

DVDs: Denzel Takes *Flight*; and The REAL *House of Cards*!

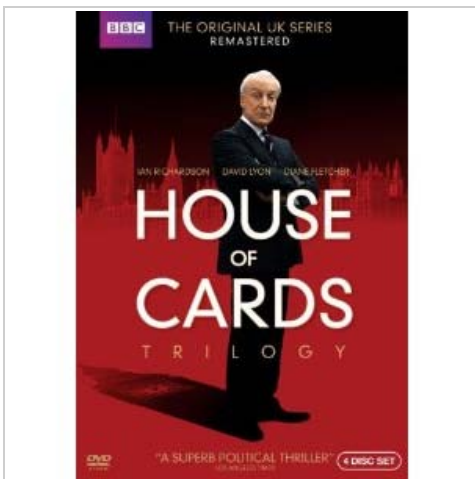
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Here's this week's roundup of top releases, including Oscar nominee Denzel Washington (one of Hollywood's most bankable stars), Disney's beloved take on *Peter Pan*, the original *House Of Cards* and more. Enjoy.



FLIGHT (\$39.99 BluRay combo; Paramount) -- Denzel Washington is one of Hollywood's most dependable stars. Studios love him because his presence virtually guarantees a solid opening for any movie he appears in. Critics love him because even on his more predictable vehicles, Washington is an intelligent actor who brings complexity and charm to the script. Audiences love him because that's what they do. So he was a smart choice to play the alcoholic pilot in the Robert Zemeckis drama *Flight*, a pilot whose very recklessness in his personal life may have been the key reason he was able to instinctively save a passenger

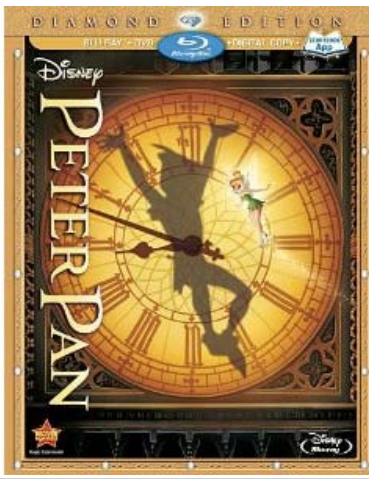
airline from a truly disastrous crash with a nery stunt literally no one else would have thought of, much less tired. Too bad he was drunk on the job and that the standard post-accident blood test will turn him from a hero to a villain in the media. Washington typically makes Whip Whitaker (what a name!) into a compelling character. But almost as soon as it begins the movie introduces cliched storylines and TV movie bromides that soften the story. For a brief exciting moment, it seems possible the movie might surprise us with a cynical spin. It's only because Washington is at the helm that we enjoy this possibility. But the movie chickens out and turns to mush before our eyes. The crash itself is effective, though I still give "scariest crash" to the Jeff Bridges drama *Fearless*.



HOUSE OF CARDS UK (\$39.98 DVD; BBC/Warner Bros.) -- Maybe you don't subscribe to Netflix. Or maybe you've already watched the Kevin Spacey miniseries *House Of Cards*. Do yourself a favor and dive into the original, which has a defining, droll performance by Ian Richardson as the master political manipulator Francis Urquhart. They swapped accents (British for Southern) but the stories are essentially the same in the first season, down to some silliness with the media that doesn't quite ring true. Besides, you can watch all three miniseries in this set, figure out where the US version is headed and seem smarter

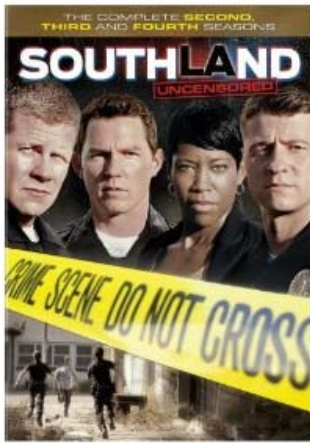
than all your friends. Jut the sort of thing Urquhart would do.

PETER PAN DIAMOND EDITION



(\$44.99 BluRay combo; Disney) -- I know it began as a play but the novel by J.M. Barrie is the artistic peak of this unique story. (Truly, the novel is surprisingly witty and will break your heart.) I've seen some tremendous theatrical productions but there's never been a good film version and that includes this beloved Disney movie. The animation is neither distinctive in style nor detailed, the story is plodding and the songs are mostly grating, with "Following The Leader" especially banal. ("Second Star To The Right" is ok but has an ungainly melody; "Never Smile At A Crocodile" is the pick

of a weak litter.) Among the voice actors, Kathryn Beaumont is a stand-out as Wendy, capturing well the sparkling personality of a girl becoming a young woman. Still, animation is key and it falls far short here. However, it's part of the Disney canon and there's no question that they present the film beautifully here. The remastering is pristine and the extras are kid-friendly, though film buffs might have appreciated a commentary track from animators or historians.



SOUTHLAND COMPLETE SEASONS 2, 3, AND 4 (\$59.98 DVD; Warner Bros.) -- Here is positive synergy in action. NBC canceled this fine cop drama too soon, despite great reviews. But this Warner Bros. studio series was picked up by its own cable channel TNT, which broadcast season one and the six completed episodes of season two to pretty good ratings. They eventually made the numbers work (mainly by shrinking the cast) and went ahead with 10 episodes each for seasons three and four. In other words, it's been almost as arduous keeping *Southland* on the air as a day on the job for an LA cop. (Though

when you're on set only curses fly and no one's life is in danger.) The very good Benjamin McKenzie of *The OC* is the heart of the show, a rookie cop with something to prove. But it's become a genuine ensemble, a good thing when you've got Regina King on hand. Since season two was only sporadically available, consider its inclusion here a bonus feature for those late to the game rather than punishment to those who have been supporting the show all along. Start your binge viewing now: **season five begins February 13!**

A LATE QUARTET (\$29.99 BluRay; FOX)

THE POOL (\$29.95 DVD; Kino Lorber)

LITTLE WHITE LIES (\$29.98 BluRay; MPI)

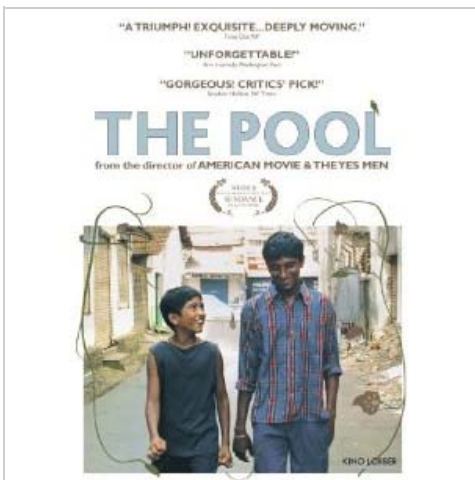
ALEX CROSS (\$39.99 BluRay; Summit)

MADEA GETS A JOB: THE PLAY

(\$24.99 BluRay; Lionsgate) -- Strong actors can't rescue a trite story of friends growing older and apart in A Late Quarter. Still, when you have Philip Seymour Hoffman, Catherine Keener and Christopher Walken on tap, the cliches



promise to go down as easily as the beautifully performed classic music.



Documentary filmmaker Chris Smith capitalized on his success with *American Movie* to make *The Pool*, a passion project about a pool boy in India. It may not have broken out commercially, but it proved Smith has genuine talent and an independent spirit.



Little White Lies is the exact opposite: it's a flasy French drama with an all-star cast enlivening the *Big Chill*-like story of friends gathering together for a weekend where old wounds will open, secrets will be revealed and little white lies will be exposed. Thank goodness Marion Cotillard, Jean Dujardin and Francois Cluzet are on hand.

Tyler Perry did not succeed in stepping into the shoes of Morgan Freeman for a reboot of *Alex Cross*. If the mere sight of him toting a gun makes you giggle, it's probably because you're more used to see him as *Madea*, whether it's on stage (the DVD release *Madea Gets A Job* captures him performing live) or more likely at the movies. Still, he's slowly expanded his dramatic roles and *Alex Cross* won't be the last time he ventures into new territory.

SIDE BY SIDE (\$29.95 BluRay; New Video)

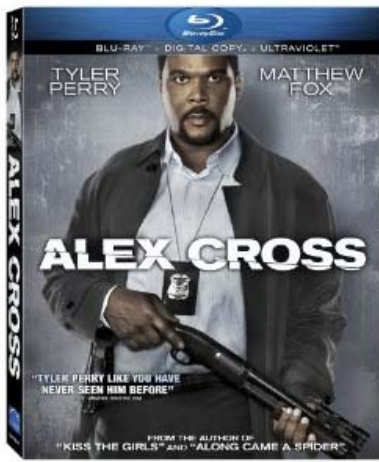
DIANA VREELAND: THE EYE HAS TO TRAVEL (\$24.98 DVD: EOne)

PAUL WILLIAMS: STILL

ALIVE (\$19.99 DVD; Virgil Films) --

Three pretty good documentaries, each one strong enough on their own if you're interested in the topic.

Keanu Reeves is not an ideal narrator for *Side By Side*; his voice-overs are pure *Bill & Ted* even after all these years. But he

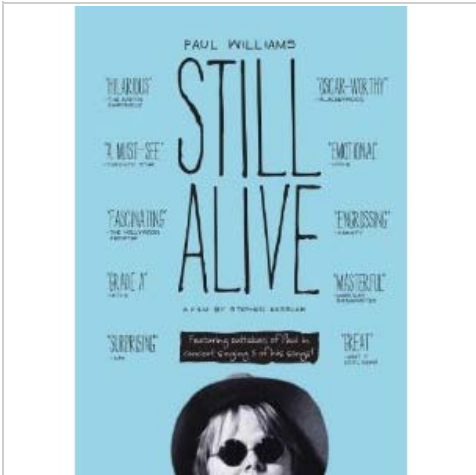
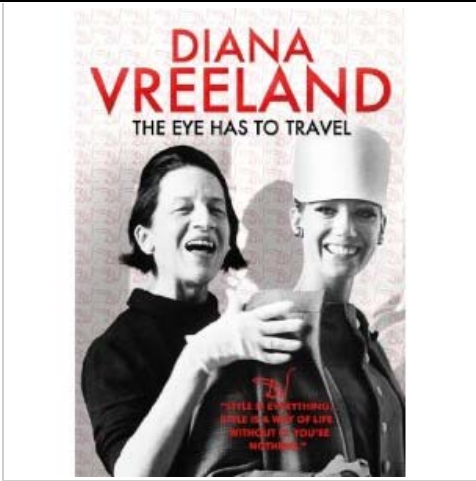


introduces the general public to the interesting transition taking place in movies from film to digital. The movie has a wide scope, taking into account the dramatic shifts in editing once that switched to digital. While 3-D may be a fad, once digital filmmaking is equal to shooting on stock it will unquestionably be the dominant format for making a film, just as it already dominates special effects, editing and distribution. Some directors will still choose film just as some movies are made in black and white. But digital will soon be king and at most stages already is. This film demonstrates the pluses and minuses of this inevitable shift.

Diana Vreeland is an icon with a zest for life so anyone with a yen for fashion will enjoy her company.

Paul Williams has had a surprisingly quixotic and interesting career, as *Still Alive* demonstrates. It's a pity the filmmaker let Williams take over the movie and make their fandom a part of the story or this documentary would have been even stronger. Williams is interesting. A fan's appreciation? Not so much.

ANIMANIACS VOLUME 4 (\$29.99 DVD; Warner Bros.) -- Cartoons for kids get no respect, at least not right away. That may seem strange to say in an era where *South Park* and *The Simpsons* are TV institutions and Pixar dominates Hollywood. But like Looney Tunes back in the day, shorts that are geared ostensibly towards kids are dismissed. *Animaniacs* has the anarchic DNA of Warner Bros. cartoons at its core and this final volume of the TV series is the caper in a nutty, amusing, raucous show that will age very well. In 20 years, they'll be calling the best of these genuine classics.



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