

August 29, 2012

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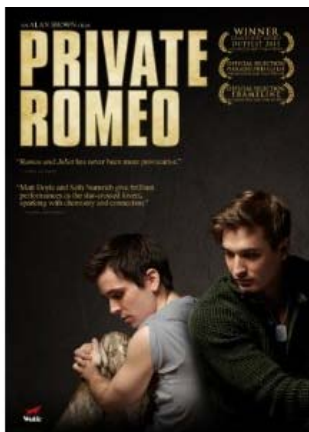
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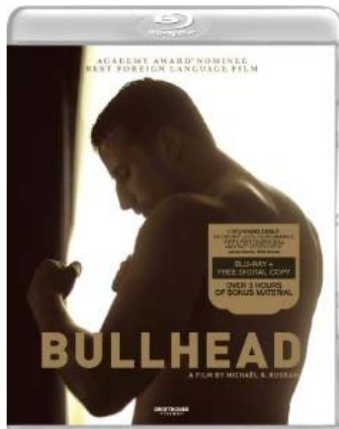
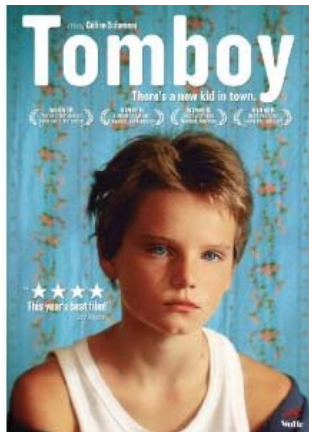
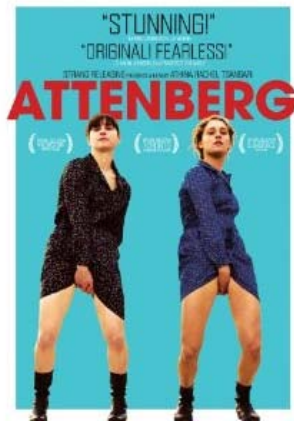
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PRIVATE ROMEO (\$24.96; Wolfe)

ATTENBERG (\$27.99; Strand)

TOMBOY (\$24.96; Wolfe)

BULLHEAD (\$29.97 BluRay; Image/Draft House)

A NECESSARY DEATH (\$24.98; MPI) -- Here are a clutch of arthouse titles worth your time. *Private Romeo* is a clever reworking of *Romeo & Juliet* that was inspired by the all-male Off Broadway sensation *R&J*. This time, the setting is the all male world of military school, where a handful of cadets have been left alone for a long weekend. The gay angle is subtle and the many stage actors on display are excellent as the script deftly adds in a line of dialogue here and there to let their employment of the play's original script make sense. (We begin by seeing them reading lines in class and then they start to quote the play in other settings.) The cast elevates this tremendously, with Matt Doyle a very desirable Juliet, Hale Appleman very combustible as Mercutio and Seth Numrich best of all as Romeo. A few bold touches (actors breaking into song while filming themselves the way kids do these days) could have been pushed further. It doesn't really pay off until the finale when Numrich breaks into "You Made Me Love You" and the yearning passion bubbling under the surface explodes. Still, for those like me who missed *R&J*, this is a fine spin on the classic play. *Attenberg* is even better, a genuinely odd Greek comic drama. This is the second film for Greek writer-director Athina Rachel Tsangari, and she clearly has a distinctive, fascinating vision. The sober story -- a young woman who watches her father dying of cancer while she tentatively overcomes her fear of sex thanks to a visiting engineer -- is shot through with absurdist humor. A huge fan of the nature documentaries of David Attenborough (aka *Attenberg* in fractured English), the young woman frequently takes to imitating animals of the wild in spontaneous



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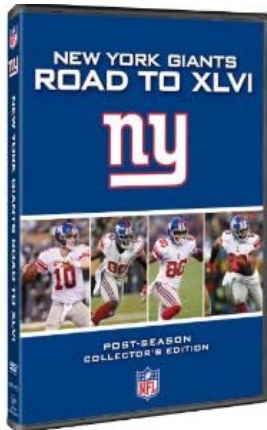


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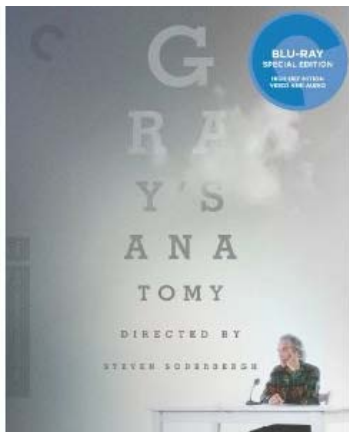


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improvisations with her dad or her best friend, a local barternder who is far less afraid of kissing guys than she. Yep, a heartfelt, if emotionally subtle scene between she and her dad will often end with them grimacing and growling like chimpanzees or wild penguins. It sounds silly -- and the two friends even practice Silly Walks a la Monty Python -- but the result is quite original. Tsangari is very, very precise, and with the collaboration of cinematographer Thimios Bakatakis (who only works with natural light), she creates one striking image after another. I can't wait to see her next film, and is there any higher compliment? I felt the same way about director Celine Sciamma after her debut *Water Lillies* at Cannes. Now comes her second feature *Tomboy*, a critically acclaimed look at a new kid in town that may remind some of the excellent, little-seen *XXY*. This film is less provocative but proves Sciamma is a genuine talent. That's two female directors of serious note in the same week. *Bullhead* is a confused drama about a farmer who bulks up on steroids and animal hormones to counteract insecurity over his masculinity. It's dominated by the performance of Matthias Schoenaerts and acting fans should feel compelled to search it out for that alone. *A Necessary Death* is a compelling mock documentary. A college student decides to make his senior thesis about someone who plans to commit suicide. He tracks down a person with an incurable illness and begins to film them in their final days. Perfect, right? But then reality intrudes and the mere presence of the camera -- not to mention the relationships that spring up between the crew and the subject -- interfere with what seemed so inevitable, so necessary. The director daniel Stamm went on to helm the commercial hit *The Last Exorcism*. Here's hoping this film is a clearer indication of the path he'll take.



NY GIANTS ROAD TO XLVI (\$39.93; NFL/Vivendi) -- Okay, it's clearly stated on the package that this covers the post-season games of the Giants. You get all the complete games and some extras. The picture quality is notably less great for those who are used to hi-def television and BluRay, so you should consider that before purchasing if you have a serious TV to watch it on. But I can understand fans who feel this set is incomplete. Frankly, they'll never make a penny off the footage in their archives and I presume they're not going to release a set with the entire Giants season of every game included. If they should, it should come out at the same time and if they don't, well why not? It can't be that expensive to create and you don't HAVE to charge the moon for it so at a reasonable price I think fans would be enthused. But the week 16 game against the Jets was do or die and the Week 17 game against Dallas was for the NFC East title. For the same price, they should have included two more games. Each season is its own story, so it's not like they always need to include the final two games of the regular season. Some teams coast into the post-season. But those were clearly classic games and deserved to be here. And frankly, what's the point of owning the rights to all those games if you're not going to make sets like this as complete and exciting and inexpensive as possible? It's all "found" money so why not make the fans happy?



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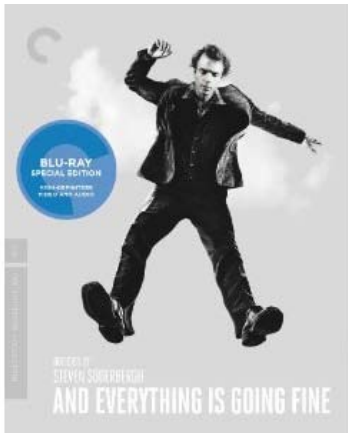


feliciaday
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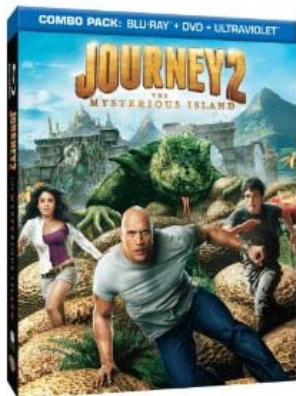
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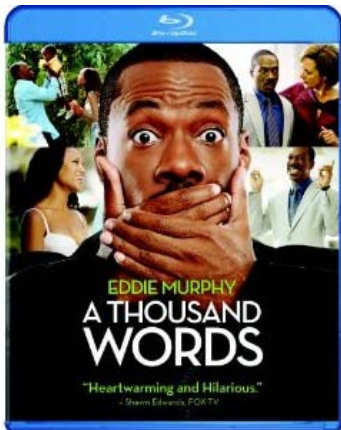
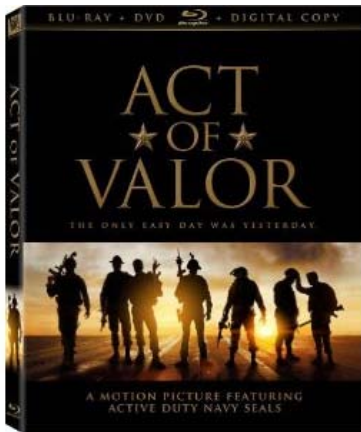
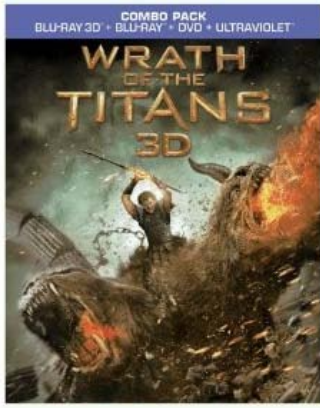
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GRAY'S ANATOMY (\$39.95 BluRay; Criterion)

AND EVERYTHING IS GOING FINE (\$39.95 BluRay; Criterion) -- Spalding Gray was a true original. I can't believe I never saw him perform in person but thank goodness he has been captured on film better than almost any other current theatrical talent doing one-man shows. (I hope someone does justice to Daniel Kitson soon with the same filmic inventiveness.) This piece about his eye disease is not as satisfying as *Swimming To Cambodia* (the place where newbies should always begin with Gray), but it is Gray and that's enough. The best bonus on *Gray's Anatomy* is another monologue, this one on "A Personal History of The American Theater." Of course, Criterion presents it with care. After Gray's tragic suicide, director Steven Soderbergh combed through all the footage on Gray to create a brand new documentary that charted his life, usually in Gray's own inimitable voice. It's a valentine but also a discerning portrait made by one artist in honor of another, and part of honoring him was to look at him clearly and judiciously. Again, the best bonus on *And Everything Is Going Fine* comes from Gray himself and it's his first monologue, "Sex and Death. To The Age 14." We'll never see his like again.







JOHN CARTER 3-D (\$49.99 BluRay combo Disney)

JOURNEY 2 THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND (\$35.99 BluRay; Warner Bros.)

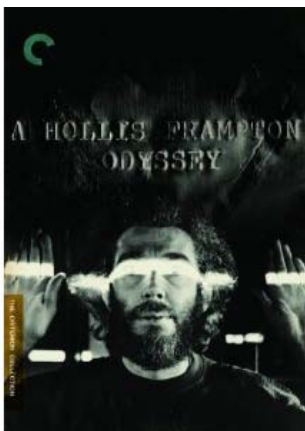
WRATH OF THE TITANS (\$39.98 BluRay combo; Warner Bros.)

GHOST RIDER: SPIRIT OF VENGEANCE 3-D (\$45.99 BluRay combo; Sony)

ACT OF VALOR (\$39.99 BluRay; Relativity)

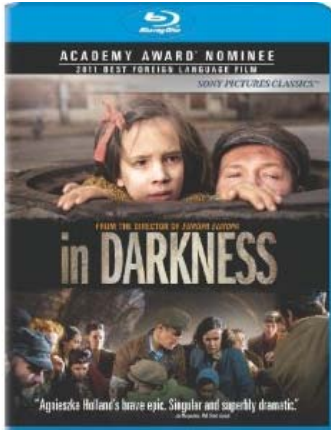
A THOUSAND WORDS (\$39.99 BluRay; Paramount)

SHERLOCK HOLMES: A GAME OF SHADOWS (\$35.99 BluRay combo; Warner Bros.) -- These are the sort of movies people rent. They didn't go to see them in the theater because they knew the reviews were bad or their friends said it sucked or they just didn't have the time or the energy. But when they're looking for a DVD to rent, people always tend to gravitate towards recent releases because the films have been advertised on TV and even if it's bad, it's probably not that bad, right? I always say, why not balance out ever current release with a genuine classic, a movie you've never seen but which is a lot more likely to be actually good? You can start by grabbing titles that interest you from [my picks for the best movies of all time](#). Until then, let me tell you about the movies you're going to rent anyway, even though you know you'll be disappointed. *John Carter* isn't that bad but it's by no means good. It ain't Taylor Kitsch's fault. It's the fault of a banal script and confused direction by the excellent animation director Andrew Stanton. They ignore the books and their anti-organized religion and anti-communism slant but do capture the pulpy silliness of it all. *Journey 2* doubles down on the family blandness and scored at the box office but unless your kids are really young, they'll be bored. I hope the talented Josh Hutcherson (Team Peeta!) makes better choices now that he has the opportunity to pick and choose. *Wrath* had the possibility of actually making a good movie, but it's just as dumb and messy as *Clash Of The Titans*. Does anyone care that the 3-D isn't as godawful? Not when the storyline remains so dim-witted. No one really expected much from the flaming skull flick *Ghost Rider* so when it scored at the box office you can't really blame Nicolas Cage for lazily walking through the sequel. the big drawing card of *Act Of Valor* was the presence of genuine men and women of the military, which promised to give this war movie authenticity that so many others lacked. Unfortunately, the fact that it features real military personnel turned out to be the only drawing card. Again, less authenticity and better acting would have made a better movie. I'll take my rah-rah John Wayne patriotism courtesy of the likes of *Battle Los Angeles*, thank you very much. *A Thousand Words* sat on the shelf for years so it's hardly a surprise this Eddie Murphy comedy disappoints. In an interesting promotion, Paramount will give you a free download of one of Murphy's genuinely good movies if you buy this DVD. Finally, the one real disappointment on this roundup is the second *Sherlock Holmes* movie. Robert Downey Jr and Jude Law are excellent casting and have great chemistry as Holmes and Watson. Too bad the nonsensical plot is a thousand miles away from the character created by Doyle and idiotic on its own terms. If you want to make an over the top action flick, why call it Sherlock Holmes?

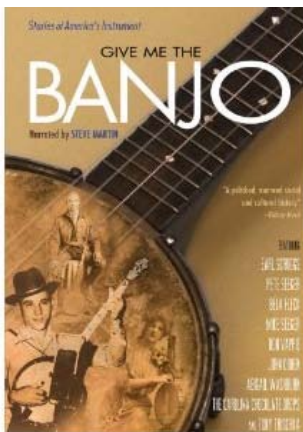


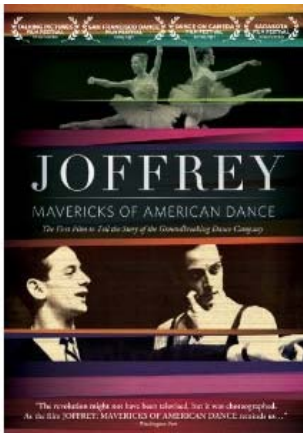
A HOLLIS FRAMPTON ODYSSEY

ALAMBRISTA (\$29.95 each DVD and \$39.95 BluRay; Criterion) -- Two bold new releases from Criterion that make clear how this label remains a labor of love for the people involved. These titles may surprise us and prove profitable but clearly Criterion is putting them out because they believe these titles deserve to be available, not because there's a clear and compelling commercial reason for doing so. If I have a major gap in my film knowledge, it's surely nonnarrative and experimental film, something I try to plug up every once in a while by attending [Anthology Film Archives](#) in Manhattan and embracing titles like this, a collection of the major work of Hollis Frampton. Outside of a museum, where else are you going to be able to watch shorts like these? Criterion includes 24 films from the 1960s and 1970s, along with their usual marvelous extras, including audio commentary by Frampton, selected interviews, a performance piece by him and essays. *Alambrista* is a 1977 film about the evergreen topic of illegal immigration. This one humanizes the story of a Mexican former who comes to California looking for work so he can support his family back home. Director Robert M. Young offers audio commentary, actor Edward James Olmos (seen in a small role) talks about the film's importance and they even include a short nonfiction documentary by Young from 1973.



IN DARKNESS (\$35.99 BluRay; Sony) -- Another movie about the Holocaust, you might groan? Yes, why not? Just as there are endless variations on war movies and romances, there are probably endless stories to tell about the Holocaust, from the gripping first scene in Quentin Tarantino's action flick *Inglorious Basterds* to this quiet, solid drama. It's the best movie in years from director Agnieszka Holland thanks to her ability to focus in on this particular story about these particular people. That turns the tale of Jews hiding out in a sewer system while protected by a Polish man taking money from them to do so into a universal tale of survival and faith. It doesn't reinvent the wheel, but it's a compelling solid film nonetheless.





GIVE ME THE BANJO (\$29.95; New Video)

JOFFREY (\$29.95; New Video)

CHICAGO IN CHICAGO (\$24.98 BluRay; Image) -- Three art-related releases round out this column. Steve Martin is the inevitable host for this documentary about the banjo. You get a little bit of everything: three hundred years of musical history, mini-profiles of top players like Bela Fleck and Taj Mahal and best of all performances, including bonus performances as extras. It's probably best for casual music fans. *Joffrey* is stronger because it has a tighter focus on the ballet troupe, its initial founders and the roadblocks they overcame throughout the years. Ballet fans should pounce. *Chicago in Chicago* is a simply shocking live album -- did they never really use this title before? I always loved how they sort of indifferently just numbered their albums (*Chicago IX*, *Chicago XXII* and so on) but this name seemed like a no-brainer for a live album. The emphasis here is on musical chops, not the vocals, though veteran Walter Parazaider is subbed here by Ray Hermann on sax. If you're a fan of the jazzier side of Chicago, you'll be happy. If you want mainly the pop hits, this isn't the one for you.

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