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Michael Giltz

Freelance writer and raconteur
Posted: December 7, 2010 06:27 PM

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DVDs: *Blade Runner's* Secret Inspiration?

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SPACE PRECINCT: THE COMPLETE SERIES (\$49.98; Image) -- Just in case you were wondering, critics don't have an encyclopedic history of all pop culture lodged into their brains. I know Gerry Anderson as the creator behind puppet-driven iconic TV series like *Thunderbirds* (from the 1960s) and

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the live action *Space: 1999* from the 1970s, which was his last hurrah, in my mind. I wasn't even sure if he was still alive. So when *Space Precinct* arrives, I pop it in thinking this cops in space show was from the same era; certainly the hair and the performances confirmed that. And my God, it looks like the missing link between the squeaky clean space operas of *Buck Rogers* and the gritty dystopian future of *Blade Runner*. Was *Space Precinct* a heretofore uncelebrated influence on that Ridley Scott film? Clearly the vision of the future seems similar, from the cityscapes to the flying cop cars covered in dirt and grime. Maybe Scott had mentioned the show in one of his commentary tracks and I just missed it? Uh no. Turns out *Space Precinct* aired its 22 episodes in 1994-1995, so in fact it joins the long list of movies, tv shows and books influenced BY *Blade Runner*, rather than the other way around. The mix of humans and aliens and Anderson's typical model work is fine, but this is too serious for little kids and too simple-minded for anyone other than hardcore fans. The transfers are clean and nice, however so if you are a fan you should be happy.



FLIPPED (\$35.99 BluRay or \$27.98 regular DVD; Warner Bros.) -- A young boy and girl in the early 1960s experience first love, with the girl (Madeline Carroll) confident they're fated for each other and the boy (Callan McAuliffe) not so sure. Director Rob Reiner is still trying to get his mojo back with this little film whose main grab is the way scenes are shown once from the boy's perspective and again from the girl's -- a conceit that most of the time just means we watch the same boring incident twice, without any real insight except the most obvious about how two people can see the same event differently. Two problems plague this movie. First, McAuliffe is dreamy enough in a young Zac Efron sort of way but he is painfully stiff as an actor and no match for Carroll. Second, the character he plays is simply unlikable. Bryce is simply not a very interesting boy. We might have accepted Juli falling for his looks and then realizing he just wasn't as nice or complicated as she imagined but instead we're supposed to think she sees something in him no one else does. Nope, he's just a dumb teenager confused by her attentions and not worthy of them. At all. Kind of hard to have a romantic drama when you think the girl is making a mistake.



THE SIX MILLION DOLLAR MAN: THE COMPLETE COLLECTION (\$239.95; TimeLife) -- Unlike the bare bones *Space Precinct*, this is as lavish a collection as any fan could hope for. You get all five seasons (impeccably remastered), all the TV movies that led to the series and the TV movies that came after it, all the cross-over episodes with *The Bionic Woman* (go Lindsay Wagner!) and a truckload of commentaries and interviews. The show itself is kind of curious: it's family television and scrupulously avoids bloodshed or killing of bad guys a la *The A Team*, but it's also very somber and adult in its attitude and deals with things like Star Wars missile defense, missing nukes and other sobering issues. They've done the series proud and it comes in a fairly compact box, which opens up and plays the voice-over intro ("We can rebuild him....") and yes, I remember every word. Plus, each season comes in its own box so you can file them alongside your other DVDs if you want; still, the boxed set will fit on most bookcases without trouble. For now, it's only available from Time Life, though eventually it will end its exclusivity and be available elsewhere.

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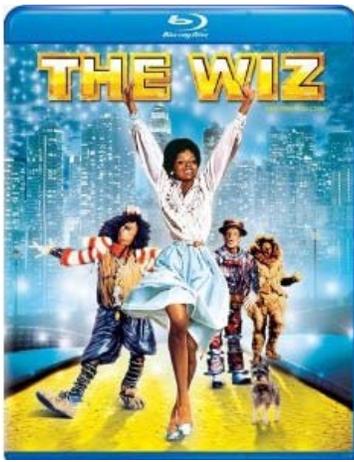


Victoria Beckham Expecting Baby No. 4

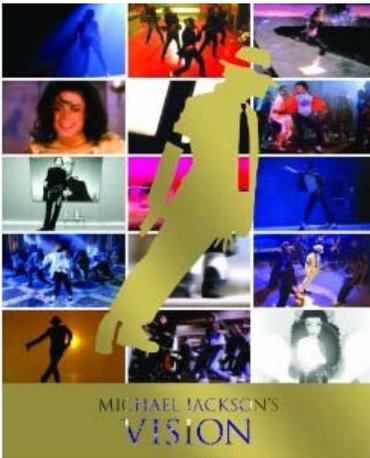
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TOP VIDEO PICKS 1 of 9

Queen's Royal Wedding



THE WIZ (\$26.98 BluRay; Universal) -- Last night I was at an event celebrating the career of **legendary publicist Irene Gandy**. Hosting and interviewing her was Andre DeShields, the original Wizard on Broadway. At the end of the night, she asked him to perform "Believe In Yourself," which he did beautifully. It was a reminder of how the film version could have been so much better with Stephanie Mills instead of the too-adult Diana Ross and DeShields instead of Richard Pryor. (Though Hinton Battle was surely great, Michael Jackson was the sort of Hollywood upgrade that made sense.) Still "Ease On Down The Road" and the other songs are delivered dynamically in the film, which remains an iconic work in claiming The Wizard Of Oz and fairy tales in general for everyone.



MICHAEL JACKSON'S VISION -- (\$39.98; Sony Legacy) -- Even when his music declined over the last few albums, Michael Jackson's pioneering work in music videos continued to be ambitious and fun. If you are a casual fan and don't own the previous sets of videos, this collection of his 35 main music videos will be a good buy, from "Billie Jean" and "Beat It" to 'Cry." If you're a fanatic looking for the definitive set that will replace all previous ones, this is a disappointment. You get only an excerpt from the 40 minute "Ghosts," you don't get what could have been a longer version of "Smooth Criminal," you don't get among the bonus features the Motown 25 performance or other iconic appearances and so on. The imagination on display here from stop-motion to sci-fi to the sheer artistry of the dancing and choreography is exceptional. Too bad they didn't give the same imagination to this set. This standard version is solid, but there should be a deluxe version that really did bring together all his video work (even Captain EO if possible!) in one place.

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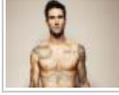
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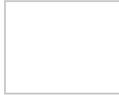
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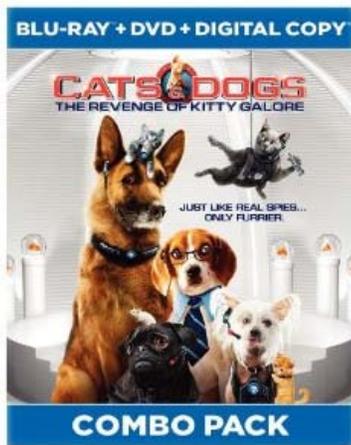
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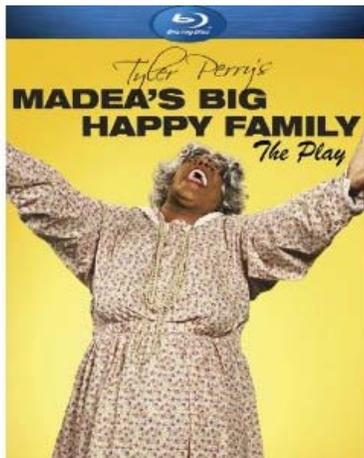
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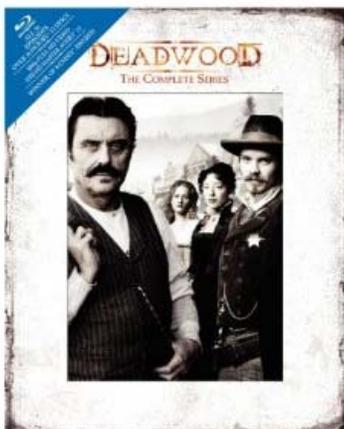
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CATS & DOGS: THE REVENGE OF KITTY GALORE (\$35.99 BluRay or \$28.99 on regular DVD; Warner Bros.) -- Oh, cats. Why did you have to team up with dogs when they are your natural enemies? It kills the entire premise of the series in which cats and dogs battle it out as they've always done with humans the unsuspecting bystanders. So this sequel -- which came and went at the box office -- is strictly for kiddies and those who long for a Gandhi-like peace to prevail in the world of animals. Me, I prefer the eternal struggle. Some clever extras include "interviews" with dogs dishing on their costars and Hollywood in general and some choice clips from the Warner Bros. library depicting how cats and dogs have always feuded.



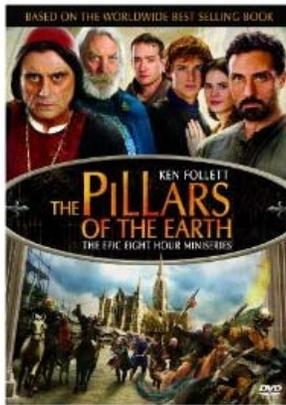
MADEA'S BIG HAPPY FAMILY: THE PLAY (\$24.99 BluRay; Lionsgate) -- Lionsgate has released a batch of Tyler Perry films and plays on BluRay. His films aren't notable for their slickness, though they have improved in image quality with each succeeding film. And the documents of his stage plays are pretty straightforward. So if you own them already, there's no need to upgrade. But if you have a BluRay player, you might enjoy the modest step up in image quality -- the better to enjoy Madea here as she corrals the family together to hear Shirley's important news, reveal some secrets and learn some lessons. If you're a fan, dive in. If not, start with one of the films.



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DEADWOOD: THE COMPLETE SERIES (\$209.98 on BluRay; HBO) -- HBO has always charged a premium for its TV shows, so I'll skip over the cost and focus on the quality. I still find it difficult to talk about this show because I'm so mad at creator David Milch for foolishly dropping the ball and moving on to *John From Cincinnati* rather than sticking with his greatest work. I'll never understand why people who are lucky enough to get a great series on the air will let themselves be distracted by launching another series at the same time. But letting one show die completely while you wander off to do something else -- especially when that show is still firing on all cylinders creatively is almost unprecedented. Perhaps HBO deserves more blame -- they saw *Deadwood* had peaked at about 3 or so million, instead of the mega-ratings of *The Sopranos* and maybe weren't as enthusiastic as they should have been. And saying goodbye after three seasons is better than finishing with two TV movies about two hours in length. If you can gather how obsessive I am about the show, maybe you'll understand what a landmark work it is -- brutal, foul-mouthed, violent and acted to perfection. It's essential viewing, even though the story will always remain unfinished. As for the packaging, it's a pain. Presented as a hardcover book with thick cardboard pages and lavish photos, it's very handsome. But actually slipping the discs in and out of their sleeves for viewing is annoying and difficult and leaves you constantly worried about scratching the disc.

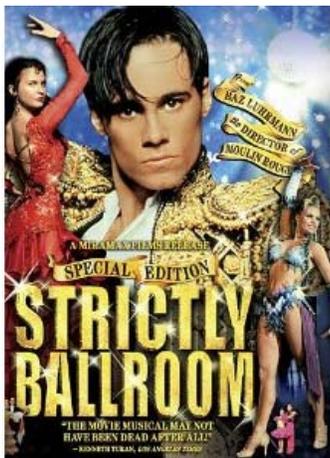


THE PILLARS OF THE EARTH (\$59.95; Sony) -- Ian McShane had the role of a lifetime in *Deadwood* and has since appeared just about everywhere, including this sprawling adaptation of the Ken Follett best-seller about the building of a cathedral. This is bodice-ripping melodrama done with relish, the sort of thing miniseries were made for. The book is beloved and surely what Follett will be remembered for. It's also a page-turner and thus perfectly suited to this sort of treatment. While far from a classic, anyone looking for a miniseries akin to the sort they turned out regularly in the Seventies and Eighties will be pleased.



THE TUDORS: THE COMPLETE SERIES (\$129.98; Showtime) -- I love it when people complain that a series like *The Tudors* isn't historically accurate. Well, duh. It's a TV show, not a scholarly work. Jonathan Rhys-Meyers came into his own playing Henry VIII and proved he had what it takes to be a leading man. (Before this show, I thought of him more as a character actor.) But the entire cast is strong and the storyline as addictive as any soap opera, even if you already know who wins the showdown between Henry and the Catholic Church. However, this boxed set is yet another unfortunate packaging job. It looks lovely of course. But the bulky, photo album size means it won't fit on your bookshelf or along side your other DVDs. You have to either place it on a coffee table, take up a ton of shelf space or

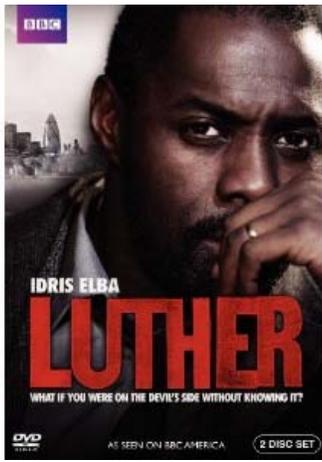
put it in the closet. And the discs themselves are slipped into cardboard slots that make them a pain in the neck to remove and put back. You're always worried about scratching the discs or damaging the pages. Doesn't anyone who designs these things ever actually use them? Solid extras as with the previous boxed sets of each season. By the way, if you want something else to savor and you loved this show, read [Hilary Mantel's excellent book *Wolf Hall*](#).



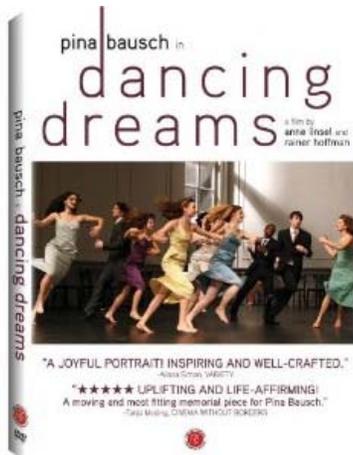
STRICTLY BALLROOM SPECIAL EDITION (\$19.99; Miramax) -- My favorite Baz Luhrmann film is still his first -- this delightfully dippy tale of a young rebel hoping to bring a bold new dance move into competitive ballroom dancing. This special edition has only modest extras but it's nice to have the movie back and looking good.



BATMAN BEYOND THE COMPLETE SERIES (\$99.98; Warner Bros.) -- This futuristic series had the difficult task of following up the best Batman outside of the comic books: *Batman -- The Animated Series* (1992-1995). Yep, better than any film series or TV show previous. So the fact that *Batman Beyond* is pretty good is cause for celebration. The packaging mimics that for the earlier series, which makes sense, and happily you can easily remove the case holding all the DVDs and put it alongside your others. (The box, like so many, is bulky and useless.) This set contains 52 episodes (basically the same discs from previous season boxed sets with no new remastering I can see) and some new extras. But a LOT is missing if you're a hardcore fan and it's hard to understand why WB would skimp on them. Where is the crossover episodes from other shows they own like *Justice League Unlimited* and above all why not include the de facto series finale TV movie: *Batman Beyond - Return Of The Joker*? So if you own the previous seasons, don't buy this -- it's not remastered and the 95 minutes of extras aren't worth the money. If you want a decent Batman series that focuses on Batman as a teen or you've been drawn in by the recent comic book spin-offs set in this universe, it's a good collection. Just don't be surprised if they do a real complete collection again in a few year's time.



LUTHER (\$34.98; BBC) -- Think *Prime Suspect* but with *The Wire*'s Idris Elba instead of Helen Mirren as a troubled but brilliant DCI. This six episode season has a fine cast, a female villain for a change of pace and an unfortunate resemblance to *The Silence of the Lambs* sequels in its plot twists. It's a blast to see the drug lord from *The Wire* on the side of the good. But hopefully future seasons won't find them so insistent on over-the-top devices. A good cop show with a great central character is plenty.



DANCING DREAMS (\$27.95; First Run) -- The death of Pina Bausch was a devastating blow to the world of dance. She died at 68 of cancer but of course her work lives on through the dancers and choreographers she inspired. Luckily, veteran dance chroniclers Anne Linsel and Rainer Hoffman were documenting Bausch in one of her last major projects: Contact Zone. Like so many artists before her, Bausch was invigorated by working with the young. For this piece she recruited 40 teenagers who had never even heard of her and worked with them for 10 months leading up to its world premiere. Modest bonus material include a Bausch biography and directors' notes but the most satisfying bonus of all is seeing Bausch working and creating right up to the end.

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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I think, if I remember correctly what I had previously read, that the new Deadwood set contains a couple of previously-unseen documentaries of worth? Anybody know?

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