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### Michael Giltz

Freelance writer and raconteur  
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# DVDs: Aaron Johnson Kicks Ass in *Nowhere Boy*

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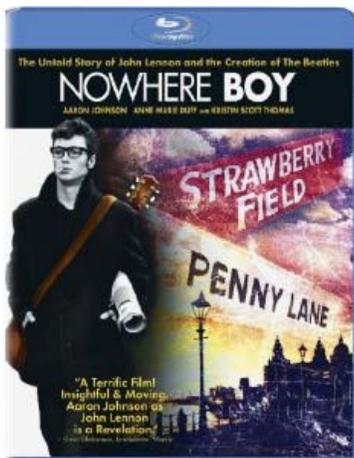
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It's a pretty dreadful idea: a biopic about John Lennon as a teenager. But the result -- *Nowhere Boy* (\$30.95 BluRay and \$28.95 regular DVD; Sony) -- is pretty darn good, if flawed. It shows sensitive young John (Aaron Johnson) living with his uptight aunt (Kristin Scott Thomas) but being increasingly drawn to his biological mother when she pops back into his life and encourages John's love of rock and roll (and

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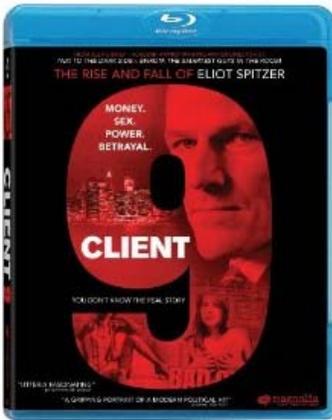
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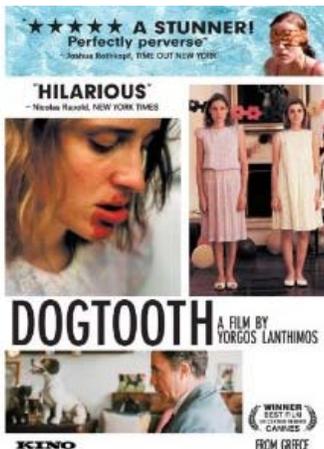
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playing hooky and general rebelliousness). As a massive Beatles fan, I'm rather surprised and pleased you can watch John as a teen in this, then follow the climax of this movie (where he heads to Germany) into *Backbeat*, which shows the band on that tour; then *I Want To Hold Your Hand* (the delightful Robert Zemeckis film about fans in America trying to get tickets to *The Ed Sullivan Show*); then John and Brian Epstein on their lost weekend in *The Hours and Times* and on and on. It's not surprising that the biggest band of all time should inspire such creativity; it's surprising that so many of these movies don't suck.

The big reason for *Nowhere Boy's* relative success (it is a bit heavy-handed in the psychology department) is lead Aaron Johnson. He does a great job of creating a character that stands on its own; look at how his cockiness masks insecurity or the scene where he's a bit freaked out (and thrilled) when his sexual come-ons finally get rewarded. Combine his subtle work here with his turn as a nerdy American kid in *Kick-Ass* and you have a one-two punch that shows Johnson is the real deal. Up next for him is *Albert Nobbs*, a period piece in Ireland and then (possibly) the big budget Bryan Singer film *Jack The Giant Killer* and then a *Kick-Ass* sequel. Here's hoping he keeps doing quality indie dramas while cashing his big paychecks. I think he's going to be around for a long time to come.



**CLIENT 9: THE RISE AND FALL OF ELIOT SPITZER** (\$29.98 BluRay and \$26.98 regular DVD; Magnolia) -- This solid documentary shows former New York governor Eliot Spitzer on the road to redemption, heading from this mea culpa straight to a talk show on CNN. But the real story here is not Spitzer's personal life or him facing what he did (sleep with hookers) with the appropriate acknowledgment. It's really the film's nailing of a conspiracy to take Spitzer down by powerful figures in Wall Street and in Albany and DC -- people who hated Spitzer not for the minor irony of being a crusader against prostitution and other crimes while committing one himself but for his effective crackdown on the far bigger crimes of Wall Street. You'll walk away convinced of several points. One, Spitzer deserved punishment for his crime but not being railroaded out of office. Two, Spitzer was targeted by people using law enforcement to exact political revenge. Three, if Spitzer had stayed in office, he might have been able to curtail, lessen or even prevent the Wall Street meltdown because he was so focused on the very ills that brought the country's economy to its knees. Well done.



**DOGTOOTH** (\$29.95; Kino) -- Surely one of the oddest films to ever be nominated for an Oscar for Best Foreign Film and for that I'm pleased. (By the way, shouldn't they change Foreign Film to International



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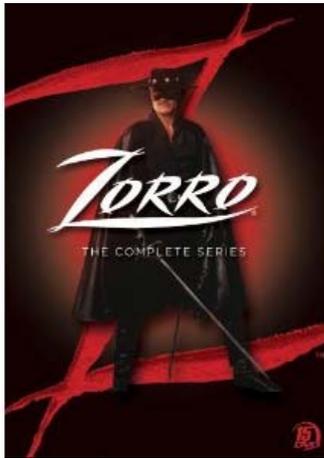
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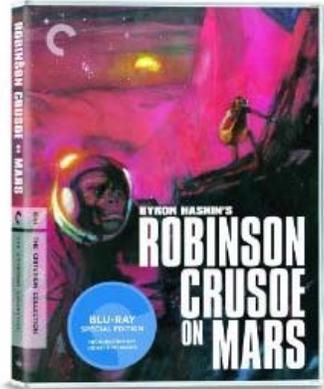
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Film?) Where to begin? Very simply, three teenagers are kept in complete isolation in their home by parents who lie to them about conditions in the outside world. As the teenage boy reaches puberty, the parents reluctantly let a tutor enter their enclosed universe to "tutor" the boy in love and problems ensue. They don't just lie to the kids about the outside being a vicious dystopian nightmare -- the parents also randomly substitute one word for another so that the kids have bizarre names for common objects and generally make your head spin. It's like Harold Pinter crossed with Pirandello or god knows what. It's playful, strange and definitely not for your average Joe who likes their movies offered up nice and easy. But for anyone willing to go on a ride, this Greek film is oddly compelling.



**ZORRO: THE COMPLETE SERIES** (\$99.95; A&E) -- I'm not quite sure why the swashbuckling hero Zorro is always aimed at kiddies on TV. The Antonio Banderas film showed it was ripe for a more adult (but still family friendly) take. But this series that ran on the Family Channel for 88 episodes in the early 1990s is aimed squarely at tykes and won't make anyone blanch who though the original Disney series was the cat's meow. You get a string of half hour episodes with so-so action and Zorro clambering about on the roofs of California towns, taunting the law and generally doing good. Only the very young and parents desperate for a Latino hero will be pleased. Some very good extras include a behind the scenes film (of course), a very welcome copy of the Douglas Fairbanks silent classic *The Mark of Zorro* (1920) and the first episode of a Zorro serial from 1939.



**ROBINSON CRUSOE ON MARS** (\$39.95 BluRay; Criterion) -- Criterion is such a stamp of quality that filmmakers must love to make it onto their list. By and large, that list is composed of stone cold classics. The marvelous Eclipse series is for more unexpected discoveries or secondary work from major directories. But every once in a while a cult film slips onto Criterion and you just know it's because someone there has a personal passion for it. That's certainly the case with *Robinson Crusoe On Mars*, a 1964 retelling of the Daniel Defoe classic via the Red Planet. Directed by special effects master Byron Haskin it is -- I'm sorry to say -- a minor work that doesn't deserve the honor. The acting is stiff, the companion Friday (who is conveniently humanoid and bizarrely dressed like an Egyptian) laughable and the special effects rudimentary. The main draw is the film's attention to technical detail that make it not so crazy when it comes to science. It's the sort of thing you might stumble on late at night and watch it fascination, but it's not actually good. It's certainly been given the usual Criterion treatment with audio commentary from today and interviews from the past, a good essay and even a music video created for the goofy song that Victor Lundin (Friday) wrote. I wish their passion had uncovered a gem, but not this time.

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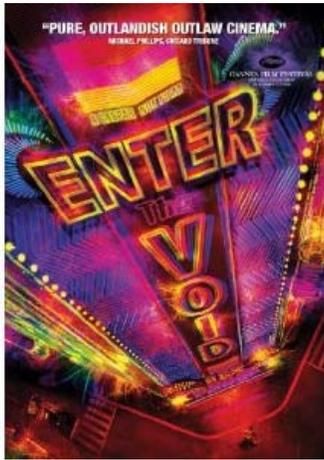
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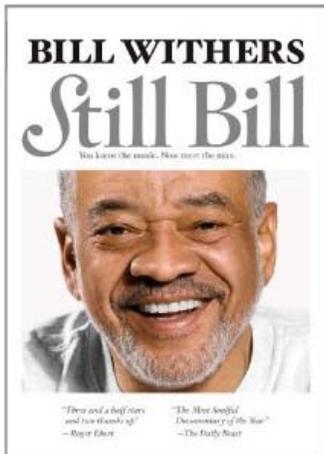
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**ENTER THE VOID** (\$24.98; IFC) -- Gasper Noe's follow-up to his terrific *Irreversible* is a nearly three hour glimpse at a young man who is shot by the police, arguably has his life flash before his eyes and then gets reincarnated as his sister's baby. It's technically proficient, but once you've seen a fly-over shot of Tokyo or rather once you've seen it eight or ten times the point of seeing it yet again begins to pale. Two orphaned siblings are at the heart of the story: a sister who strips at a Tokyo bar and a brother who is dealing drugs. At the very beginning of the film, overly aggressive police trying to bust him shoot the brother in the chest. We soon get loads of flashbacks showing how he became a dealer, seeing their parents die in a car crash, watching the brother sleep with a friend's mom to get money, getting drugs from a dealer and on and on, all while our hero refers endlessly to *The Tibetan Book Of The Dead* in order to prepare us for the reincarnation. The show-stopper here is certainly the shot of a penis entering a vagina...from the perspective of inside the vagina. You've never seen THAT before in a mainstream movie. To me, the film is so simple-minded that no camerawork can save it. Certainly the acting is affectless and flat, except for the brother and sister played as little children -- those young actors are very nuanced and good. It literally begins with death and ends with birth and I wanted to break out into "The Circle Of Life." A blank screen is thrown in towards the end for no apparent purpose other than to trick people into thinking the world is over. It began with a giant ENTER filling the screen and ended with a giant THE and then VOID. Surprising, it ain't. It's conceivable that the film could be more effective at half the length and it would certainly be easy to do since there is endless repetition here that doesn't give it any cumulative power. On the other hand, I stayed awake throughout the entire three hours and never felt antsy except on an intellectual level. It's certainly well-crafted; it's just not well-thought out.



Video



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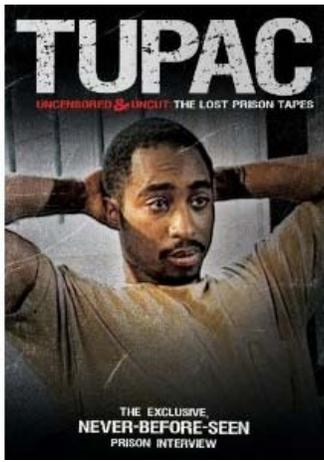


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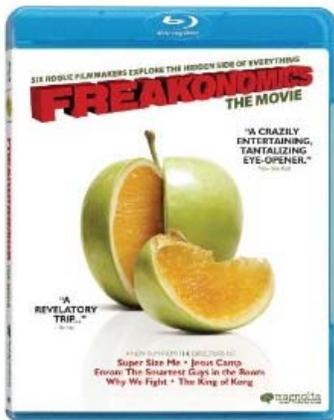




**BILL WITHERS: STILL BILL** (\$29.99; Docurama)/**TUPAC: THE LOST PRISON TAPES** (\$14.95; New Video) -- Bill Withers is a terrific artist with a string of classic albums to his credit that extend far beyond "Lean On Me" and "Ain't No Sunshine." I've attended tribute concerts to him where Withers sat in at the end, I've watched DVD extras on his album Just As I Am that showed a fascinatingly prickly man and I eagerly looked forward to this film that document where he was today and why he dropped out of the music rat race. He deserves a world class film. What he got was this loving, rudimentary, surface look at Withers as he dips tentatively back into the studio. It's fine for hardcore fans like myself but not particularly well done as a film. Also just out is Tupac: The Lost Prison Tapes, a 45 minute interview done with Tupac behind bars. Much of this has popped up on other documentaries or online but it's nice to have the whole interview unedited and in one place and the price is pretty cheap. With the endless stream of Tupac releases, this should have been an extra on some fuller documentary film but fans who want every scrap will want it.



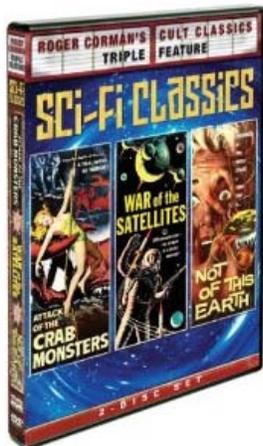
**SECRETARIAT** (\$39.99 BluRay or \$29.99 regular DVD; Disney) -- It's no Seabiscuit, but this family friendly fare from Disney is exactly as advertised with Diane Lane and John Malkovich delivering their turns as an independent and determined owner and her unconventional trainer with the skill you'd expect. No points for guessing the finale.



**FREAKONOMICS** (\$29.98 BluRay and \$26.98 regular DVD; Magnolia) -- A documentary film based on the nonfiction book that pulled together newspaper columns (and original content) illustrating unexpected economic angles on familiar questions? Huh? It seemed like the strangest idea since a movie about Facebook. But rather cleverly, this film is really a string of shorts by different filmmakers that treats individual pieces as stand-alone puzzles. Like any omnibus, the results are mixed but -- in this case -- generally entertaining.



**INSPECTOR BELLAMY** (\$24.98; IFC) -- The final film of French director Claude Chabrol is a shambling mess. Gerard Depardieu stars as a famous policeman on holiday who gets drawn into a potential murder thanks to a man's confused confession. The tone is light. Or dark. Or light and dark. Chabrol indulges in random camera movements and bizarre cuts out of a fear of repeating himself. Depardieu and everyone else seems thoroughly bored. The story is tiresome (thanks to his very annoying and drunken brother), misleading in an uninteresting way and has a resolution that is both hard to swallow and kind of laughable. Consider this a Gallic shrug of the shoulders.



**ROGER CORMAN'S CULT CLASSICS TRIPLE FEATURE: SCI-FI CLASSICS** (\$24.97; Shout) -- Heck, I wasn't even a drive-in fan back when they had drive-ins everywhere and B movies have never

been my thing. But Shout Factor packages these flicks so lovingly and Corman's titles and posters -- Attack Of The Crab Monsters, War Of The Satellites, Not Of This Earth -- do exactly what they were always meant to do: sucker you into spending 70 or so minutes waiting for the movie to deliver on their crazy premises. They rarely do, but then it's over and you move on to the next one. Shameless.



**THE SOCIAL NETWORK** (\$34.95 BluRay and \$28.96 regular DVD; Sony) -- The most acclaimed film of the year and now probably the underdog for Best Picture at the Academy Awards (which is more fun than being a dull fait accompli), *The Social Network* is ideal for DVD viewing. Great home theater systems can capture the subtlety of director David Fincher's work and the brilliance of the score by Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross (the one sure bet for the movie on Oscar night). It's subtle acting -- especially by a superb Jesse Eisenberg, Andrew Garfield and Justin Timberlake -- is worth a second and third look. And people who thought they didn't want to see a movie about Facebook can finally catch up. You get two audio commentary tracks (one with Fincher and the other with screenwriter Aaron Sorkin and the cast), as well as the usual wealth of extras.

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**MI-5 VOLUME 8** (\$39.98; BBC) -- This British spy show proves the UK is thoroughly up-to-the-minute when it comes to frantic editing and splashy action scenes that would make 24 proud. Unfortunately, that's become the de facto approach of a lot of British TV, even period films. But don't blame them. This season revolves around an elaborate conspiracy including Irag, missing uranium (still?) and an MI-5 alumni who can't be trusted.

**WHICH WAY HOME** (\$29.95; Docurama) -- Fans of the terrific foreign film *Sin Nombre* should check out this documentary about real-life kids from Mexico and Central America who ride the rails in hope of making it to a new life in the US.

**BURIED** (\$29.95 BluRay; LionsGate) -- Ryan Reynolds is buried alive and doesn't know why. Thank God he has a cell phone. And reception? Meanwhile, I can't get reception standing on a street corner with the phone held up as high as possible. This thriller about an American contractor in Iraq would have been ideal as a 22 minute episode of *The Twilight Zone*. But it's painfully stretched out to feature length and it shows.

**MAN IN A SUITCASE** (\$59.99; Acorn) -- A Cold War spy-for-hire series with Richard Branford stuck in Europe and forced to hire himself out to shady figures while trying to prove his innocence of US authorities. Ran for one season with a total of 30 episodes. This contains the first 15 hour-long episodes. Quite pricey for half a season of a pretty obscure show but not bad and the theme song is a keeper.

**JACK GOES BOATING** (\$39.99 BluRay or \$29.98 regular DVD; Anchor Bay) -- Philip Seymour Hoffman makes a promising directorial debut with his adaptation of the play by Bob Glauhini. Hoffman stars as a lonely soul trying awkwardly to date Amy Ryan. Fellow stage vets John Ortiz and Daphne Rubin-Vega are the friends who try to encourage him even as their relationship falls apart. The dialogue has a theatrical feel that the film can never overcome, despite Hoffman's many visual flourishes that open up the story nicely. And it becomes claustrophobic as a dinner party scene that surely worked well onstage just feels stifling and artificial.

**SHAUN THE SHEEP: SPRING SHENA-A-ANIGANS** (\$14.98; Lionsgate/Hit) -- This franchise from creator Nick Park is clearly not at the same level as *Wallace & Gromit*. But it is amusing and decently done. So if they want to turn out a bunch of episodes while laboring over the latest *W&G*, that's fine by me. Surely if anyone deserves a money-maker, it's Park.

**WISH ME LUCK SERIES 2** (\$39.99; Acorn) -- More derring-do behind enemy lines for women in WW II in this series from the late 1980s. Since each of the three seasons often includes new recruits, you can never rest easy that anyone will survive. Quite fun.

**SANTA SANGRE** (\$29.98; Severin) -- I'm just not a fan of Alejandro Jodorowsky, the madman behind *El Topo* and *The Holy Mountain*, the sort of films even John Waters might consider a little wacky. But for those who love his work or want to check it out, this reissue of his 1989 circus film is lovingly presented with loads of extras including an elaborate making-of, a UK documentary, multiple interviews, a documentary on the real-life inspiration for the film and more. Gloriously over-stuffed, just like his movies.

**SCOOPY-DOO! MYSTERY INCORPORATED** (\$14.98; Warner Bros.) -- The new reboot of *Scooby-Doo!* harkens back to the original rather nicely, but with an ongoing mystery and -- in this case -- Velma having a thing for Shaggy. You mean she's not gay? OK, maybe not but this is one romance too far. Finally, the season contains just 13 episodes so parceling out four to a volume is just annoying in every way.

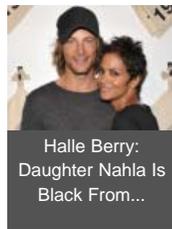
**PUPPETS WHO KILL: THE BEST OF SEASON 3 AND 4** (\$19.95; VSC) -- A halfway house for criminally insane puppets? Either you're in or you're out after that description. And if you like *The League Of Gentlemen* and *Kids In The Hall* (but darker), you should give it a whirl.

*Thanks for reading. Michael Giltz is the cohost of Showbiz Sandbox, a weekly pop culture podcast that reveals the industry take on entertainment news of the day and features top journalists and opinion makers as guests. It's available free on iTunes. Visit Michael Giltz at his website and his daily blog. Download his podcast of celebrity interviews and his radio show, also called Popsurfing and also available for free on iTunes. Link to him on Netflix and gain access to thousands of ratings and reviews.*

*NOTE: Michael Giltz is provided with free copies of DVDs to consider for review. He typically does not guarantee coverage and invariably receives far more screeners and DVDs than he can cover each week. Also, Michael Giltz freelances as a writer of DVD copy (the text that appears on the back of DVDs) for some titles released by IFC and other subsidiaries of MPI. It helps pay the rent, but does not obligate him in any way to speak positively or negatively of their titles.*

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