

September 1, 2012

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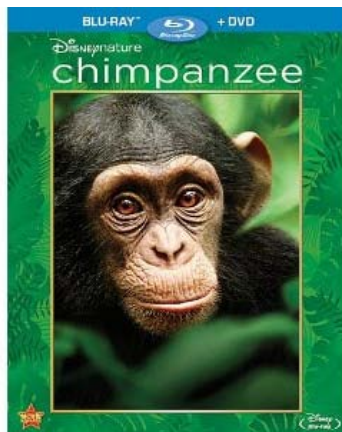
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CHIMPANZEE (\$39.99 BluRay combo; Disney) -- The political documentary *2016: Obama's America* is a huge hit for a film in its genre. But it's crazy to say it's the top documentary film of the year... except for nature documentaries. That's the caveat news outlets must make, which is kind of like saying a movie is the top family film of the year... except for animated films. Or the top drama of the year... except for ones with vampires. In fact, the top documentary of the year so far is *Chimpanzee*, the latest in what is proving an annual event. Every year around Earth Day, Disney releases a new documentary about our world. This latest was directed by Alastair Fothergill and Mark Linfield, both of whom can be found on the credits of some of the best documentaries in history, namely the *Blue Planet* and *Planet Earth* TV shows and their theatrical spinoffs. This one isn't quite up to the level of those, but it's an engaging look at the life of a little chimpanzee from birth through traumatic events and the possibility of a happy future. Parents beware: nature throws our hero Oscar a few *Bambi*-like curves. It's presented as gently as possible but is there nonetheless. The very sensitive and the very young might be upset by those

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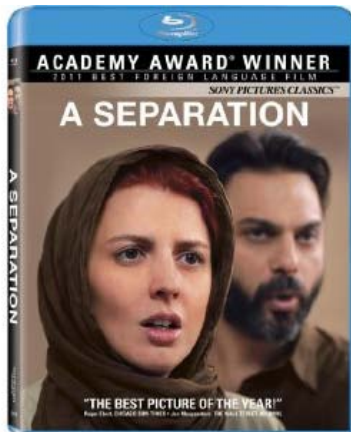
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moments, but the rest will discover a real-life adventure tale told with acute observation. I could have done without narrator Tim Allen's jokey asides, but they're modest and brief. Those who have seen the startling beauty of those other films won't be surprised when I say many of the shots -- especially the opening scene setters -- are so striking I half wondered if they were special effects. James Cameron would be jealous of the imagery on display. Overall, it is superior family entertainment and deservedly should be lauded as the biggest hit documentary film of the year, no matter what political party you're registered in.



THE HUNGER GAMES (\$39.99 Blu-ray combo; Lionsgate) -- OK, now fans breathlessly waiting for the second film installment in the series can watch and rewatch *The Hunger Games*. Some truths will emerge. The pageant towards the beginning where the contestants are on display is an embarrassment -- Katniss is supposed to be clothed in an outfit that bursts into simulated flames and the special effect is so lame (even for a somewhat low budget film tackling such a big tale) that it's literally cringe-inducing. It looks like an effect a kid would produce for their home-made YouTube video. It's not a throw-away scene but a key moment in the "selling" of Katniss to a TV audience that will ultimately have a hand in deciding her fate. It never, ever should have made it to screen in its present form. As a commercial decision, I would have stuck with director Gary Ross who delivered a massive worldwide hit on a relative dime and did a great job of finding his stars alongside casting director Debra Zane. However, Ross is much better at the earlier dramatic scenes. So on an artistic level, the action portion of the film might improve mightily. Finally, as if there were any question, Team Peeta, all the way.



A SEPARATION (\$35.99 BluRay; Sony Pictures Classics) -- This sensational drama was my introduction to the talents of director Asghar Farhadi. Rightful winner of the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film (when will they change the name to Best International Film, by the way?) it's a penetrating, utterly involving drama of life in contemporary Iran. A wife who decides she wants a separation from her husband begins a cascade of events that include hiring a woman to watch after her husband's elderly father and soon one action leads to another and the consequences become more and more dire. It's superlative drama of the highest order and now that I've been able to see two more of Farhadi's films, I know it's not a fluke either. He's a world class director. Anyone interested in drama, cinema or just a good family drama should watch this immediately.

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[Welcome to the American Republic, Mr. Eastwood](#)

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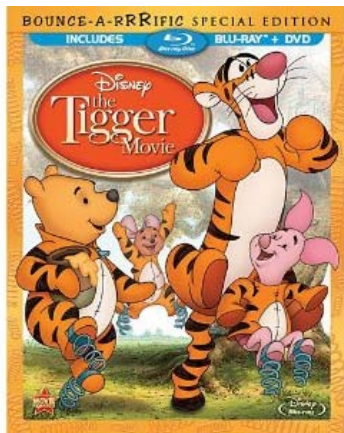
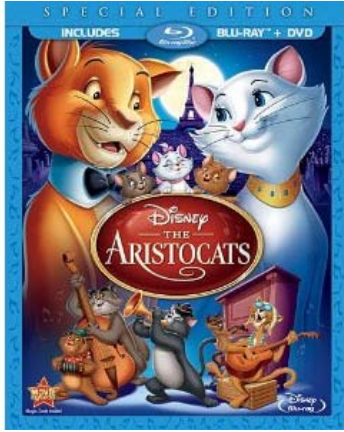
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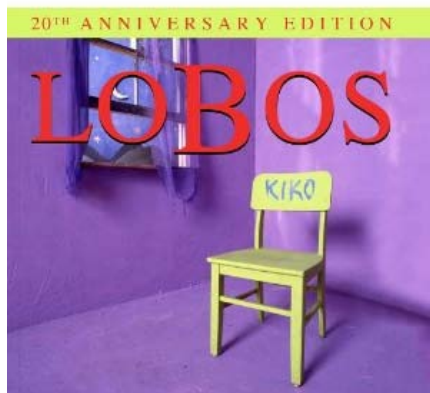
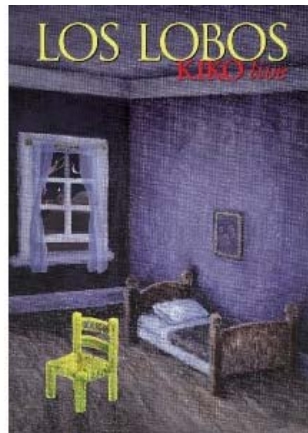
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THE RESCUERS/THE RESCUERS DOWN UNDER (\$39.99 BluRay combo; Disney)

THE ARISTOCATS (\$39.99 BluRay combo; Disney)

POCAHONTAS/POCAHONTAS II (\$39.99 BluRay combo; Disney)

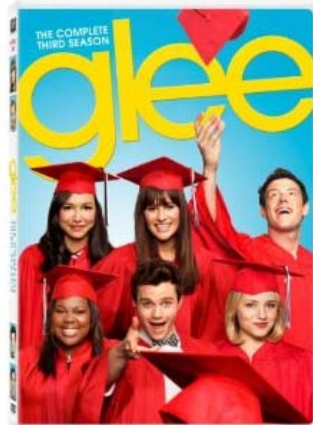
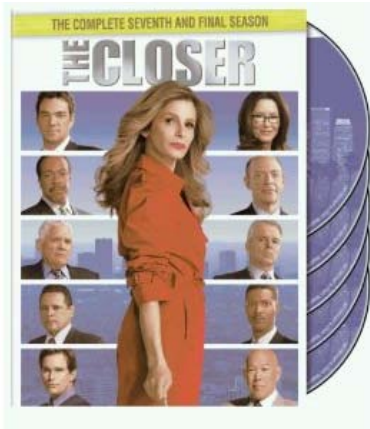
THE TIGGER MOVIE (\$39.99 BluRay combo; Disney) -- *The Rescuers* and *The Aristocats* were made during the dark days of Disney animation. They are cheaply produced, with flat, static backdrops and the modest stories are geared strictly at tykes. It's depressing to see movies with the Disney name that have animation more appropriate for a cheap Saturday morning cartoon. But that's no excuse for the paucity of imagination on display, especially with fine voice actors like Bob Newhart and the inspired choice of Eva Gabor on tap. Even the Sherman Brothers can't rescue *The Aristocats*, despite a few decent songs. *Pocahontas* is an overshadowed entry from Disney's second golden period (before they were outclassed by Pixar). It's awfully politically correct but gorgeously animated and proudly embraces a rare downbeat ending. It's puzzling and annoying that Disney doesn't allow fans the option to watch the movie with the duet reinstated for the 10th Anniversary DVD. Alan Menken and Stephen Schwartz always wanted it in and they did it the last time around but now it's relegated to an extra. The movie doesn't become a classic but it's certainly better without it. Like *The Rescuers* set, it includes an inferior sequel. Finally there's *The Tigger Movie*, a glorified straight to DVD release that ended up being released theatrically and doing quite well. It falls somewhere in the middle here, not a cheap sad tale but a good proving ground for young Disney talent, albeit not so good that it makes you forget how good Disney can truly be. Still, it was the Sherman Brothers again to the rescue, with some superior songs.

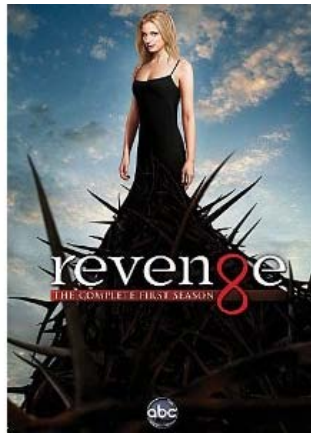


LOS LOBOS KIKO LIVE (\$16.98 DVD; Shout)

LOS LOBOS -- KIKO 20TH ANNIVERSARY (\$9.99 CD; Shout) -- Los Lobos is a great roots rock band that threw everyone for a loop with their sonic masterpiece *Kiko*. Fans and critics still haven't quite recovered, and though it's a favorite of the cognoscenti, *Kiko* still hasn't entered the pantheon the way it deserves. Let's face it, you wouldn't have expected a psychedelic masterpiece from Creedence Clearwater Revival and you didn't expect this left-field beauty from the ferociously rocking band behind "Will The Wolf Survive?" But, boy is it a great album. It's been 20 years and people need to take a deep breath, listen to this album with fresh ears and realize what a landmark it is, every bit the equal of Wilco's *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*, Radiohead's *Kid A* and other oddball classics. It's lyrical, shimmering, strange, lovely and haunting. You can rock out to the CD (headphones preferred, thank you very much) or you can buy the DVD and enjoy a live performance with the album played in its entirety. The band is at the peak of their powers (though I'd love to see them again today -- [they're touring](#) on their own and with Neil Young & Crazy Horse, which is a terrific double bill). The live DVD isn't edited crazily like so many concert films and gets the job done. You can watch just the concert or a fuller version along with interviews and other extras wrapped around the performance. In any format, you'll appreciate anew a

great American band and their greatest album.





HOUSE SEASON EIGHT (\$74.98 BluRay; Universal)

THE CLOSER SEVENTH SEASON (\$59.98 DVD; Warner Bros.)

GLEE THIRD SEASON (\$59.98 DVD; FOX)

MIKE & MOLLY SEASON TWO (\$44.98 DVD; Warner Bros.)

MIGHTY MORPHIN POWER RANGERS SEASON 1 VOLUME 1 (\$19.93 DVD; Shout)

REVENGE FIRST SEASON (\$45.99 DVD; ABC)

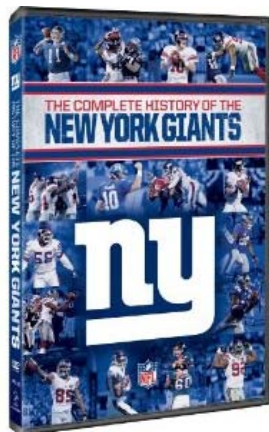
DOCTOR WHO: THE GREATEST SHOW IN THE GALAXY/ DOCTOR WHO: SPEARHEAD

FROM SPACE (\$24.98 each on DVD; BBC) -- It's hard to know when to say goodbye. *House* clearly got it wrong; one season earlier and I think fans and critics would have mourned the show more. As it was, eight seasons was clearly more than enough, though that doesn't dim Hugh Laurie's fun in creating one of TV's most indelible pains in the ass. *The Closer*, however, got it just right, with the show leaving at the top of its game ratings-wise and Kyra Sedgwick brandishing that crazy Southern accent to great effect right up to the end. *Glee* can't say goodbye because it has something to prove after a creatively disastrous season two and a not much better season three. Like clingy parents, they refuse to let go of key characters after they graduate and that does not bode well for season four. But here's hoping they get back on track.

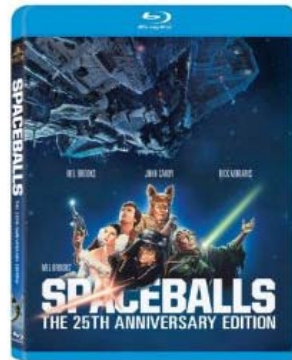
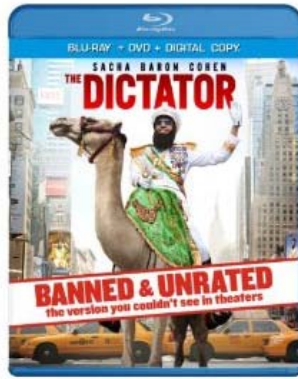
(Start by insisting the songs actually have something to do with the scenes at hand, guys!) *Mike & Molly* moved a bit beyond the incessant fat jokes to allow Melissa McCarthy to blossom even more as a full-bodied woman in love. Fans of *Power Rangers* are ga-ga for the 20th anniversary reunion that's going to bring together every surviving Power Ranger that they can for the ultimate showdown. Until then, the hardcore fans can begin again where it all started with this economical first half of season one. It contains 30 episodes and no frills but who needs frills when you've got the MMPRs? The guilty pleasure of last season deserves a wider audience and this DVD release of Season One of *Revenge* leaves you no excuse. Dive in. Finally, I continue to plead for complete boxed sets for each Doctor, but fans will enjoy these single releases of prior Doctor Who adventures with entire tales and loads (I do mean loads) of extras. What better way to prep for the new season starting Saturday on BBC America?



GOOD WILL HUNTING (\$14.99 BluRay; Miramax/Lionsgate) -- This is a corny sentimental film. But if it makes you cry, who am I to spoil your pleasure? And it made Oscar-winning stars out of Matt Damon and Ben Affleck, both of whom have acquitted themselves very nicely as actors and in Affleck's case especially as a director. On the other hand, it gave the very talented director Gus Van Sant a dual track of intriguing indies and bland studio pictures. But since he uses his Hollywood juice to make flicks like *Elephant*, at least he's used his power for good. And I still quote the "How do you like *them* apples?" line.



THE COMPLETE HISTORY OF THE NY GIANTS (\$26.97 DVD; NFL/Vivendi) -- This is a rerelease of the 2004 documentary about the Giants, modestly updated to fill in the last eight years. Strictly for fans, though NFL Films always has great footage you've never seen before in their releases. You used to have to wait for a weekend TV broadcast; now fans can enjoy their access any time.



THE DICTATOR (\$39.99 BluRay combo; Paramount)

SPACEBALLS (\$19.99 BluRay; MGM)

POST MORTEM (\$29.95 DVD; Kino Lorber) -- What's a comedy? Here are three pretty radically different responses. Sacha Baron Cohen likes to mix the forms of reality TV when mining his cultural collisions between Western society and the "foreign," in this case a brutal dictator who is deposed and must go to work in a health food store. I'm sure he and Mel Brooks would get along mightily, but Brooks is doing a very different sort of comedy with *Spaceballs*, his spoof of *Star Wars* and *Alien* and Indiana Jones and anything else that comes to mind. He'd rather trade in one top drawer joke for ten cheap ones because a laugh is a laugh, right? *Young Frankenstein* it ain't but time has actually helped this one not seem so out of step because when it first came out *Star Wars* seemed to be pretty passe as a target. Finally, the very (very) different comedy *Post Mortem* is the second in a trilogy of films looking at Chile through a mordant, unexpected lens. It focuses on a man who takes notes during autopsies but is often daydreaming about his leftist neighbor. When the government is overthrown, the bodies of her compatriots begin to dominate his job and the man can't keep political reality at bay any longer. No one, I think, would like all three of these films. But hearing who likes which two and why would be fascinating.



MY SON JOHN (\$29.95 BluRay; Olive/Paramount)

CAPTAIN CAREY U.S.A. (\$29.95 BluRay; Olive/Paramount)

PRIVATE HELL 36 (\$29.95 BluRay; Olive/Paramount) -- Another batch of catalog titles from Paramount rescued and brought to life by Olive Films. *My Son John* is a relic of the Cold War, with parents Helen Hayes and Dean Jagger petrified that their eldest is a dirty commie. it's especially notable for being the final film of Robert Walker, who died during production at the age of 32 years old, one reason at least the film is unsatisfying. Alan Ladd is very satisfying in *Captain Carey*, in which a WW II operative returns to his stomping ground in Italy and discovers there are still wrongs to be righted and deaths to be avenged. Finally, there's the trim noir *Private Hell 36* in which two cops keep a stash of money from a crime and are ridden with guilt. Ida Lupino co-wrote and stars; the more I see of her fascinating career, the more I like her.

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