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Freelance writer and raconteur

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Heading out to the video store and looking for some DVDs to rent or buy? Here's a roundup of recent releases. You can always, of course, rent *The Bride Of Frankenstein* or *Psycho*. But why not take a gander at these less obvious choices?



DRAG ME TO HELL (\$29.98 and \$39.98 BluRay; Universal) -- Until *Paranormal Activities* came out, this was unquestionably the most notable horror film of the year. It's still probably the best reviewed. Universal had unreasonable expectations for this B movie horror fest in the best Sam Raimi tradition about Alison Lohman getting cursed by a nasty old woman. At \$80 million worldwide and a long DVD history ahead of it, it's a strong performer for the genre. And it might be the perfect break for Raimi so he can get his Spidey sense tingling again.

ORPHAN (\$28.98 or \$35.99 on BluRay; Warner Bros.) -- I'm not sure why it is -- I'm not adopted myself -- but I have a serious aversion to films where adopted children turn out to be the spawn of hell/untrustworthy/ungrateful/just plain mean. Seriously, if people listened to Hollywood, it would be a miracle if a single kid was ever taken into someone's home ever again. Even a top-notch cast -- Peter Sarsgaard and Vera Farmiga -- can't gussy this one up into anything beyond it's predictable arc of the orphan from hell (though in this case, that's hardly a cliché).

P (\$19.95; Palisades Tartan/Asia Extreme) -- Only hardcore fans of horror would know about the distinction between Thai horror and, say, Korean horror. I'm not one of them. But this entry about a young girl taught the dark arts who is forced into working at a go-go club (not a good combination if

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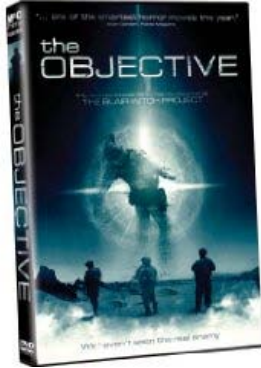
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you're a customer) is a cut above.

WILLIAM CASTLE FILM COLLECTION (\$80.95; Sony) -- If you're like me and you enjoy being scared (but not that much) and don't really care for gore (even a little) this boxed set is for you. Castle is more of a Barnum-type showman than a good director, so the eight flicks in this set (along with a substantial documentary about Castle himself). His promotions were often better than the films themselves. One tagline said: "If it frightens you to death, you'll be buried free of charge!" But *The Tingler* with Vincent Price, the ridiculous *13 Ghosts*, and Joan Crawford in *Strait-Jacket* are all good for a laugh when they don't spook you. Decent extras scattered throughout.



THE OBJECTIVE (\$19.98; IFC/MPI) -- On the off chance that your main desire is to actually see a good movie, give *The Objective* a shot. A Special Forces team is sent into the mountains of Afghanistan after a rogue cleric when they stumble upon an ancient evil. It's a genuine B movie that garnered some good reviews for the clever premise and a relatively unknown cast (Jon Huertas, Matt Anderson) that keeps you blissfully unaware of who might survive. From Daniel Myrick, the director of *The Blair Witch Project* and a man who might have some useful tips for the folks behind *Paranormal Activity*.

TALES FROM THE DARKSIDE SEASON TWO (\$39.99; Paramount) -- Maybe you prefer your horror in bite-sized bits? This anthology series from the mid-Eighties -- like most anthology TV shows -- featured actors on their way up or on their way down and directors who loved the genre or couldn't get any other type of work. Invariably, there are some standouts in the 24 episodes, though the show is far from a classic. It doesn't help that music rights proved too expensive and they have reportedly rescored half the episodes. Anyone who's actually a fan of the show and remembers the originals will undoubtedly feel cheated.

THE CRAFT (\$24.95 on BluRay; Sony) -- An obvious precursor to the hit TV series *Charmed*, this is a goofier, nastier spin closer to *Heathers* with the outcasts of a high school ready to use dark magic to get their revenge and to hell with the consequences (not to mention their souls). Fairuza Balk has fun and Robin Tunney will be a draw for fans of the TV show *The Mentalist*. But it's Neve Campbell who anchors this silliness with by taking it all very seriously.



THE GATE MONSTROUS SPECIAL EDITION (\$19.98; LionsGate) -- Long available only in a cropped version, this cult hit from 1987 is finally offered in widescreen in what appears to be a newly remastered print with the usual extras like a commentary track and brief making-of featurettes. A young Stephen Dorff stars in this tale of kids who unintentionally open a gate to hell, releasing some demons who wreck serious havoc in their town. Like *Gremlins* (but less satirical), it's genuinely scary but meant for teens and is not particularly violent.

THE KILLING ROOM (\$19.95; Genius) -- If you find the horror-porn of *Saw* unpleasant, you might

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enjoy this classier spin on the same idea. Timothy Hutton and Chloe Sevigny are two of four people who agree to be part of a research project that turns deadly when they're locked in a white room and told only one can come out alive. Debuted at Sundance and sort of worth the ride.

THE HAUNTED AIRMAN (\$24.98; EI) -- Maybe horror is just an excuse for you to clutch your date's arm? Then this romantic ghost story may be just the ticket. Robert Pattinson (now where have I heard of him before?) stars as a British WW II soldier who is wounded and sent to a rambling old mansion to recuperate, only to be haunted by ghosts! Better than vampires, I suppose. Julian Sands (always reliably creepy even if he's playing a good guy) and Rachael Stirling costar.

LEFT BANK (\$24.98; IFC/MPI) -- Roman Polanski may not be working for a while, but this spin on *Rosemary's Baby* should keep him uppermost in the mind of horror buffs. In it, a world-class runner (Eline Kuppens) is forced to stop training and recuperate from a knee infection. She impulsively moves in with her boyfriend Bobby, a handsome member of an archery club that has been around since the Middle Ages and...well, ancient groups with medieval ties never have an athlete's best interests at heart.

SCARE TACTICS SEASON THREE PART ONE (\$29.98; Warner Bros.) -- OK, you don't really want to be scared at all, but you don't mind if OTHER people get scared. Then dig into the SyFy (god, I hate that new name) prank show built around horror and sci-fi angles. Hosted by Tracy Morgan, you can watch as a babysitter finds a psycho invading her home, a freakish creature gets loose in a lab and so on. For the folks who think there's not enough screaming during America's Funniest Home Videos.

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Thanks for reading. [Visit Michael Giltz at his website](#) and his [daily blog](#). Download his [podcast of celebrity interviews at Popsurfing](#) and enjoy the weekly pop culture podcast he co-hosts [at Showbiz Sandbox](#). Both available for free on iTunes. [Link to him on Netflix](#) and gain access to thousands of ratings and reviews.

NOTE TO READERS: I was provided with a final copy of every DVD reviewed in this column. In fact, I refuse to review DVDs based on streaming videos available online or advance DVD test discs since it's impossible to verify the quality of the picture, sound, menus, extras and other features that way. I receive many more DVDs each week than I could ever cover and typically, I don't guarantee coverage for any DVD that is sent to me, merely that I will consider it for coverage.

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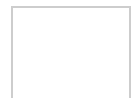
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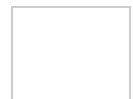
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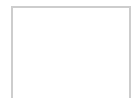
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