

DVDs: Hill Street Blues, Wonder Years... What Show Should Be Next?

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The greatest TV show of all time is coming to DVD in a complete boxed set this April. [I'm talking of course about Hill Street Blues](#) -- the Beatles, the Bob Dylan of primetime dramas. Very few TV dramas proved of enduring value before Hill Street Blues. It changed all the rules and ushered in the first wave of truly great dramas that now proliferate. Now that Bob Newhart has his Emmy, [his masterpiece The Bob Newhart Show gets the full-set treatment in May](#). [This fall, we'll get the innovative sitcom The Wonder Years](#), with most if not all of its music cues intact. I can't wait to see how that show has held up.

So three key shows are getting a proper DVD release just as DVDs and BluRays are giving way to streaming libraries like Netflix. Before time runs out, what other TV shows deserve to be presented in inexpensive, full-length, nicely remastered, with lots of extras (hey, a fellow can dream) boxed sets?

For me I'd like a do-over of Northern Exposure (available but not with all the original music) as well as the miniseries Holocaust (the current release is missing half an hour because it's the syndicated edition, not the original Emmy-winning version) and would love to see St. Elsewhere from beginning to end, since I just couldn't commit to it when the show originally aired and missed much of its greatness.

Actually, the list of great shows still not satisfyingly available in complete sets is very long, if only because TV has produced so MUCH television. So a list is pretty easy to create. St. Elsewhere, Your Show Of Shows (something better than the mishmash that has come out over the years), Tattinger's (including the unaired episodes and the half-hour spin-off), and above all the brilliant drama I'll Fly Away.

What's on your list of favorite TV shows that should come out on DVD? (And while we're dreaming, a really smart greatest hit set from most classic sitcoms like I Love Lucy and MASH and Seinfeld others would be welcome -- sometimes you don't actually want 100+ episodes. Look at The Andy Griffith Show to see how it's done when creating a greatest hits set.) And now, on with a roundup of new releases....

ALL IS LOST (\$29.99 BluRay combo; Lionsgate)

ENDER'S GAME (\$39.99 BluRay combo; Summit/Lionsgate)

WADJDA (\$40.99 BluRay combo; Sony Pictures Classics)

DALLAS BUYERS CLUB (\$34.99 BluRay combo; Universal)

YOUNG DETECTIVE DEE: RISE OF THE SEA DRAGON (\$24.98 BluRay combo; Well Go)

THE BEST MAN HOLIDAY (\$34.99 BluRay combo; Universal)

THE ARMSTRONG LIE (\$35.99 BluRay; Sony)

WATCHTOWER (\$24.99 DVD; Film Movement) --

Three major films came out that seemed vaguely linked as one person against the odds: Gravity, Captain Phillips and All Is Lost. The best of the lot -- and the least seen -- is All Is Lost. Robert Redford stars in this almost wordless movie about a man on a boat trying to survive a storm and shipwreck at sea. I can't tell my port from my starboard and never could quite figure out flotsam versus jetsam, but I was gripped from beginning to end. It was delightful to see Redford -- a terrific actor -- in a role worthy of his talents for a change. I had reservations about the finale but on reflection and comments from others, I now am more open-minded about

what I think and what it meant. Perhaps the extras will illuminate the director's intent, but overall this is one of the purest examples of cinema you'll see this year and a nail-biter to boot.

Similarly, Harrison Ford has also struggled to adapt to older age. Redford just stopped making movies, with an occasional return in some awful flick. Ford has finally let go of leading man roles and is having fun in supporting turns. His work in 42 was better -- and that was a better film -- but here he is in Ender's Game being curmudgeonly for this would-be franchise that stumbled out of the gate, only making \$90 million worldwide. The studio shouldn't feel too bad: given the other wordy, increasingly dull books in the series, this was never a natural for sequels anyway. The novel remains the perfect gateway drug for boys who claim they don't like to read.

Wadjda is a solid film made in Saudi Arabia -- by a woman! -- and featuring a charming lead performance by Waad Mohammed as a cheeky, willful little girl who yearns for a green bicycle even though girls aren't encouraged to ride bikes at all in this repressive country where women are not even allowed to drive cars. Director Haifaa Al-Mansour isn't just the first woman to shoot a film in Saudi Arabia, she's the first person to ever shoot an entire film in that country which doesn't even technically have movie theaters. It's a small miracle and hopefully this modest, quietly subversive charmer will be the first of many.

I was hoping for at least two strong lead performances amidst some earnest filmmaking when I watched Dallas Buyers Club. No such luck. The fault does not lie with Matthew McConaughey or Jared Leto -- two fine actors. They're simply stuck in a vapid, confusing script that barely creates any characters or conflict, seemingly so enamored to be making the movie at all. The tale is about a straight man (McConaughey) who gets AIDS and then gleefully dives into the black market for drugs that might actually work, science and the rules be damned. Leto has the worst of it, saddled with the old tragic queen role -- shunned by family and doomed to die. The movie is so uninterested in its characters that Leto's lover barely has a name or a word of dialogue. The woman who ends up running the clinic with them is similarly no-named. In one small but typical bit of confusion, Leto is in the hospital with a severe medical emergency. McConaughey returns from a business trip (in the era before cell phones) and of course neither man has any family or friends to speak of. The office manager realizes McConaughey hasn't heard, tells him the bad news and then inexplicably says, "I thought you knew." Well, hell, unless she told him, how would she ever think he knew? No one else would have a clue where he was or how to reach him but her, so what could she be thinking. Similarly, the movie begins with McConaughey so frighteningly skeletal, the fact that his coworkers at the rodeo aren't all saying, "Dear God man, get to a hospital and find out what's wrong!" is astonishing. I don't care if it "really happened." As presented, it's unbelievable, as is the rest of this shoddily made, confusing, if well-intentioned bit of nonsense.

Young Detective Dee: Rise Of The Sea Dragon is also nonsense, but it revels in that sense of fun. It has virtually nothing to do with the clever detective stories about Judge Dee. But it is a good excuse for fantastical, martial-arts infused action and Raiders-style fun amidst the sleuthing/adventure. Expect more to come.

What took them so long? Young Detective Dee is the prequel that was apparently greenlit before the original hit theaters, it came out so fast. In contrast, The Best Man Holiday took 14 years to appear. The results are modest, even forgettable, but hey, the cast is starrier than ever and fun to see back together. The Best Man Vacation surely won't take so long.

The Armstrong Lie is almost too depressing to watch. Lance Armstrong built a career around a lie: a man overcoming cancer through work and grit and talent. Instead, the real story was a man cutting corners and cheating to get ahead and then egotistically lying to one and all for years, slurring and defaming former friends and associates all because he was too cowardly to admit he'd been a fraud. Sure, cycling is fraught with cheaters. That doesn't excuse him and certainly doesn't excuse willingly throwing others under the bus because they got tired of the lies. Ugh. This film was being made as the lies unraveled and caught it all.

Watchtower is a film festival treat, a quiet, observant, slow-moving but absorbing Turkish film about a man and a woman with troubled pasts who come together tentatively, but with real desire. It was rescued from obscurity by [Film Movement, which has built a business and monthly movie club](#) around highlighting the movies that got acclaim at festivals but for whatever reason didn't get a theatrical release. You can sit through ten movies in Toronto or Cannes before finding one good one, so more power to them; they present movies direct on DVD and also make theatrical releases happen in major markets. And here's to keeping an eye out for writer-director Pelin Esmer's next movie.

THE JUNGLE BOOK DIAMOND EDITION (\$39.99 BluRay combo; Disney)

MOON MAN (\$26.99 DVD; Cinedigm) --

If you enjoyed Saving Mr. Banks, you're surely aware that the talented songwriting team The Sherman Brothers wrote the brilliant score for Mary Poppins. They also worked on the songs for The Jungle Book (though not "The Bare Necessities," which was written by Terry Gilkyson -- and arranged by Van Dyke Parks!). Those songs are a highlight from this film, the best of the lot from its era and a final achievement by Walt Disney. This was the last animated film he oversaw and of course Mary Poppins was the live action triumph he made happen as well before dying. Talk about going out on top! This sparkling new edition looks just great.

Moon Man is a far more modest affair. Based on the children's book by Tomi Ungerer, it shows the Man in the Moon coming down to earth to check things out, freaking out major governments and making it impossible for kids to fall asleep. It has a hippy, dippy charm, served well by the sometimes psychedelic animation. Not a keeper, perhaps, but worth a look.

GAME OF THRONES COMPLETE THIRD SEASON (\$79.98 BluRay; HBO)

SHERLOCK SEASON THREE (\$39.98 BluRay; BBC Home Entertainment)

NURSE JACKIE SEASON FIVE (\$39.97 BluRay; Lionsgate/Showtime)

DALLAS COMPLETE SECOND SEASON (\$39.98 DVD; Warner Bros.)

HETTY WAINTHROPP INVESTIGATES COMPLETE COLLECTION (\$119.99 Acorn)

NEWHART COMPLETE SECOND SEASON (\$29.99 DVD; Shout Factory)

DOCTOR WHO: THE MOONBASE (\$24.98 DVD; BBC Home Entertainment)

THE WHITE QUEEN (\$59.99 BluRay; Anchor Bay/Starz) --

Game Of Thrones keeps getting better and better. It's not a truly great series yet (Peter Dinklage can only do so much) but it is great fun indeed. The cast is also feeling their oats, the salacious bits of nudity at every turn have calmed down a bit and the mother of dragons cannot be stopped! Nothing like it has ever been achieved on TV: fantasy has always been campy or low-budget and just plain awful. Now to go alongside the sci-fi classics TV has produced for decades, we finally have its first classic fantasy series.

Sherlock may have turned the corner in season three. Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman have been awash in work, so it's no wonder the seasons amount to just a frustrating three TV movies. That should keep the quality up. Instead, the show has edged into camp, seeming to go from a tad lighthearted to out spoofing of itself. Still, the two leads are so appealing it makes the nonsense visuals (like the idiocy that happens whenever Holmes dares to stop and think) just bearable. Amusing touches are fine, but let's hope they rein in the jokiness down the road. Mind you, at this rate, it would take them 50 years to work their way through the canon so we've got loads of time to adjust.

The drama -- yes, drama -- Nurse Jackie has perhaps exhausted its quotient of melodrama, though Edie Falco remains a pleasure to watch. Let's hope the sixth season will be the last and let the show wind things up before making a hash of the storylines they've put in place. In other words, keep her on the wagon!

Goodbye, J.R.! That's the main reason to tune into the soapy soap Dallas Season Two, which incorporated the real-life death of Larry Hagman into the show's storylines. The posters promoting the new season -- with the

cast sexily immersed in oil -- are fun. The show? Not nearly as much as it should be, though I'm always happy to watch Jesse Metcalfe emote.

I really must stop forgetting that actors are in fact acting! Patricia Routledge is so firmly ensconced in my mind as the helplessly snobbish working class woman Hyacinth Bucket (Bouquet!!) in Keeping Up Appearances that I forgot she could play other roles. But here she is charming in a very different manner as Hetty Wainthropp. In this complete collection of mysteries, we see her facing retirement with a firm desire to do something useful and fun, so why not solve murders? Future hobbit Dominic Monaghan is on for part of the ride. Amiable fun.

I was always glad to see Bob Newhart in a primetime hit again. I just never thought much of Newhart, the show where he ran an inn in Vermont. It's the biggest hit of his career, though of course The Bob Newhart Show is the one we'll all remember. Nonetheless, anytime he gets to carry on a phone conversation with an unseen caller is welcome and it was all worth it for that final episode. But reviewing some of these episodes makes clear they really were pretty thin in the humor department.

A new Doctor is coming! But what to do until then? Why dive into earlier adventures of Doctor Who. I really only watched the Tom Baker years until the reboot with Christopher Eccleston so I've got a lot of catching up to do. When I was less than one year old, then-Doctor Patrick Troughton was landing on the moon in the year 2070, getting accused of starting a plague and trying to clear the whole mess up in Doctor Who: The Moonbase. Missing episodes are filled in here with animated ones (which let's you know the devotion of Who fans right there) and as always, the BBC loads this complete adventures with literally loads of extras. If you're a fanatic and have deep pockets, these are catnip.

Once upon a time, an event like The White Queen would have been unthinkable on anywhere but a major network. Now countless channels turn out co-productions and original series with similar lavish casts and Hollywood production values. This BBC miniseries (miniseries because it wasn't renewed for season two) is based on novels by Philippa Gregory set during the War Of The Roses. Rebecca Ferguson is the heroine of the title and the great Janet McTeer is her mother, amongst a large and generally talented cast. Now Starz here in the US is looking to make another miniseries happen; it would be called The White Princess and would be based on the same series of novels. Luckily, you can start diving into the books right now.

ROCKY HEAVYWEIGHT COLLECTION (\$ BluRay; Fox/MGM)

ESCAPE PLAN (\$39.99 BluRay combo; Lionsgate)

CHICAGO (\$14.99 BluRay combo; Lionsgate)

KING OF THE HILL (\$39.99 BluRay combo; Criterion)

DARKMAN (\$29.93 BluRay; Scream Factory)

GOTHAM CITY SERIALS: BATMAN and BATMAN AND ROBIN (1943, 1949) (\$9.99 DVD; Mill Creek)

TRANS-EUROP-EXPRESS (\$39.95 Kino Lorber)

THE ARTIST AND THE MODEL (\$39.98 BluRay; Cohen Media Group)

FESTIVAL EXPRESS (\$24.99 BluRay; Shout Factory) --

Rocky is coming to Broadway as a musical (!) so that's clearly the excuse for repackaging the six Rocky films in this new BluRay set. Happily, they've remastered the first and best Rocky. The new modest extras are some home movies shot by the film's director. Someone suggested that Rocky winning Best Picture against Taxi Driver, Network, Bound For Glory and All The President's Men was an embarrassment. Hardly. Many many times Oscar nominates BAD movies for Best Picture. In 1976, five films came out and got the nod and they were all good and all would make my list of the best movies of that year. Yes, I would have voted for All The President's Men, but that doesn't make Rocky a bad choice. Save your ire for The Greatest Show On Earth, Around The World In 80 Days, Gandhi and the like. Not Rocky.

Sylvester Stallone is still at it, with he and Arnold Schwarzenegger fighting their way out of the toughest prison

ever created in Escape Plan. It's just as witless as it sounds and no good calling card for the former governor.

Chicago is another Oscar winner for Best Picture that wouldn't have received my vote. (I would have plunked down for The Lord Of The Rings: The Two Towers), but better Chicago than any of the others. Here it is 11 (!) years later in a new combo pack and what a bargain those are becoming. You get a BluRay, a DVD and a digital copy for \$15 (and cheaper on sale). That's some razzle dazzle.

Director Steven Soderbergh has made so many movies in so many different genres and styles, it's no surprise we're still catching up to him. One of his best early films that has gone unappreciated is King Of The Hill, a thoughtful coming of age period piece with a terrific cast (including Lauryn Hill) and great, sensitive direction by Soderbergh. Criterion does it proud and talk about an extra: you also get a DVD of Soderbergh's similarly blink-and-you-missed-it crime flick The Underneath. They won't change my mind about Kafka, but his career which seems so scattered while it's happening may look a lot better on reflection.

Sam Raimi made better films before and after but comic book fans love their superheroes so Darkman has always had its fierce adherents. Liam Neeson had his first shot as an action figure playing a scientist turned crime-fighter and Raimi was working out ideas that would bear fruit with Spiderman. But a great hero needs a great villain and Larry Drake of L.A. Law doesn't even come close to the gravitas and scare factor needed here.

Fans of course will gobble Darkman up, just as fans of Batman who are really hardcore will check out this DVD containing two serials from the 1940s starring the Caped Crusader. In the first, Lewis Wilson is Batman and Douglas Croft is Robin, the boy wonder (he was 16 at the time). Because the war is on, they're fighting a Japanese plot to turn our scientists into zombies. In the second, a new Batman and Robin take on The Wizard. It's all creaky stuff, done in the low-budget breathless style that serials invariably were reduced to and is strictly for serious fans only.

Ah art films! In the 1950s and 1960s, sophisticated filmgoers (and those that longed to be) dove into art films precisely to be puzzled and intrigued by the meta-plotting of movies like Trans-Europ-Express, where Jean-Louis Trintignant plays both himself as an actor and the gangster he's going to portray. It all makes sense of a sort and if audiences couldn't figure it out they would insist that was the point and book a room at Marienbad.

More purely, people went to foreign films for the promise of sex. The Artist and the Model has that in spades, since it features an elderly sculptor forming a fond attachment with the voluptuous nude model he's using for his last work, a piece that might well be his masterpiece. As with all those films years ago, this proves to be less salacious than arty as the aging artist imparts wisdom and his views on life to his captive audience. Still, it titillates and that's enough.

Festival Express is a curio of a concert film/documentary showing the freewheeling era when a bunch of bands would decide to tour together by getting on a train and going from town to town and having one big party the entire way. It's not great, but it's a fascinating document and fans will savor the on-board jams where artists of various ilk like Janis Joplin are just sitting around making music. This new release includes a making-of and some more extras, namely bonus performance footage. Worth a look.

LAVERNE & SHIRLEY SEVENTH SEASON (\$42.99 DVD; Paramount)

GENTLE BEN SEASON TWO (\$29.99 DVD; CBS/Paramount)

FAMILY MATTERS COMPLETE FOURTH SEASON (\$29.98; Warner Bros.)

JOANIE LOVES CHACHI COMPLETE SERIES (\$29.99 DVD; Paramount) --

It's a golden age of television and if any kids out there don't believe you, make them watch an entire season of any one of these series. Witless, bland, unfunny and downright godawful -- that's what these are and they're very typical of fare that dominated in the 1960s and 1970s. You can almost imagine what the actors were thinking.

Penny Marshall: When can I direct and I wish I were back on The Mary Tyler Moore Show. Or The Odd Couple. Or Paul Sand In Friends And Lovers. Or anything.

Clint Howard: A bear? Good god, why couldn't I be paired with a dog or a porpoise or a monkey or anything but a bear??

Jaleel White: sure I'm the star (see how the rest of the cast is in the background on the DVD cover?) but I'd rather be on The Cosby Show.

Erin Moran: I wish I were back on Happy Days. Thank god it's still running!

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