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Freelance writer

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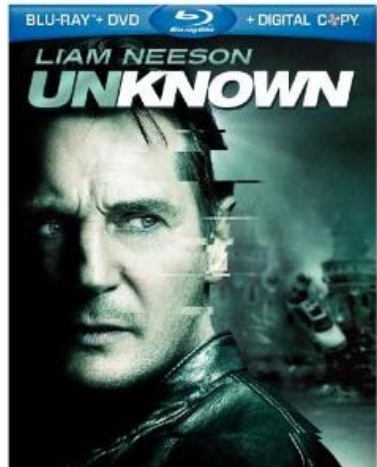
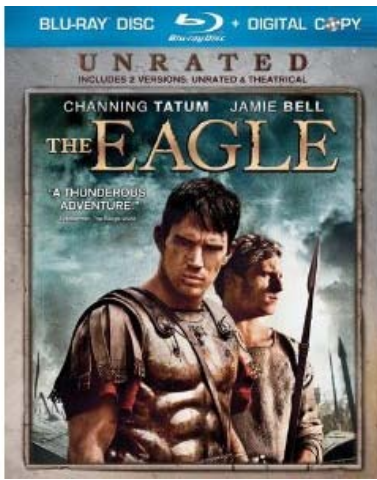
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Hey, you can't always watch Oscar-winning films or critically acclaimed independents or obscure dramas from around the world. Sometimes, you just want to turn your mind off. (I'm looking at you, horrible *Transformers* franchise.) Still, even when you're looking for popcorn fare, you undoubtedly prefer good popcorn fare to bad ones. That's why the most common question I get about new movies is whether they should go see it in the theater or whether it's "rentable" (they might say "Netflixable" these days) or not worth bothering. The top three movies out this week are not good by any standard, but they're almost certainly movies many of you decided were "rentable."

PHOTO GALLERIES



THE EAGLE (\$29.98 regular or \$39.98 BluRay; Universal)

UNKNOWN (\$28.98 regular or \$35.99; Warner Bros.)

THE ADJUSTMENT BUREAU (\$29.98 regular or \$39.98 BluRay; Universal) -- *The Eagle* is the most offbeat of these films and benefits from being set in an unusual time period. If nothing else, it's not your average bear. Channing Tatum stars as a Roman soldier desperate to restore his family honor by reclaiming the golden eagle standard lost to the barbaric Britains. Jamie Bell plays a slave whose life is spared because of Tatum after refusing to provide sport in the arena for bloodthirsty Romans. They team up to go toward enemy territory (for Tatum) and home (for Bell). I got a kick out of Bell being called slave (sue me) and the manly honor and betrayals and proof of courage come at regular intervals. Nothing special, but Bell elevates any film he's in and Tatum is cast well, though the cheery finale beggars belief.

Liam Neeson's *Unknown* is such a shameless ripoff of *Taken* you'd almost swear it's a remake. It's not more's the pity, since the film is lesser in every degree to that modest B movie success. January Jones remains the perfect Hitchcock blonde born too late.



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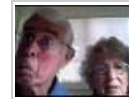
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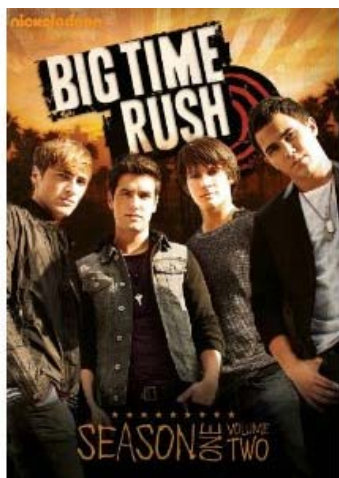
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Finally, I **praised Matt Damon a few weeks ago**, but even he's not perfect. *The Adjustment Bureau* is a weird, unsatisfying movie based on a Philip K. Dick short story. Damon is a politician who looks poised for great things but angels (or "case workers" as one of them dubs themselves) are there to make sure Damon stays on plan and avoids missteps like a romance with the wacky Emily Blunt. The problem? Damon and Blunt feel fated to be together and keep crossing paths, despite the best efforts of The Chairman and his minions. It's not terribly dramatic or light on its feet a la *Heaven Can Wait*. A little ponderous with endless unnecessary explication, you spend the whole film wondering exactly what the filmmaker George Nolfi was going for. When Damon delivered one especially goofy line, the person watching with me bursting out laughing and I said, "He's doing the best he can." He laughed some more and agreed, Damon wasn't the problem. On the other hand, my friend pointed out, Damon did agree to make it. Fair enough. Even Damon can sometimes mess with the Plan.

Have you enjoyed any bad movies lately? Confess.



RAFFAELLO MATARAZZO'S RUNAWAY MELODRAMAS (\$59.95; Eclipse) -- Criterion continues to mine cinema history for deliriously enjoyable collections like this four movie package of Italian melodramas. Producers looked at the worldwide success of neo-realism (which focused on the working class and the poor) and said, hey, why not combine that with over-the-top soapy plot twists? The result was journeyman director Matarazzo's biggest hits of his career. His muses were the manly Amedeo Nazzari and the heaving bosoms of Yvonne Sanson. I've watched *Chains*, in which Sanson is plagued by a former love turned thief who pesters her for attention when she just wants to devote herself to her car mechanic husband and two adoring children. Just when I thought I knew where the movie was headed, they started piling on the plot twists and turns with abandon. And over the top doesn't begin to describe the sight of her little son, arms open wide, tears running down his face and pleading with his mother not to leave their home for what he knows is a meeting with that lover. I can't wait to watch the rest, including *Nobody's Children* and *The White Angel*, which pile misfortune on two lovers across not one but two feature films. Great fun in decent prints.



BIG TIME RUSH SEASON ONE VOLUME TWO (\$19.99; Nickelodeon/Paramount) -- I really hate



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Scarlett's naked pics, Tyler Perry is highest paid

how shows for kids shows parcel out episodes for a season in multiple volumes on DVD. Just wait and put them all out at once. It's good to teach kids a little patience. The latest in a seemingly endless string of shows about young pop stars, this one feature four affable guys who are hockey players turned boy band (natch!). They've moved to California and attend a performing arts school while recording songs and touring. Hi-jinks ensue. This set includes six episodes and the TV movie *Big Time Concert*. All hail little sister Katie (talented Ciara Bravo), the only sane one in the bunch.

ALSO OUT NOW:

THE CLOSER SEASON SIX (\$39.98; Warner Bros.) -- As the July 11 premiere of the seventh and final season of *The Closer* approaches, you can catch up with Season Six, highlighted by Brenda (Emmy winner Kyra Sedgwick) gunning for the job of Police Chief of the LAPD and episode four, "Layover." Useful tip: never pick up a flight attendant while transporting a prisoner.

THE ROMANTIC ENGLISHWOMAN (\$24.95; Kino) -- This woefully underappreciated drama features a top-notch cast -- Michael Caine and Glenda Jackson in the leads -- a script by Tom Stoppard and Thomas Wiseman from Wiseman's book and perhaps the best reviewed work of director Joseph Losey after *The Servant* and his cult hit *The Boy With Green Hair*. It's a mystery why some movies fall off the radar. perhaps this overdue release with bring this story of a novelist fantasizing about cheating on his wife a wider audience. It's like *The Seven Year Itch*, but smart and funny rather than obvious and dumb.

MARPLE: THE PALE HORSE (\$29.99; Acorn) -- Hmm, where to start? As just a movie, the 89 minute Miss Marple adventure starring Julia McKenzie is decent fare for those who love their British cozies. This DVD release includes another TV movie made in the 1990s from the same novel and that stars Jean Marsh and Andy Serkis among others. It's a nice bonus but hardly compensates for the very expensive price for what amounts to a single TV movie in a long-running series. I've given up hoping someone would come to their sense and deliver the Christie and Poirot shows in some sort of reasonable order and at a reasonable price. As for shoehorning Miss Marple into a Christie mystery in which she doesn't appear, well worse crimes have been committed.

ONE NIGHT ONLY: THE A.I.M.S. GALA (\$19.95; MVD) - This curio of a concert features decent visuals and sounds, as well as some gems -- mainly Elvis Costello and Chrissie Hynde on three songs and a four song set by Chris Rea, then close to the peak of his UK fame; followed by an all-star ramble through some oldies led by Ian Dury, Phil Collins, Eddy Grant and the like. It all happened because Bill Wyman decided to do a talent search. He went to five or so cities with professional recording equipment to record the best bands he could find and then give them copies of the masters to do with what they could. The Royal Albert Hall concert was held to celebrate this, feature the five best bands and raise some money for charity. None of the bands made big waves, but it was a nice effort and the music's not bad. A bonus documentary features the performances of the five bands which were unknown then and remain so now.

LIVING IN EMERGENCY (\$27.95; First Run Features) -- The only surprise about this critically acclaimed documentary film is that it wasn't made sooner. The work of Doctors Without Borders is shown through this look at four volunteers -- two new recruits and two veterans and all of them dealing with the stress and rewards of providing desperately needed medical care in high-risk areas like Liberia and the Congo. First, check out this film. **Then, for more information on the group and its work, visit their website.**

HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX

HARRY POTTER AND THE HALF-BLOOD PRINCE (\$39.92 regular and \$49.99 BluRay each; Warner Bros.) -- As the July 15 finale of the Potter film series approaches, Warner Bros. continues to stuff and I do mean STUFF these Ultimate Editions with every imaginable geegaw you can think of exploring the world of Potter and how these movies were made. Until **Pottermore.com** launches on July 31 with sneak peeks for a lucky few, this is where Potter fans will gorge themselves.

UNDER THE HAMMER (\$49.99; Acorn) -- The creator of *Rumpole of the Bailey* -- John Mortimer -- had less success with this light drama set in the world of auction houses. Richard Wilson and Jan Francis star as the appraisers at Klinsky's with a love for fine art...and perhaps each other? This set contains all seven episodes, most notable for the usual profusion of top-notch actors in guest spots offered on British TV, like John Gielgud, Rosemary Harris, Ian Carmichael and many others.

THE MEDALLION (\$17.97 BluRay; Image) -- It's not quite the home run pairing of *Rush Hour*, but



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Jackie Chan and Lee Evans make a nice bumbling team in this modest, family-friendly thriller with Chan starring as a detective who comes back from the dead (with a massive increase in his martial arts skills) to defeat Snakehead (poor old Julian Sands) before the bad guy rules the world. Harmless, but not particularly good either.

THE WOMEN IN CAGES COLLECTION (\$24.97 regular or \$39.99 BluRay; Shout) -- The name says it all, doesn't it? Shout presents the goofiest, most enjoyable trio of b movies in ages. They all star Pam Grier and they all feature women...in cages. *The Big Bird Cage*, *The Big Doll House* and *Women In Cages*, to be exact. Proto-feminist subtext. Uh, maybe. *Big Doll House* in particular includes generous extras, including a making-of documentary. The perfect gift for Quentin Tarantino? Nope, he probably owns original prints and will buy this the day it comes out anyway.

Thanks for reading. Michael Giltz is the co-host 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 about their titles.

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