

THE GOD WHO WASN'T THERE

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-Newsweek

DVD

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Michael Giltz

Posted November 11, 2008 | 06:45 PM (EST)

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DVDs: Hello "Fraggle Rock!"

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Lately, I've been on a crusade against lavish and wildly impractical DVD boxed sets that kind of look cool but can't fit onto your DVD rack or bookshelf, make getting to the actual DVDs nigh on impossible and end up gathering dust in a closet somewhere. I waited weeks and weeks and covered a bunch of boxed sets all at once -- **you can read it here**. But they keep on coming. Here are some more awkward boxed sets along with other new releases.

DOWN AT FRAGGLE ROCK -- Because it aired originally on HBO, the gentle and sweet *Fraggle Rock* is probably the least appreciated offering from the fertile mind of Jim Henson. Parents with little kids should be chomping at the bit to get the entire series. Too bad *Fraggle Rock: The Complete Series Collection* (\$139.98; HIT/Lionsgate) is bungled on almost every level. First, they released the first three seasons (there are four in all) on individual sets. But now instead of releasing the fourth season on its own, they're releasing the entire show, thus punishing the hardcore fans who've been buying it all along. They either have to buy the entire show just to get the final season (and the extras) or they're out of luck and have to wait until the last one is eventually put out. And the packaging itself is a nightmare for kids. You get a nifty looking *Fraggle Rock* logo that snaps open to reveal a photo album sort of binder. (This seems to be all the rage, though the binders are a terrible way to store DVDs.) The way it's designed, the photo album is resting on its side so DVDs are prone to fall out -- in fact, half were rolling around loose the first time I opened it. Plus, the DVDs have to be slid into these awkward, hard to open little cardboard slots that scratch the discs. And the pages surrounding these cardboard holders are flimsy. It all seems designed to make it impossible for little kids to open it up and pull out a DVD without crying in frustration or tearing a page or two by accident. Delightful show. Just be prepared to buy some plastic DVD cases so you can put the discs in them and store away the boxed set out of the reach of kids.

APE SHALL NEVER KILL APE -- Though they might if it meant getting their hands on *Planet of the Apes: 40th Anniversary Collection* (\$139.99; Fox). This BluRay set contains all five feature

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films with loads of extras. I go back and forth on what works best on BluRay. Obviously newer movies like *Wall-E* and *The Dark Knight* will pop on this format. But I really do love seeing older movies on BluRay with all their graininess. Standard DVDs of old movies look good. But when I'm watching an old movie on BluRay, I never forget that I'm watching a *film*. This set comes in a lovely case that like so many others is wildly impractical for the 99.9% of buyers who don't want to keep it out on their coffee table. You get a giant fold-out, nicely designed case in a slipcover that's almost too deep to store on a bookcase (it sticks out a little) and is certainly impossible to put on a DVD rack without taking up half the shelf. Even worse, the DVDs are simply stuck onto little plastic hubs so you again have to buy plastic DVD cases and store them in that if you want the movies to be included in your library. But boy, is the hardcover book included lavish and lovely. I'd love it even more if it were square and part of a boxed set that could fit onto my shelf. Happily -- for casual fans who aren't so hardcore they'll study the timeline included in this set and try to find mistakes -- they've put out the one essential film on its own on BluRay, *Planet of the Apes* (\$34.99; Fox) and it's loaded with extras too.

GO WEST, YOUNG MAN -- Westerns are endlessly intriguing to me. Show a lone rider coming into town with nervous people shutting their doors and scurrying for cover and I'm hooked. Two major releases look to satisfy this craving. *The Films Of Budd Boetticher* (\$59.95; Sony) is a near-perfect collection of five Westerns directed by Boetticher and starring Randolph Scott. It doesn't include two westerns they made for other studios, which is the only complaint one can make about this set, one of the best of the year, certainly. You get five trim Westerns, including gems *The Tall T* (1957) and *Comanche Station* (1959), along with intros by the likes of Martin Scorsese and Clint Eastwood as well as a terrific documentary. Not quite up to the standards of the Anthony Mann/Jimmy Stewart collaborations but darn close. *Wagon Train: The Complete Color Season* (\$119.98; Timeless Media) is a lot more complicated. The anthology show was the 24 of its day, with each season following a group of settlers from Mississippi to California. The two stars -- Ward Bond and breakout actor Robert Horton -- became wildly popular. But here's the bad news. Bond died during the fourth season and Horton left after the sixth season. And what we've got here is the SEVENTH season -- the only season shot in color, the only season that expanded to 90 minutes and the first one without the two essential stars. So you do get what amount to a nearly 70 minute film in every episode; it's just a far cry from the show's heyday. On the plus side, four discs contain 16 episodes from earlier vintage seasons, a de facto greatest hits collection. But a set devoted to Season One would have been far more welcome.

ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE -- A ton of music titles are out this week but for me it begins and ends with the Beatles, the greatest band of all time. *All Together Now* (\$24.98; Apple/EMI) is really a glorified advertorial for the new Cirque Du Soleil Vegas show *LOVE*, which is built around the music of the Beatles. Soleil never collaborates with others so it's fun to see them deal with the very strong opinions of Olivia Harrison, Yoko, Paul and Ringo. And certainly whenever they show up interest spikes. But this is mostly for hardcore fans of the circus troupe. Annoyingly, it's only available at Best Buy. (I really hate those exclusive deals.) *Composing The Beatles Songbook: Lennon and McCartney 1966-1970* (\$19.95; Pride) is a far more bare bones project strictly for the most avid Beatles fanatics. It features talking heads like Anthony DeCurtis, Robert Christgau, Klaus Voorman and others talking about the songs of the Beatles. As an avid Beatles fan, I got pulled into it once but it's a very modest effort indeed. *Come Together: A Night For John Lennon's Words & Music* (\$10.99; Eagle Rock) is a reissue of the Lennon tribute concert that was one of the first post-9-11 events in NYC. Like all multi-artist shows, the offerings are wildly varied. Highlights include Cyndi Lauper, Sean Lennon with Rufus Wainwright and Moby on "Across The Universe" and Kevin Spacey's not-to-be-missed cover of "Mind Games." Another, more raucous event was *Too Tough To Die: A Tribute To Johnny Ramone* (\$19.97; Anchor Bay) with Red Hot Chili Peppers, Eddie Vedder, X, Henry Rollins and others serenading the ailing Johnny who would die just a few days later. After all those tributes, it's nice to dive into *Sonny Rollins In Vienne* (\$14.98; Emarcy) , a 2006 concert in France with Rollins and his band probing and prodding and exploding tunes like "They Say It's Wonderful" and "Sonny, Please." A titan. *A Technicolor Dream* (\$14.98; Eagle Rock) makes the convincing argument that The 14 Hour Technicolor Dream "happening" in 1967 was a signal moment in pop music for bands like Pink Floyd and many others who trailed in their wake. Interviews with Roger Waters and Nick Mason from Floyd, along with the legendary producer Joe Boyd, Barry Miles and others, along with extras like Syd Barrett performances with the band in the extras make this worthwhile. *The Holy Modal Rounders: Bound To Lose* (\$24.95; Carnivalesque) is a somewhat more sober account of Pete Stampfel and Steve Weber as they ply their psychedelic folk for four decades, culminating in the inevitable comeback concert. It's like a real-life *Mighty*

"Washington Unplugged"

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I'm a little embarrassed to love this show as much as...

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John Oliver was upset enough to drop his monocle when he...

Obama Teases Reporter From India During Press Conference (VIDEO)

Obama held a conference packed with press from around the world on Thursday. He called...

Jim Cramer Declares The Depression "Over" (VIDEO)

On Thursday's episode of "Mad Money" host Jim Cramer declared that the depression...

Scientists Find Rocket Fuel Chemical In Infant Formula

ATLANTA — Traces of a chemical used in rocket fuel were found in samples of...

Least Wasteful Cities In America (SLIDESHOW)

It's great to love the city you live in, and better to

Wind without the mock pretensions. Sam Shepard, Dennis Hopper and others weigh in on their journey. *Talk Talk Live At Montreux 1986* (\$14.98; Eagle Rock) captures the 80s band at the height of their commercial and artistic success. Some prefer the New Age noodling that would follow and send them into obscurity, but I'll take the triumphant pop of "Life's What You Make It" and "Living In Another World" any day. Frank Zappa was always on the fringes, too, but his influence is massive and it'll be many years before we absorb all the music he created. One glimpse of his talent comes on *An Evening With Frank Zappa During Which The Torture Never Stops* (\$21.98; Zappa), a Halloween concert from 1981. Lynyrd Skynyrd has been a monster on the road for a lot longer than their original lineup survived intact. You'll get a pretty typical show from them on *Lynyrd Skynyrd: Sweet Home Alabama* (\$14.98; Eagle Rock), a 1996 concert. But the real treat (sorry, guys) are the three tracks from a 1974 show with the original band pounding through "Workin' For MCA," "Sweet Home Alabama" and of course "Free Bird." Duran Duran has proven darn near just as durable and there's no better reason to check in with them than *Duran Duran Rio* (\$14.98; Eagle Rock), a documentary about the making of their best album (by far), along with more than an hour of bonus interviews and performances by the band.

MOVIE ROUNDUP -- *Get Smart Special Edition* (\$34.99; Warner Bros.) screws up by turning Maxwell Smart (Steve Carell) from a bumbling fool who believes he's a brilliant secret agent into a self-aware sad sack who is good at his job as an analyst but yearns to be an agent; *Journey To The Center Of The Earth* (\$28.98; New Line) takes a very dumb premise...and keeps it that way, though Brendan Fraser is exactly right for this sort of film; *Baraka* (\$34.98; MPI) has always been a poor second cousin to *Koyaanisqatsi*, but this BluRay edition is a stunner visually and perfect for showing off your new BluRay player and/or widescreen TV; *Tinker Bell* (\$34.99 on BluRay; Disney) is yet another straight-to-DVD offering from Disney and perhaps because they intend it to launch a whole slew of products and tie-ins, it's better than most of their similar fare and the animation -- while certainly below cinema quality -- is pretty good and the harmless story is painless if strictly for the kids; *Kit Kittredge: An American Girl* (\$28.98; New Line) is spunkier and more fun and sure to get a much wider audience on DVD than during its theatrical run for this tale of a girl playing Nancy Drew during the Great Depression; *Waterworld Extended Cut* (\$19.98; Universal) contains more than 40 minutes of extra footage and while people think I'm joking when I mention its release, it's to the studio's credit that they also include the original theatrical release as well (no, I haven't watched it yet); *Transsiberian* (\$28.98 and \$34.98 on BluRay; FirstLook) is a nifty B movie about strangers on a train being hunted by a KGB agent with a top-notch cast led by Woody Harrelson, Emily Mortimer and Ben Kingsley raising the artistic stakes considerably; intentional B movie *Hell Ride* (\$19.98; Dimension/Genius), a biker movie extraordinaire from Larry Bishop and starring everyone you'd hope (Dennis Hopper, Michael Madsen, David Carradine) with lots of violence and just enough nudity to keep things interesting; that fits in nicely alongside 70s exploitation flicks like *In The Folds Of The Flesh* (\$19.95; Severin/Ryko), an Italian romp starring Pier Angeli who was and still is best known for dating James Dean; *Alvin and the Chipmunks Special Edition* (\$34.98; Fox) comes with a digital copy, and new extras like a Chipmunks Christmas music video; *The Bourne Trilogy* (\$34.98; Universal) comes out in a new trim boxed set of the terrific Matt Damon franchise and if you're wondering why all these movies keep getting rereleased it's because WalMart doesn't stock a DVD library so if you want your titles available for sale during the holidays you have to rerelease them in a new edition; *DJ Spooky's Rebirth Of A Nation* (\$26.97; Anchor Bay) brings the remixing art to feature films by stirring up D.W. Griffith's outrageously racist *Birth Of A Nation* with a new score performed by Kronos Quartet; and Daniel Craig plays a washed up movie star in *Flashbacks Of A Fool* (\$26.97; Anchor Bay) with most of the movie spent on the character's teen years where the ruggedly handsome Craig's younger self is played by the even more handsome Harry Eden.

TV ON DVD -- *Spin City Season One* (\$39.99; Shout) reminds us what a charming TV star Michael J. Fox is; *NewsRadio The Complete Fifth Season* (\$39.95; Sony) unfortunately reminds us that some stars can't be replaced and how even removing a secondary character from an ensemble -- like Phil Hartman's from this once delightful show -- can leave a gaping hole; *Carlos Mencia Performance Enhanced* (\$19.99; Paramount) weighing in on a black President, visiting Iraq, the n-word and more; *Girlfriends Fifth Season* and especially *Sister Sister First Season* (\$36.98 each; Paramount) are two very popular sitcoms and a good place to play catch up for those who want to look in the know with the new power brokers (I mean, Malia and Sasha, of course); *Dark Shadows The Beginnings Collection 6* (\$59.98; MPI) brings together more of the episodes before the vampire Barnabas Collins showed up and is there any other soap in history that has been so

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thoroughly compiled on DVD?; *Chowder Volume 1* (\$14.98; Warner Bros.) is the amusingly silly cartoon about a kid who is training to be a chef in Marzipan City; *Affairs Of The Heart Series One* (\$39.99; Acorn) adapts a series of Henry James works into one hour dramas, but stars like Diana Rigg and Jeremy Brett have a hard time enlivening prose that usually works better on the page and certainly doesn't benefit from the hurried rush of a one hour drama -- any one of these would have been better as a six hour miniseries; *The L Word The Complete Fifth Season* (\$55.98; Showtime) continues the dizzying romances of this trashily enjoyable soap opera; *Project Runway Season 4* (\$27.95; Miramax/Genius) has perhaps the most talented cast yet AND an appearance by Sarah Jessica Parker; *Dynasty Third Season Volume Two* (\$35.98; Paramount) could teach the current prime time soaps a thing or two about classy trashy fun; and *Primeval Volume One* (\$49.98; BBC Video) contains two seasons of the UK Saturday night rival for the family audience of *Dr. Who*, in this case with a story of scientists battling prehistoric creatures that have come through time portals into the present day (I hate when that happens).

DOCUMENTARIES -- Obviously, we're in a golden age for documentary films. More of them are shown in movie theaters and on TV than ever before and more people have access to video cameras so they can tell their own stories or those of others. (And all that video footage just means filmmakers will have access to unimaginable archival material down the road.) Some of the latest include *Billy The Kid* (\$29.99; Zeitgeist), an empathetic portrait of 15 year old teenager Billy Price who lives in Maine, hopes to date the girl in the local diner and generally marches to his own drummer to fascinating effect; *Annie Leibovitz: Life Through A Lens* (\$19.98; Warner Bros.) is fine but too circumspect about her private life to offer any revelations and ultimately I'd rather just look at her work, but then that's usually my reaction to any film about an artist; *Swing State* (\$19.98; Zone) is ideal if you're not completely politicked out -- it covers the 2006 Ohio race for governor with a huge advantage: one of the directors is the son of candidate Lee Fisher and the film intercuts footage that Jason Zone Fisher shot when he was 14 and his dad lost by the narrowest of margins in 1998; *Comic Books Unbound* (\$19.97; Anchor Bay) has loads of big names interviewed in this look at the back and forth between comic books and Hollywood (Guillermo Del Toro, Stan Lee, Richard Donner, et al) but at less than an hour it's way too brief to accomplish anything but the most superficial look at this story; *The Speeches Collection Volume Two* (\$19.98; MPI) has two discs and four hours of speeches by Richard Nixon (including "Checkers"), FDR, Eisenhower and Truman; *Cathouse: The Series* (\$29.98; HBO) is a classic early HBO example of packaging lowbrow entertainment (life in a brothel!) with highbrow wrapping (it's a documentary!); finally, *Run For Your Life* (\$24.98; Screen Media) is not remarkable in and of itself but the story -- about Fred Lebow and how he almost singlehandedly turned the New York City Marathon into a reality and then an institution -- is engrossing enough that runners and sports fans won't want to miss it.

SPORTS -- Sports fans should get on their knees and thank God they live in the age of DVD, where so much classic footage is being repackaged and made available to them than ever before. Here are a slew of titles crammed with tons of stuff. All but one, that is. *Dale Earnhardt 10 Greatest Wins* (\$39.95; NASCAR); *Steelers 5 Greatest Games Super Bowl Victories* (\$39.98; Warner Bros./NFL); *Redskins 3 Greatest Games Super Bowl Victories* (\$26.98; Warner Bros./NFL); *Black Magic* (\$19.95; ESPN/Genius), the Dan Klores documentary that looks at the civil rights struggle through the prism of college basketball players; *2007-2008 NBA Champions Boston Celtics: Celtic Pride Returns Special Edition* (\$39.98; Warner Bros./NBA); and the lone exception, *Michigan Vs. Ohio State: The Rivalry* (\$19.98; HBO), which tells their story in a one hour documentary, which is fine but where are the oodles of extras? Go Blue!

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Seriously, where are the subsiquent years of St. Elsewhere? And WKRP?
How about Dear John?

And really, only an hour for the OSU games versus that team from up north?
They must run the UM victories under the credits.

Go Buckeyes!

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Right on with the Fraggie Rock criticism.

I learned about the 4th Season/full set thing yesterday and am really annoyed by it!

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