. His son is the exact opposite, a glib glad-hander who appears on television as a talking head. When the father finally receives a coveted recognition of his body of work, it's a deeply moving moment -- until the son discovers, to his horror, that the award was meant for him,



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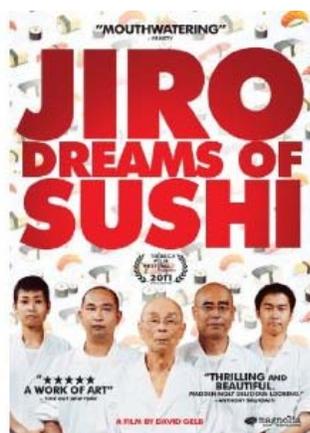


[Samuel L. Jackson's Shocking Tweets About Isaac](#)

not his dad, and the officials who messed up want him to break the news to his father. This is a very intelligent film, wittily shot like an action film (it sounds silly but works quite well) with all sorts of nods to scholarship, with notes popping up on screen and so on. Not to be missed.

The Deep Blue Sea is a beautifully crafted film about doomed love during World War II. It's based on the play by Terence Ratigan and who better to savor that repressed era than director Terence Davies, who truly makes this work his own. Rachel Weisz is especially good as the heroine but then Davies always shows his leading ladies in the best light. This is filmmaking for adults.

The Fairy is a frothy bit of silliness from a team that revels in silent movie antics, setting up slapstick scenes of silliness that are distinctly their own but nod to the glory days of Keaton and Tati. The gentle romance revolves around a seaside hotel, a fairy, shoplifters and more. They still haven't matched the purity of their debut *L'Iceberg*, but this is a solid, charming confection. Finally, there's *Margaret*. I have no excuse for missing the movie in theaters. But knowing there was a director's cut out there did make me long to see that version of Kenneth Lonergan's troubled but acclaimed/damned drama. Given his great work in plays and movies, anything by Lonergan will be must-see viewing for years to come. With this BluRay, we get a chance to view either the theatrical version or Lonergan's preferred cut. Let the cult-status myth-making begin!



JULIA CHILD'S FRENCH CLASSICS (\$19.99; PBS Direct)

JIRO DREAMS OF SUSHI (\$26.98; Magnolia) -- In the last few years, I've fallen in love with Julia Child and her cooking shows. The color episodes get replayed again and again on TV, so I think I've seen just about all of them. She's such a fun, winning personality that even reruns are fun. But the black and white episodes are rarely shown, as if fans of Child couldn't handle black and white, which is just silly. Here, finally, is a DVD containing three hours of cooking segments. Some of the equipment used is dated and it would have been nice for a DVD extra to contain the actual recipes, but you can find them online. It's a good value such as it is. But why put out these episodes piecemeal? Surely any fans of Child who would want some of her black and white episodes would want all of them? All the ones available should be slapped on a no-frills boxed set and be made available. Otherwise they're just sitting in a vault somewhere and what's the point of that? in other words, a second helping of Child, please.

Jiro is like many other documentaries in this era where the tools to make a documentary film are so readily available. As a film, it's not terribly interesting. But if you're intrigued by the topic -- a profile of one of the top sushi chefs in the world, this one a man who operates out of a modest restaurant located in a subway station in Tokyo -- you'll find this worth your time.



WATCH: Raging Grannies Have Some Words For Todd Akin



Fact-Checking '2016 Obama's America'

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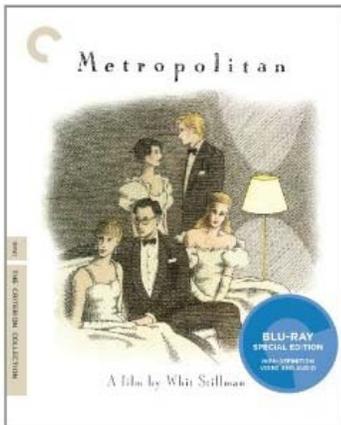
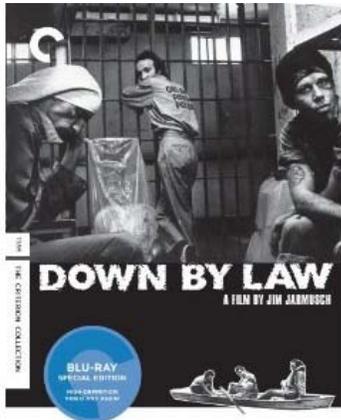
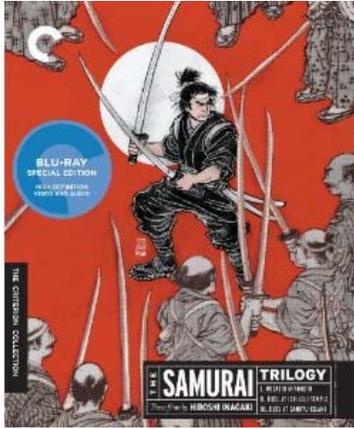
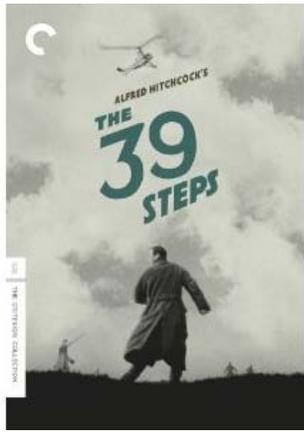


Television



Germany

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THE 39 STEPS (\$29.95 DVD; Criterion)

THE SAMURAI TRILOGY (\$39.95 BluRay; Criterion)

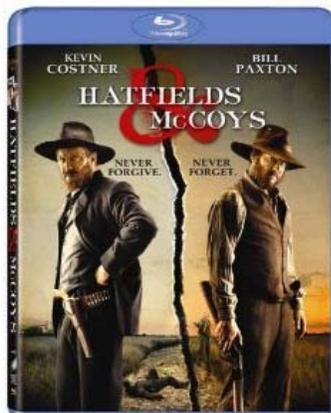
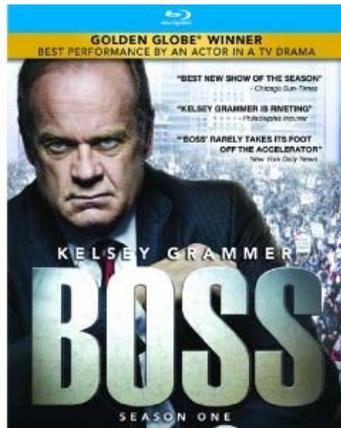
DOWN BY LAW (\$39.95 BluRay; Criterion)

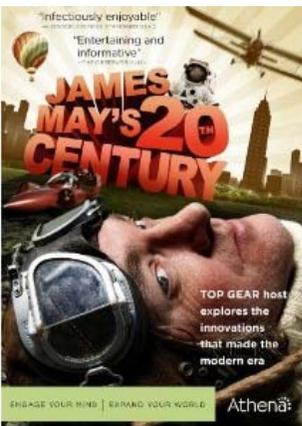
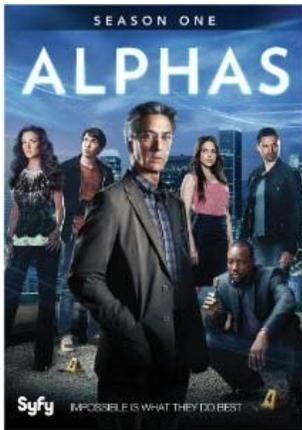
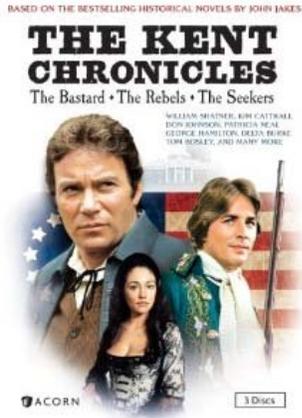
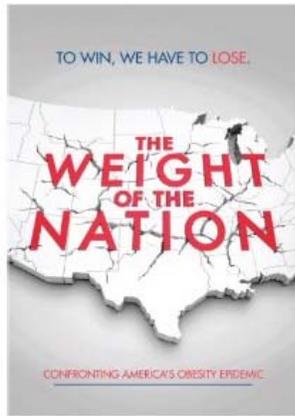
METROPOLITAN (\$39.95 BluRay; Criterion) -- Alfred Hitchcock is one of the most famous and successful directors in history and *The 39 Steps* is the movie that defined him forever. It's a grand adventure rather loosely based on the spy/adventure novel by John Buchan. What day of the week am I writing this? Well, it's Tuesday, so that means this is my favorite Hitchcock film of all time. On Wednesdays it's *Rear Window*. On Thursdays, it's his other British gem *The Lady Vanishes*. On Friday, it's *Shadow Of A Doubt* (Hitch's favorite so I'm just trying to curry favor). Oddly, it's a safe bet that most people haven't seen the box office hit *The 39 Steps*. Do watch it and you'll suddenly realize where the inspiration for countless movies you have seen sprang from. And there's no safer place to start than a DVD release from Criterion, which features an essay by Hitchcock expert David Cairns, TV interviews, excerpts from Truffaut's audio interviews with the director, a documentary about his British years and more, including my favorite -- a radio play version starring Robert Montgomery and Ida Lupino.

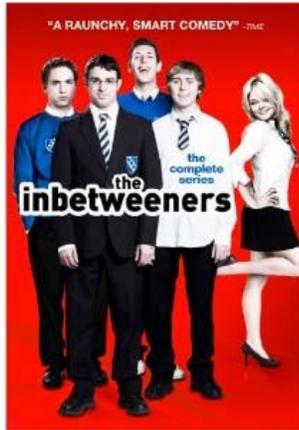
The Samurai Trilogy is a step below the true classic samurai films, but it's great fun and terrific to have in this good-looking, more compact BluRay edition. Toshiro Mifune stars as the samurai, delivering his usual full-bodied performance that's more nuanced than the potboiler novel it's based upon. Any fans of westerns and samurai films should dive in.

Down By Law is the movie that made clear Jim Jarmusch was in it for the long haul. *Stranger Than Paradise* was an oddball movie that might have been a one-off fluke. *Down By Law* showed Jarmusch was a rich and interesting filmmaker who would have a long career ahead of him. Among the usual extras are recordings of phone conversations between Jarmusch and his leads, including Tom Waits. Fans of extras know that technical people like the DP and composer often are the most informative and unguarded so they'll seek out the Robby Muller interview from 2002.

Finally, Whit Stillman is not enjoying a comeback with his latest release *Damsels In Distress*, but he has remained true to his unique sensibility. That's on full display in his utterly assured debut *Metropolitan*, the arch comedy of manners that made him an instant success. The modest extras include an audio commentary and outtakes of scenes and alternate casting. The movie has grown in my estimation over the years and this edition reinforces that.







BOSS SEASON ONE (\$39.97 BluRay; Lionsgate)

HATFIELDS & MCCOYS (\$55.99 BluRay; Sony)

THE WEIGHT OF THE NATION (\$19.97 DVD; HBO)

THE KENT CHRONICLES (\$59.99 DVD; Acorn)

ALPHAS SEASON ONE (\$44.98 DVD; Universal/SyFy)

JAMES MAY'S 20TH CENTURY (\$59.99 DVD; Athena)

THE IN-BETWEENERS COMPLETE SERIES (\$39.98 DVD; EOne) -- One of the more egregious oversights in the Emmy nominations was Kelsey Grammer not getting a best actor nod for *Boss* Season One as a corrupt mayor. The proof is right here. (Who would I take off the list to make room for him? Jonn Hamm or Michael C. Hall.)

Hatfields & McCoys got a little repetitive in the feuding, but I love a western and America loved this miniseries, one of cable's biggest hits of all time.

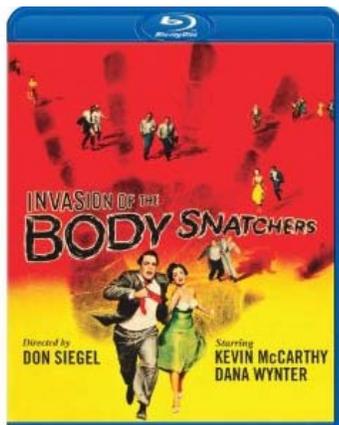
HBO has done a great job trying to bring the crisis of obesity into the spotlight via this miniseries *The Weight of the Nation* and all the other programming and outreaches that surrounded it. This set contains the four part series and more than four hours of extras, one time where piling on the content is OK.

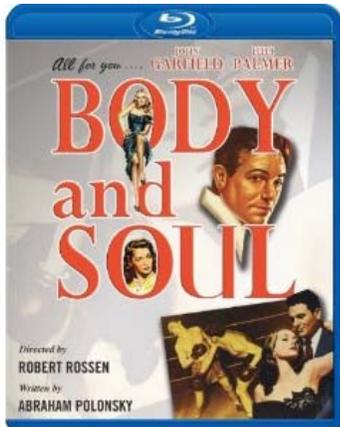
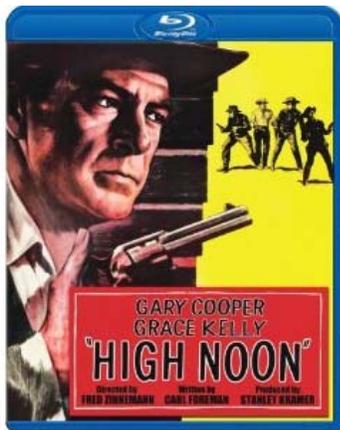
The Kent Chronicles combines three cheesy miniseries from the late 1970s based on the sprawling romantic epics by John Jakes. They haven't aged well in the least but it's nice to see all three in one set.

My friend Geoff Boucher at the [LA Times blog Hero Complex](#) is crazy about the SyFy show *Alphas*. That's good enough for me and it should be good enough for you. If this is your genre, this show is worth giving a look.

James May is famous in the UK for his cheeky car show *Top Gear*. Here on *James May's 20th Century*, he makes history fun for people who get queasy at the sight of dates and timelines and men in powdered wigs. It's good for parents and kids but will hopefully spur them on to more. There's also a three hour bonus program called *James May's Big Ideas*.

Finally, *The In-Betweeners* is a show about lads in the UK that probably seems smarter than it is because of their accents. It captures high school with a *Skins*-like maturity and the series has already made the leap to feature film with a huge hit movie in the UK.





INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS (\$29.95 BluRay; Olive Films/Paramount)

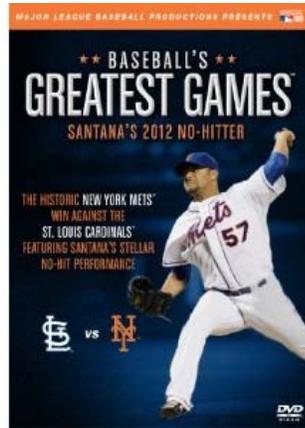
HIGH NOON (\$29.95 BluRay; Olive Films/Paramount)

BODY AND SOUL (\$29.95 BluRay; Olive Films/Paramount)

FORCE OF EVIL (\$29.95 BluRay; Olive Films/Paramount) -- Smaller companies rescuing classic films

can't get any credit. Of course, they don't have the finances to do a full restoration of movies, no matter how much the movie needs or deserves it. They also can't afford to create lots of extras. Then they need to charge a fair price because these movies aren't going to sell at the level of the latest Adam Sandler comedy. So here are four "bare bones" DVD releases of four genuine classics. I personally don't care that much for extras so I don't miss them, but others do. Two of the films look terrific. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* literally blew me away when I saw it for the first time at Film Forum a few years ago. I was hoping for a good B movie, a great sci-fi flick. But I saw a great film, period. It's clearly a landmark work and one of the best of the 1950s and indeed of all time. *High Noon* has never done it for me, but this new BluRay edition looks very good and is the only one of the four to have an extra of note, namely a making-of documentary hosted by Leonard Maltin. The last two are just transfers of current prints onto BluRay. They won't blow you away but if you haven't seen these movies, you really should. Both star the pugnacious John Garfield. He plays a boxer in *Body* and a dirty lawyer in *Force of Evil*. Both were

written and the latter was also directed by the great Abraham Polonsky, whose career was curtailed by the blacklist. We'll never know what he might have created in his prime but these movies are a testament to his talent.



BASEBALL'S GREATEST GAMES: NEW YORK METS FIRST NO-HITTER (\$12.95 DVD; A&E/MLB) -- I'm lucky enough to get a lot of DVDs. And every once in a while I get sent one I know I can't keep. DVDs about the UK monarchy go to my mom, for example. And this DVD about the first no-hitter by a New York Mets pitcher is headed right to my friend Sam, a lifelong Mets fan. If it wasn't bad enough that the Mets had never had a no-hitter, Sam and other Mets fans had to endure the indignity of watching Mets pitchers head to other teams and THEN getting a no-hitter or a perfect game. Dwight Gooden did it for the New York Yankees, the bitter rival of the Mets. And David Cone threw a perfect game for the Yankees after his days with the Mets were over. Oh the horror. So here, finally, is the game where Johan Santana accomplished what seemed impossible: a no-hitter for the Mets. It's in the mail, Sam.

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