

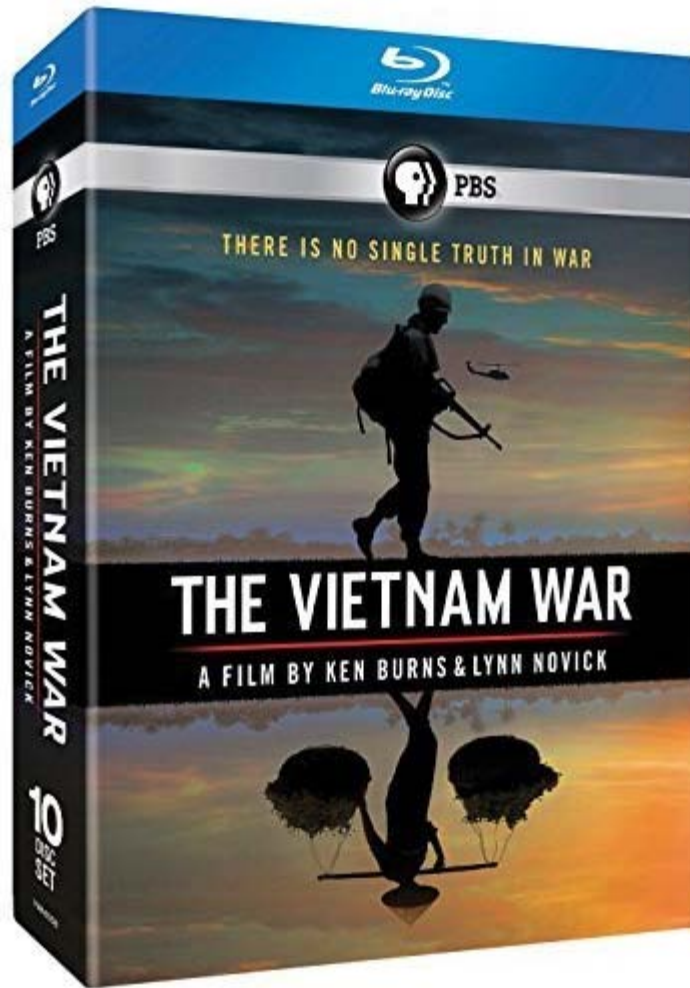


Michael Giltz, Contributor BookFilter creator

DVDs: Ken Burns Does It Again, Plus "E.T." "Wonder Woman," Hitchcock & More

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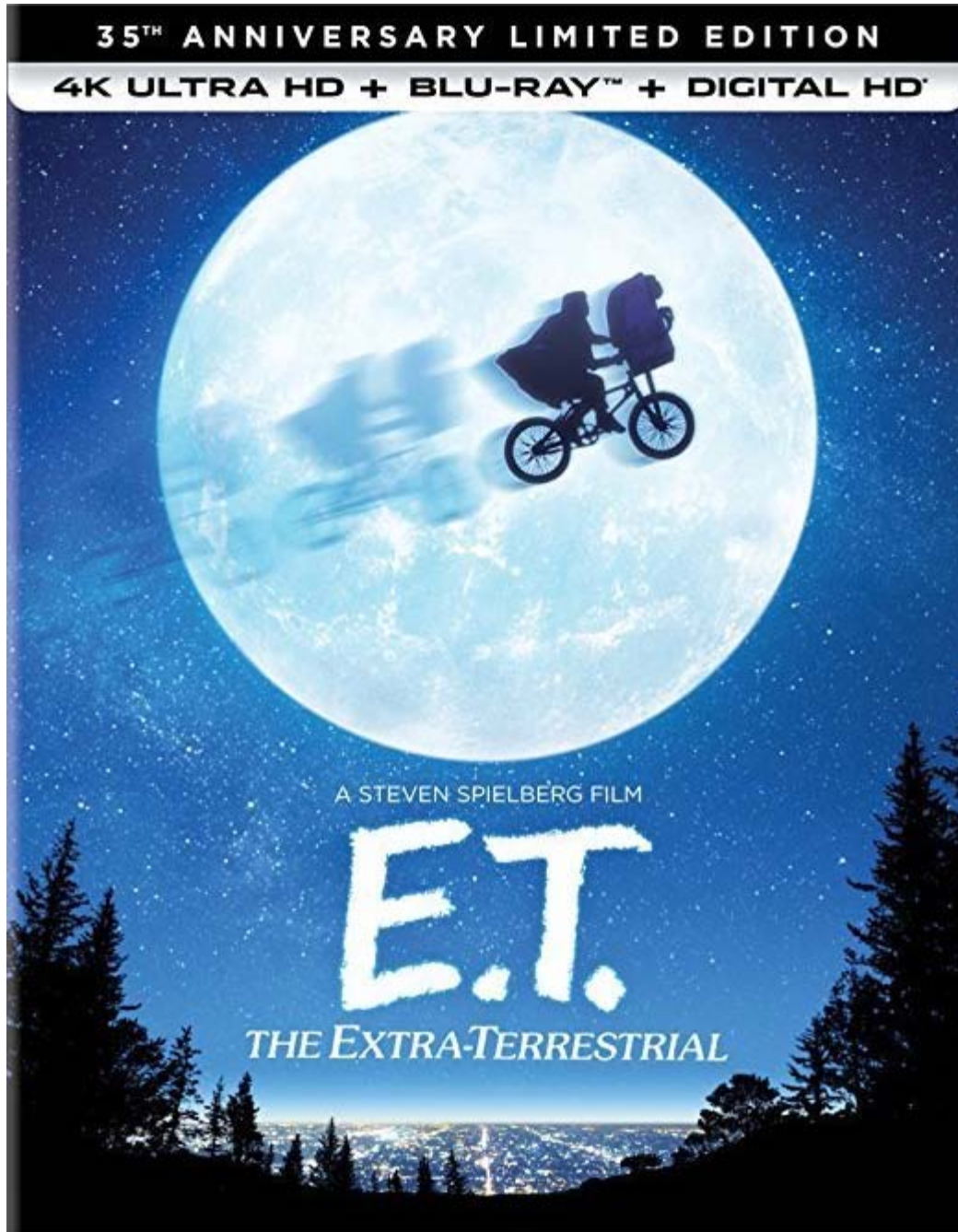
If you're like me, watching the Emmys just provides a checklist of more interesting/great shows to watch! Yes, even when you get to review TV, there's still too much TV. (Even if all I reviewed was TV it would be too much. But I also review movies, music, books, theater and more.) And it keeps on coming. A new Ken Burns documentary, which takes its own sweet time; the complete *Buffy* (which I've been planning to watch again...maybe even the seasons AFTER season five), British TV and publicists keep pushing the hot new shows from Denmark and France and Spain...argh! Then there's Wonder Woman, which doesn't benefit from a second viewing but is still better than most recent comic book movies! So here we go.



THE VIETNAM WAR (\$129.99 BluRay; PBS)

No, the 18 hour Ken Burns documentary does not last longer than the Vietnam War nor does it feel that way. (Haters gonna hate!) This series — created by Burns and Lynn Novick — immediately feels different, thanks to all the video footage from the war. It also feels very much the same, thanks to an opening disc that dips back into the French involvement in Vietnam and takes its own sweet time moving closer to when the US became disastrously involved. I haven't come close to finishing yet, but the sense of being in good hands is already comfortably present. The extras are copious but not overwhelming; the series alone can do that, thank you very much. I'm especially intrigued to see how they handle the genuinely treasonous actions of then Presidential candidate Richard Nixon. As one who grew up reading Nixon's best-sellers on foreign policy and delighting in pointing out to liberals (and conservatives) how progressive his domestic agenda was, it's been shocking to see the evidence pile up until even commentator George Will chimed in with his damning indictment of the disgraced Nixon. It's not the most salient point to take away from The Vietnam War, which even in its early days clearly sets the tone of how foolish it would be to get involved in a war in a country with a history and culture and people you haven't the slightest understanding or context with which to begin understanding. You can get this from the brilliant nonfiction book *A Bright And Shining Lie* by Neil Sheehan or countless other works on this war. And undoubtedly this documentary will take its place alongside them. It's

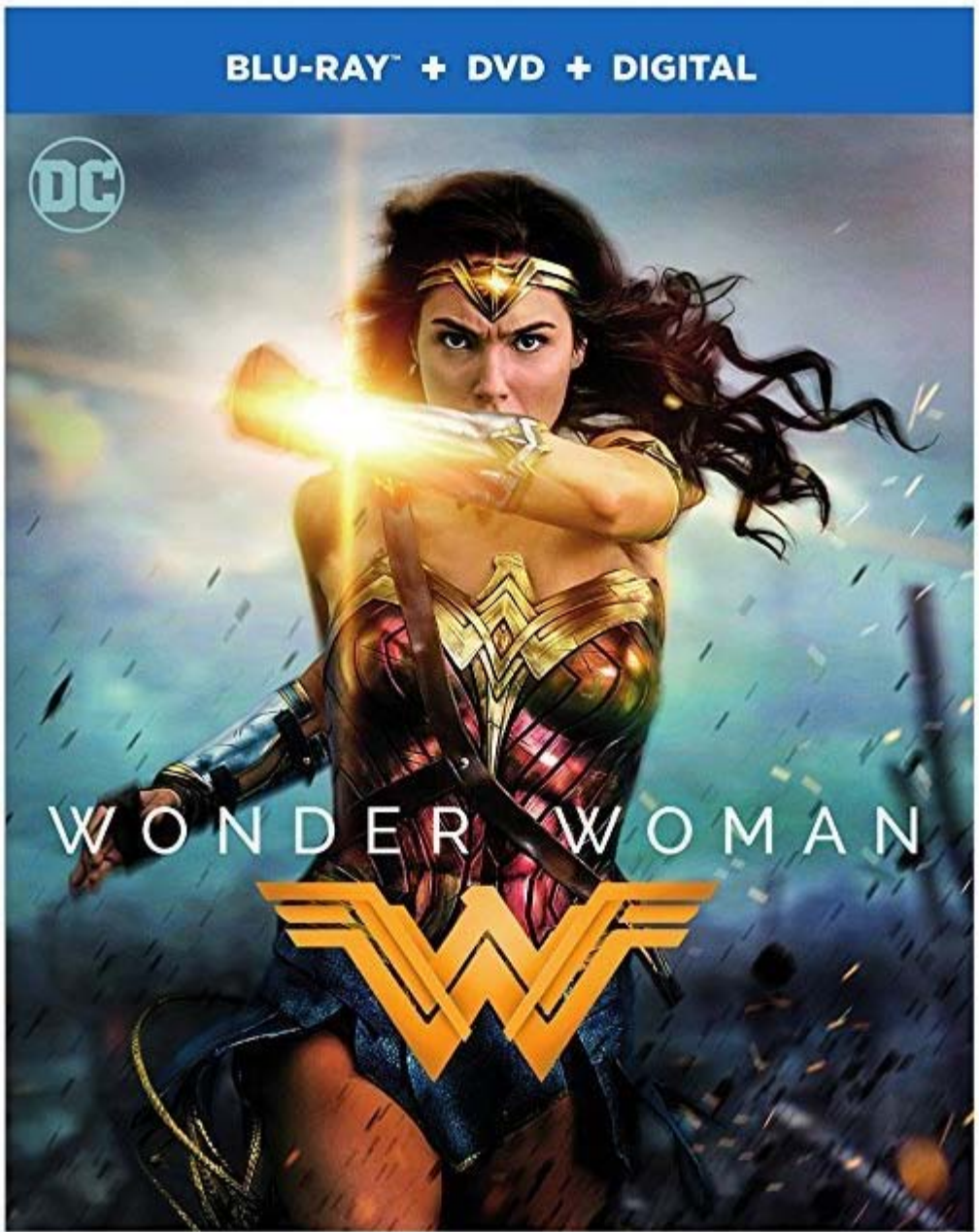
easy to take Burns and his solid, well-researched films for granted. Don't.



E.T. THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL 35TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION IN 4K (\$49.98 4k; Universal)

Earlier this year I saw *E.T.* screened at Lincoln Center with the New York Philharmonic performing the entire score. What a treat and what a reminder of how delightful the music by composer John Williams has proven. (Go [here](#) to read my appreciation of the film.) This 35th anniversary edition contains a newly mastered CD of that score and it is definitely worth appreciating all on its own. The set contains literally hours of extras, many carried over from previous editions and a nicely done new booklet. The film is one of the greats, an effortlessly entertaining family film. I received the BluRay edition for review but I've displayed the 4K version and its price

to make a point. More and more people are getting new TVs and pretty much all the fancy ones are 4K compatible. You'll find 4K content on all the streaming devices including the new Apple TV. We're also seeing a wave of reissues and new releases in 4K. I don't often have a 4K set at my disposal but anyone who does should know they can probably find that format for most new movies I review here. As with BluRay, you can pretty much guarantee they'll look spectacular. I can't remember the last time I discovered a badly mastered BluRay. TV shows are typically NOT available in 4K, at least on disc. Streaming, yes and again — most new shows I review on here can be found in 4K via streaming. So if you still like building your film library, keep 4K in mind. And few films are as playable and satisfying for most anyone as *E.T.*





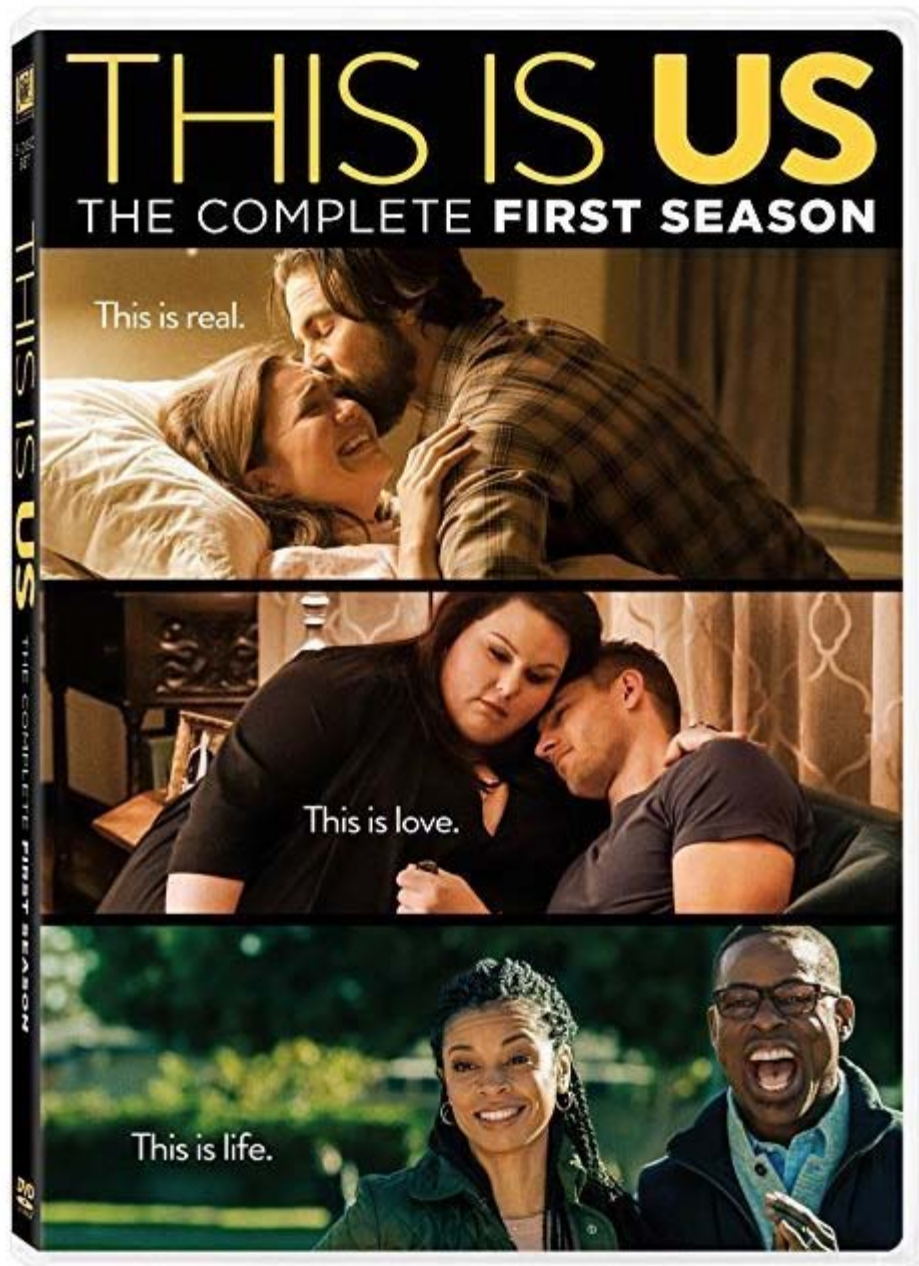
WONDER WOMAN (\$35.99 BluRay; Warner Bros.)

BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER COMPLETE SERIES (\$199.99 DVD; 20th Century Fox)

Can Gal Gadot act? I'm not sure if she'll have a big career or find herself so stamped by Wonder Woman a la Lynda Carter that her range will never be fully tapped. (See: Reeve, Christopher.) We should all have such problems, since she's stunning and embodies the part with aplomb. God knows I prefer Wonder Woman in a period setting. God knows why, does it make me a retrograde or just a guy who prefers to pretend women have come too far to enjoy her proto-feminism in a contemporary film as somehow condescending to women? Ok, too much. The flick at hand is good fun, though the first half is much superior to the second half. (Just like the first *Captain America*.) Sure, I enjoy origin stories, but it's not just that the first half works — it's that the second half is so dumb. The big finale is overshadowed by Wonder Woman's godlike status. It's hard to get worked up when gods are battling and you have no idea what they can actually do or what their vulnerability might be. On a second viewing, I didn't have the same need to cut the film some slack and its flaws are more evident. But the delightful chemistry between Gadot and Chris Pine is off the charts. Someone get these two in a Tracy-Hepburn romantic comedy but fast.

Even this *Wonder Woman* can't compare to the gold standard for super heroes in recent years. I could be referring to the 1970s *Superman* of Christopher Reeve or the recent Spidey of Tobey Maguire. But I'm referring to TV's *Buffy*, which had the tremendous advantage of multiple seasons and the desire to add complexity and nuance to the burdens and joys of super powers while fighting evil. Happily, it was mostly burdens because Buffy never had it easy. The first five seasons had their ups and downs but taken as a whole it's a tremendous achievement that mines the metaphor at the heart of the show with remarkable inventiveness. Plus it's fun and witty and a treat to watch. Maybe now I'll finally give the final two seasons that aired after the show "ended" so perfectly. I couldn't bear to watch (other than the musical opener of season six, which was

awesome). This boxed set is a reissue of a previous edition, which means they're repackaging and putting it out there. Sadly, it's not substantially cheaper this time around but it is worth every penny.





THIS IS US COMPLETE FIRST SEASON (\$39.98 DVD; 20th Century Fox)

EMPIRE COMPLETE THIRD SEASON (\$39.98 DVD; 20th Century Fox)

It ain't easy being on top. Everyone's trying to get a piece of you, waiting with their knives to cut you up. You'd think having a huge hit on your hands but that's not always the case. *Empire* came out of the gate as the guiltiest of guilty pleasures, a primetime soap set in the world of hip-hop. Audiences hadn't gone this nuts for a soap since JR Ewing and family. Creator Lee Daniels knew a soap can and will burn itself out fast. He wanted short runs but the network wouldn't hear of it so season two and now season three have piled on the nuttiness. The star has dimmed already, but when there's gold in them hills it's awfully hard to keep everyone from rushing in for a nugget. Let that be a lesson to *This Is Us*. It's got a complicated structure that should help the show break the endless hunger for more, more, more. They can dole out the suspense by jumping back and forth, without piling on the absurdity. It won't be easy and the just about to start season two will see how well they can pace themselves. Enjoy being on top while you can! The critics will be waiting.

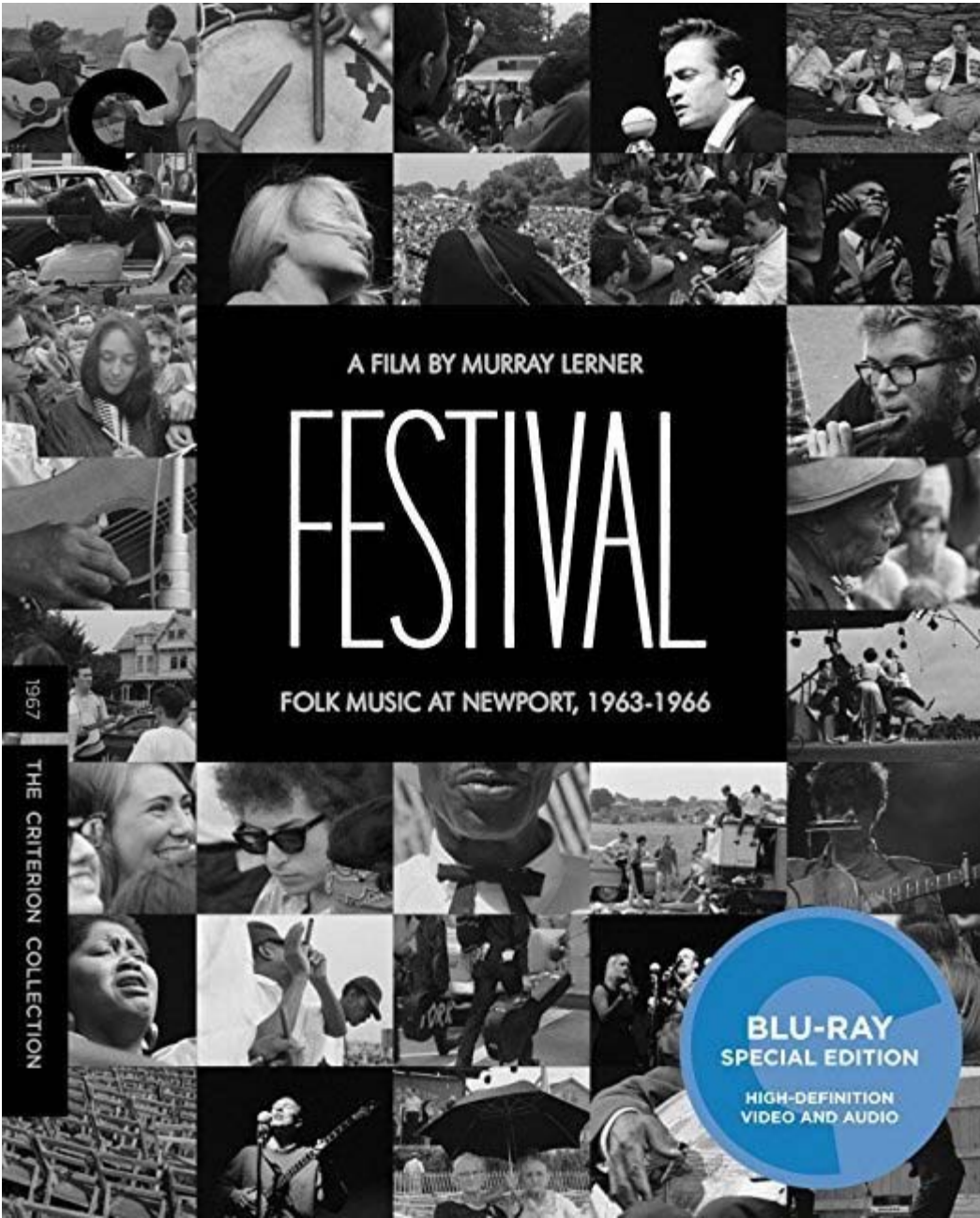


1940 THE CRITERION COLLECTION

LAURENCE
OLIVIER
JOAN
FONTAINE

REBECCA

Directed by
ALFRED HITCHCOCK
A DAVID O. SELZNICK production



A FILM BY MURRAY LERNER

FESTIVAL

FOLK MUSIC AT NEWPORT, 1963-1966

1967

THE CRITERION COLLECTION

BLU-RAY
SPECIAL EDITION

HIGH-DEFINITION
VIDEO AND AUDIO



REBECCA (\$39.95 BluRay; Criterion)

FESTIVAL (\$39.95 BluRay; Criterion)

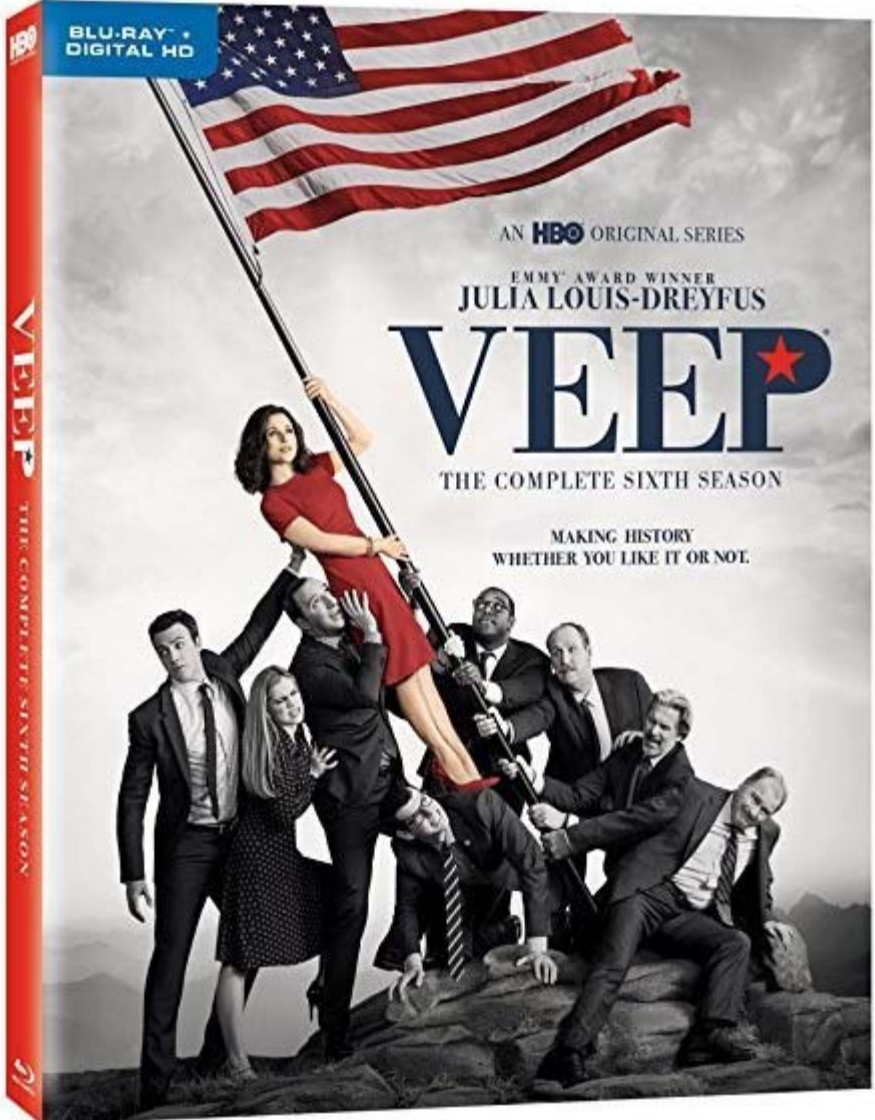
THE MODERNS (\$27.99 BluRay; Shout!)

While I'm certainly a fan of director Alfred Hitchcock (team *Rear Window* here, not team *Vertigo*), I've always been leery of his work for others. Case in point, *Rebecca*, which was his first film for producer David O. Selznick. It won the Best Picture Oscar, even though Hitch was competing against his own thriller *Foreign Correspondent* (and even though I was campaigning for *The Philadelphia Story*). It's a Hitchcock film but not a "Hitchcock" film and I've never given the movie its due, from the chilling Mrs. Danvers to Laurence Olivier's

compelling turn as Joan Fontaine's new husband, who is still *awfully* fond of the first one. Criterion offers a sparkling new presentation of the film and thus a new chance for me to see it fresh. It's gorgeous looking (the film won Best Cinematography), but one of the extras intrigues — I never think of *Rebecca* having special effects but it's fun to hear how the film's tricks were pulled off. There's also a new discussion of the film by critic Molly Haskell and scholar Patricia White. Among other goodies, you'll find not one, not two but *three* radio adaptations, including one by Orson Welles and the Mercury Theatre, which gives us a rare chance to see how two of the greatest directors of all time handled the same material, albeit in different formats.

Criterion also has a new edition of *Festival*, a seminal concert film that has often been lost in the shadows of *Woodstock* and *Monterey Pop* and my favorite, *Jazz On A Summer's Day*. This new edition looks and sounds great, essential since we're talking about some of the giants of popular music at their peak for the folk festival at Newport. It includes complete performances for some songs not in the film and a fascinating section on editing the film, a daunting task since they were looking at footage from four different years and combined them with scene setting and interviews to create one 97 minute film. As always, Criterion does director Murray Lerner and his masterpiece proud.

If director Alan Rudolph were to get one movie into the Hall of Fame, it would probably be *Choose Me* or maybe *Trouble In Mind* (which I fear has not held up). Certainly if it came to it, I'd pick *Mrs. Parker and the Vicious Circle* over fellow period piece *The Moderns*. Neither is great but *Mrs. Parker* has snappier dialogue thanks to the titular wit and a game cast. Luckily for Rudolph, Shout! has done a nice job with *The Moderns*, which is less fun but can boast his usual bevy of talent and a quirky sensibility (natch). Extras include interviews with Rudolph and star Keith Carradine (who I still don't believe can actually paint).



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JULIA LOUIS-DREYFUS

VEEP

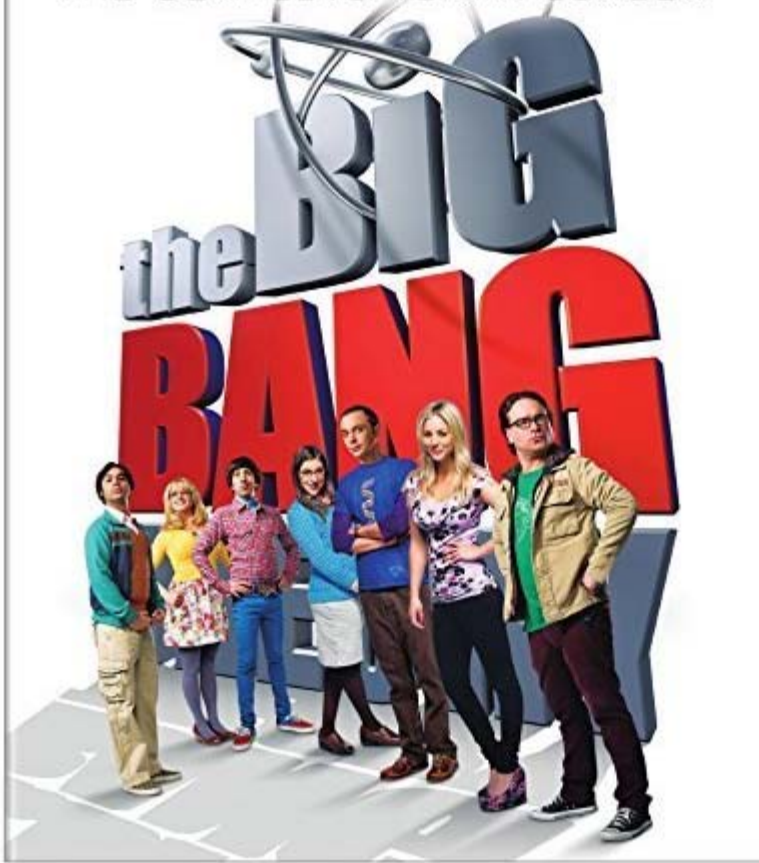
THE COMPLETE SIXTH SEASON

MAKING HISTORY
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VEEP THE COMPLETE SIXTH SEASON

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THE COMPLETE TENTH SEASON





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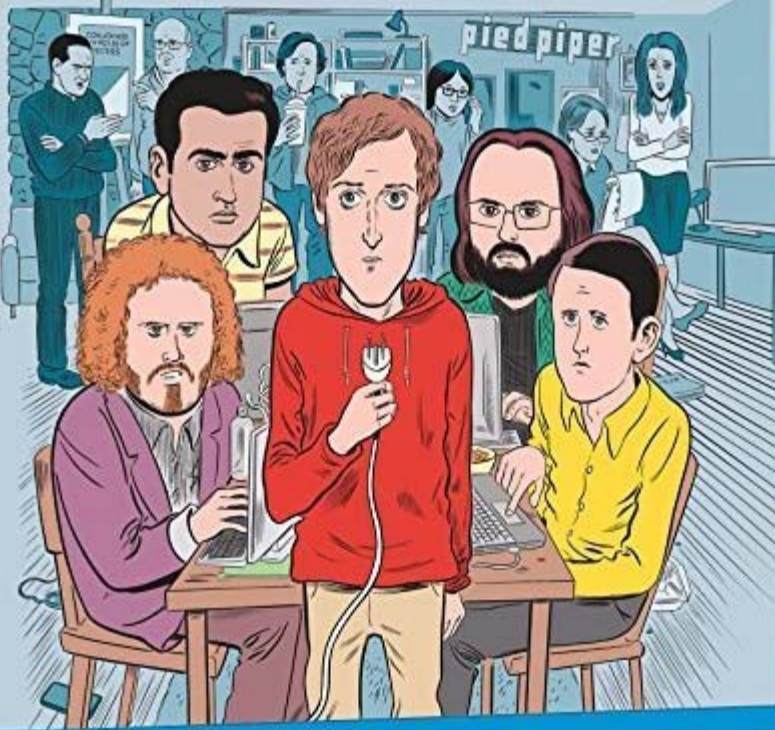
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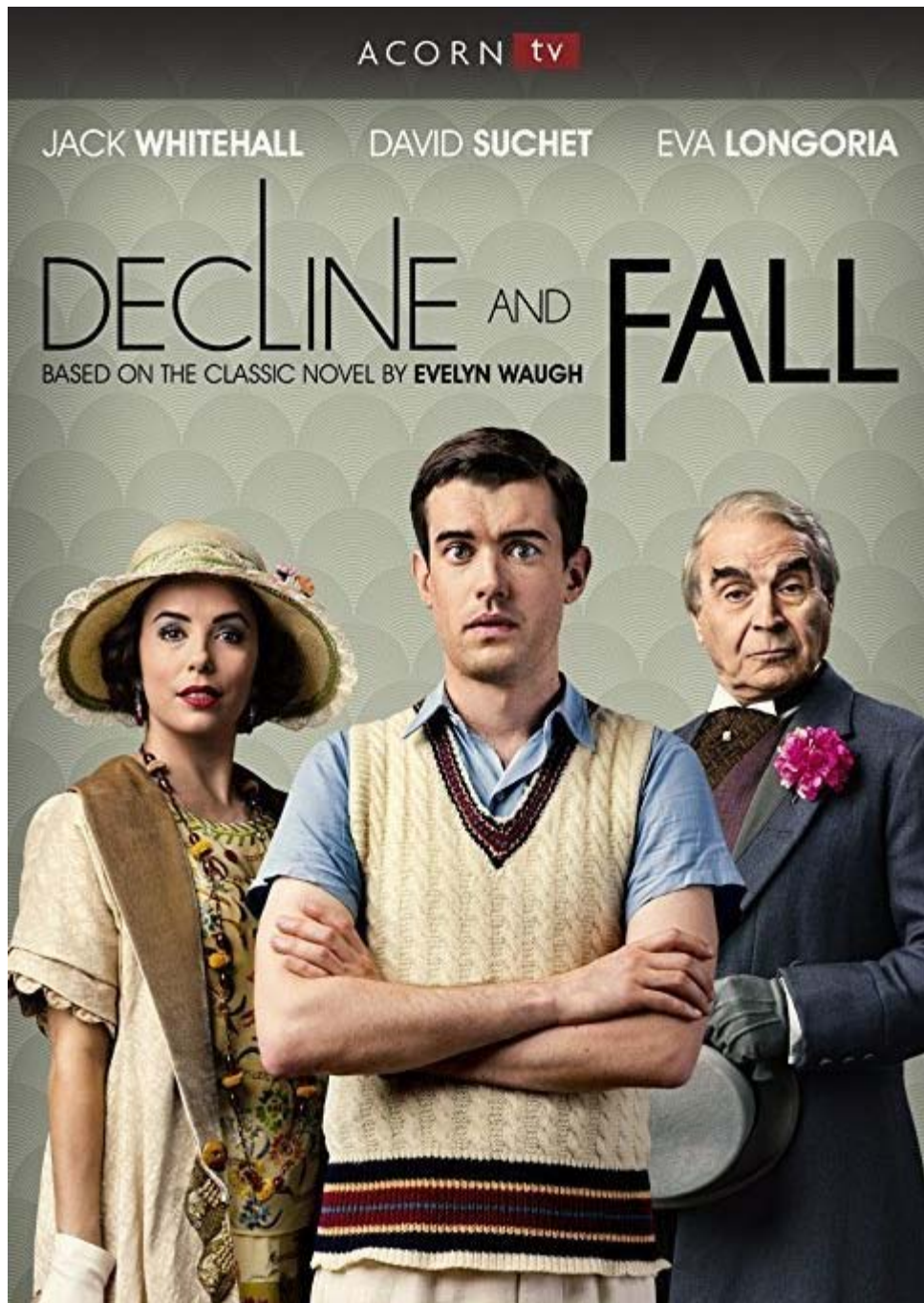
SILICON VALLEY

THE COMPLETE FOURTH SEASON



SILICON VALLEY THE COMPLETE FOURTH SEASON





VEEP SEASON COMPLETE SIXTH SEASON (\$18.94 BluRay; HBO)

THE BIG BANG THEORY COMPLETE TENTH SEASON (\$49.99 BluRay; Warner Bros.)

SILICON VALLEY COMPLETE FOURTH SEASON (\$18.94; BluRay; HBO)

DECLINE AND FALL (\$34.99 DVD; Acorn)

One more season of *Veep*! The Emmy winner for Best Comedy is still going strong creatively (ain't it nice to have just ten episodes to do, Julia Louis-Dreyfuss?). Now you the viewer just have to decide if you want to buy yet another season package or wait for the inevitable and well-deserved box set. If only the

outrageousness of the show weren't outpaced by reality, I could enjoy it more! Though honestly, at least you can watch it and laugh for a while instead of crying.

Veep is calling it a day but *The Big Bang Theory* is just getting warmed up. In its very early years, some found its endless *Star Trek* jokes and geeky demeanor refreshing and fun. But even ardent fans have cooled on the show. No matter. While time marches on and characters "grow," the episodes are still essentially interchangeable. Whether you're sampling them in syndication or watching them in order, you know precisely what to expect and the skilled cast (its only remaining saving grace) certainly delivers it. Maybe *Young Sheldon* will somehow be fun?

Silicon Valley has the same nerdy vibe as *Big Bang*, but it's more akin to *The Office* (or maybe *Office Space*) than *Big Bang*. Fans might have been distraught that T.J. Miller is bowing out after this season but a cast that changes and grows is often the secret to greatness for a TV show. If *Silicon Valley* can find new and different characters to come in and shake things up, it'll be the best thing that happened to it. Just ask *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* or *Upstairs Downstairs*.

Decline and Fall is a miniseries offering the first TV adaptation of the novel by Evelyn Waugh. The British can do this in their sleep, so why so long to adapt this particular book? Well, *Brideshead Revisited* is nostalgic and classy but most of Waugh's novels are scathing, satirical and quite tricky to pull off tonally. This miniseries doesn't pull it off. A promising start devolves into broader and broader jokiness as it goes on and the presence of Eva Longoria — out of her depth in a major role — doesn't help. But David Suchet has fun in a small part and Jack Whitehall as our hapless hero could be a find.

abundance
productions
MIDWINTER

"HAS A PUNCHLINE AS THRILLING AND HAUNTING AS ANYTHING I'VE SEEN ON SCREEN THIS YEAR."
-A.O. SCOTT, THE NEW YORK TIMES

WINNER



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"SURPRISING, DELIGHTFUL AND TRANSCENDENTLY FUNNY."
-JESSICA KIANG, THE PLAYLIST

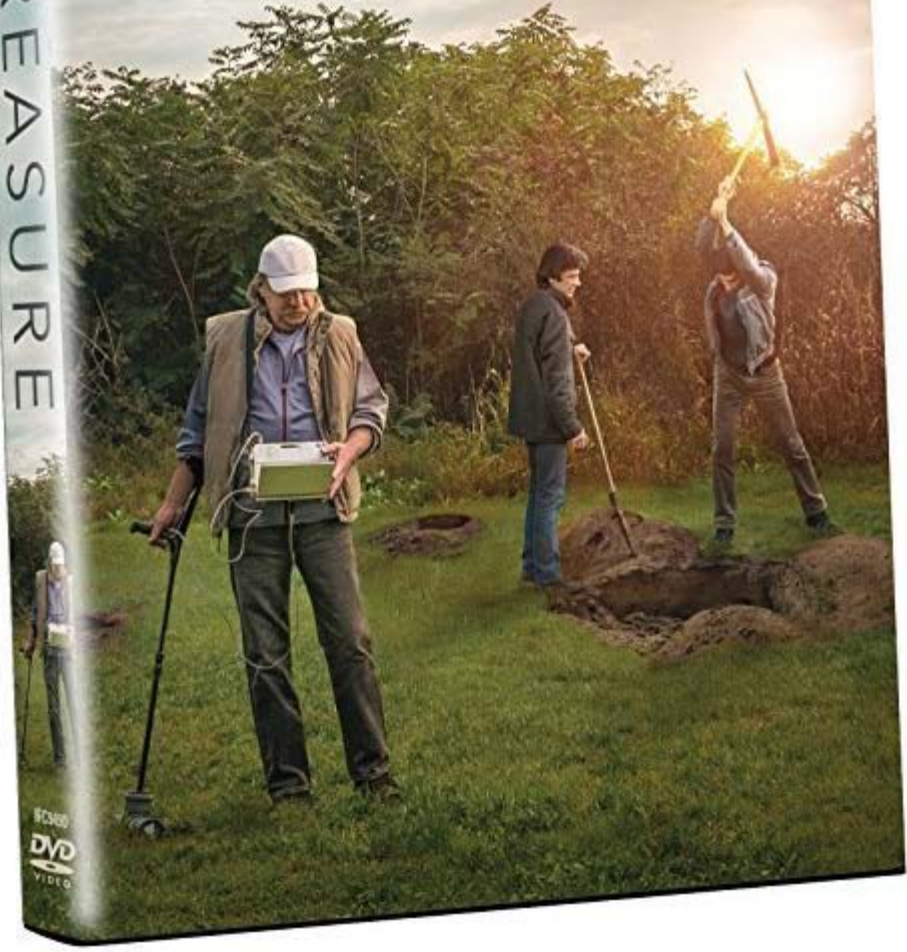
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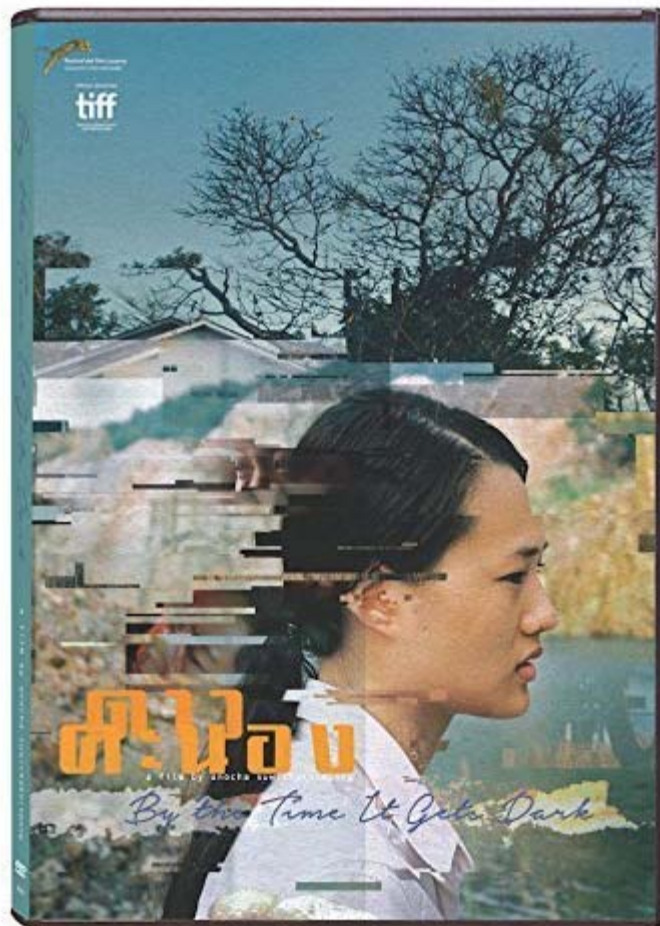
THE TREASURE

A FILM BY CORNELIU PORUMBOIU, THE DIRECTOR OF
12:08 EAST OF BUCHAREST AND POLICE, ADJECTIVE

THE TREASURE



975465
DVD
VIDEO





THE TREASURE (\$24.98 DVD; MPI)

BY THE TIME IT GETS DARK (\$29.99 DVD; Kimstim)

GLORY (\$24.95 DVD; Film Movement)

A quick primer on how to use Rotten Tomatoes.

With so many films vying for attention, how do you decide which foreign flicks to add to your list of to-watch fare? Well, *The Treasure* is a Romanian treat by Corneliu Porumboiu, one of the most acclaimed directors working today. It has a surprisingly comic tone and sensibility that will keep you off kilter in the best way.

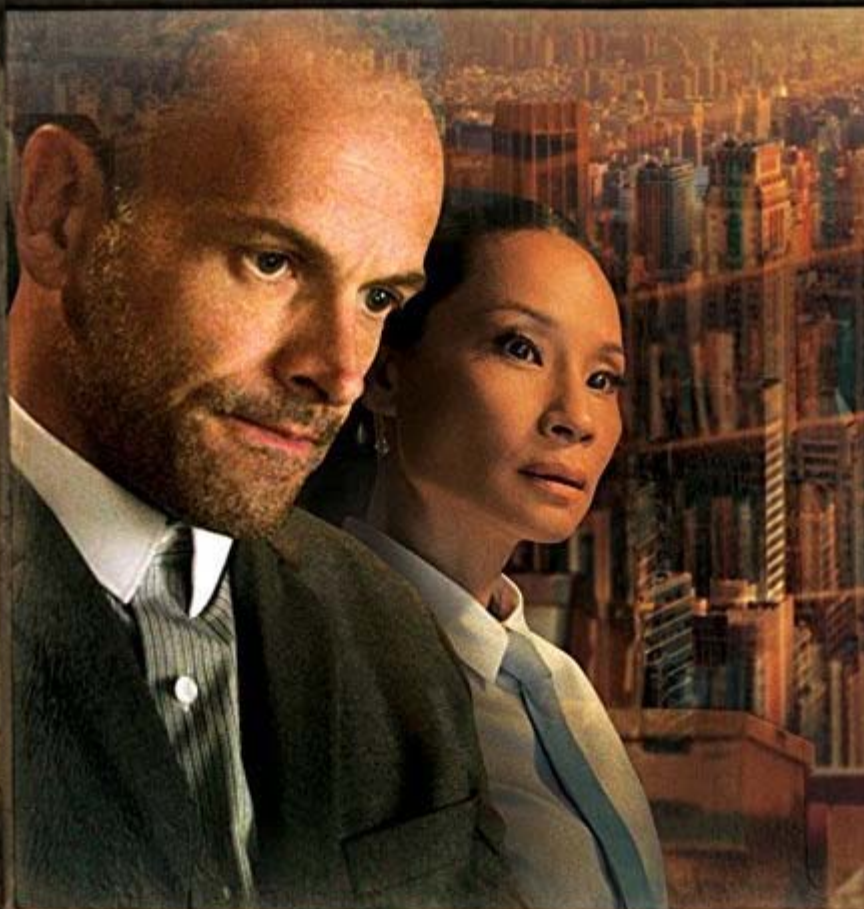
Check Rotten Tomatoes and you'll see it has a 94. DON'T STOP THERE! Anything below a 90 means you should read a few review by critics you trust (like me) before making up your mind. An 80 is NOT a good grade, but even if a movie gets a 50 if half the critics think it's brilliant and the other half think it's dreadful, it might be interesting., Still, a 94 is promising but not a greenlight. Again, you have to actually read some reviews. A film can get a 100 score if every critic in the country shrugs their shoulders and says a movie doesn't suck. (A 2 1/2 out of 4 is the same as a 4 out of 4 in their system.) But the reviews for *The Treasure* will make clear to you that quite a few critics think The Treasure is just that.

If you've sampled any Thai films, you know that country seems to create films that thrive on ambiguity. Plot? They don't need no stinking plot! While *The Treasure* can charm most anyone who gives it a try, you have to dig deeper on RT to learn about *By The Time It Gets Dark*. The critics admire it tremendously, but they make clear the film is an "ode" and mysterious and vague. The Village Voice says it's a film of "glances and ephemera and delicate metaphors." In other words, a romantic comedy it's not. If you're adventurous however, this is clearly another worthy one to put on your list.

Finally, there's *Glory*, the film submitted as the Foreign Film Oscar hopeful by Bulgaria, complete with a comparison to Oscar winner Frank Capra. Again, RT gives it a 91, so you know it's likely at least good. Dig deeper and you discover that the six top critics who reviewed this political satire all liked it a lot. it's the second in a trilogy from a writing-directing team who are basing these movies on events they discovered in the newspaper (in this case about a worker who finds a lot of money, turns it into the authorities and gets rewarded...and then of course his troubles begin. Best of all, it has the stamp of approval from Film Movement, a company that specializes in attending film festivals around the world and rescuing the many good but hard to market films that get overlooked by distributors. So depending on your taste, you're three for three here.

ELEMENTARY

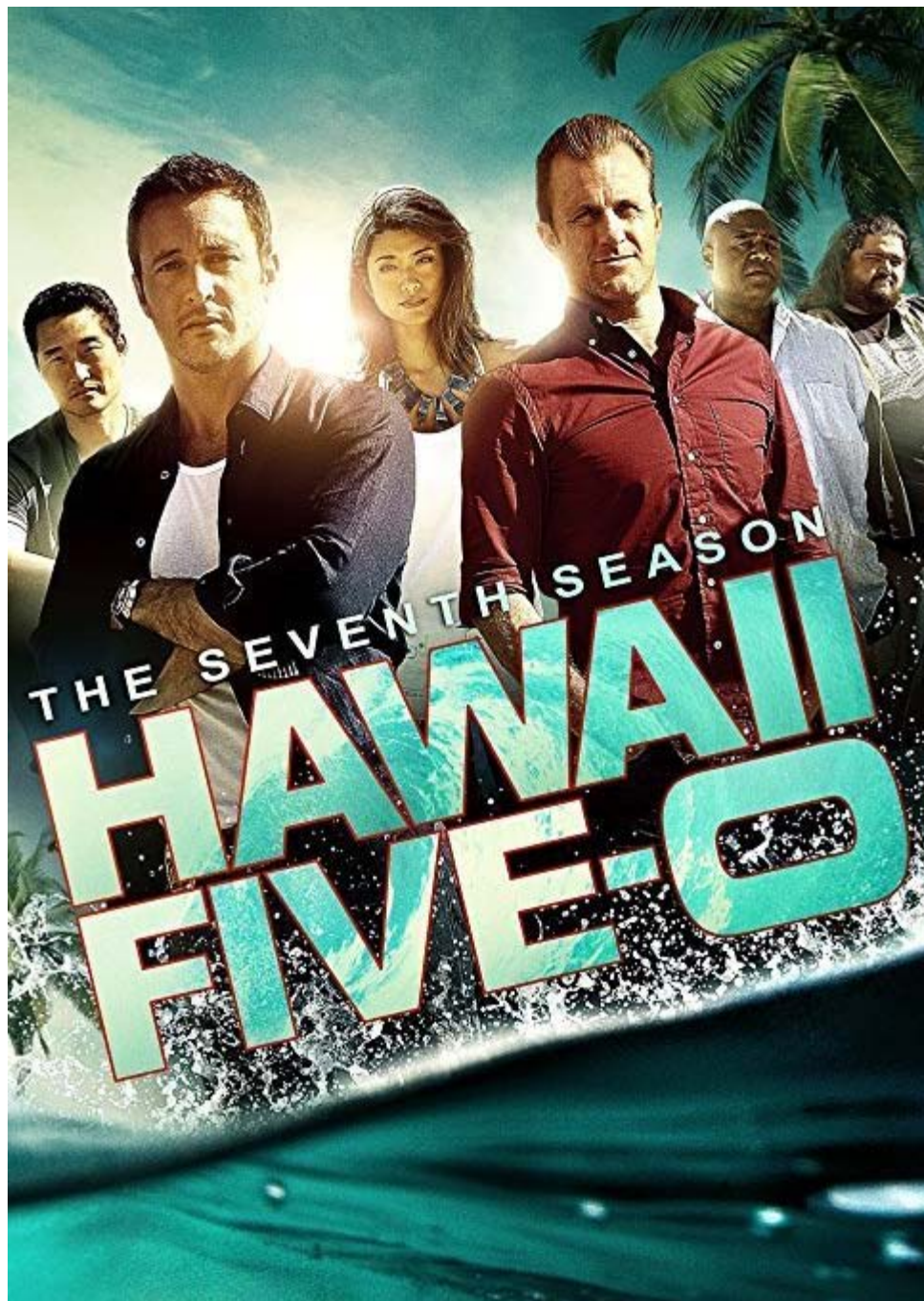
THE FIFTH SEASON



scorpion™

SEASON **THREE**

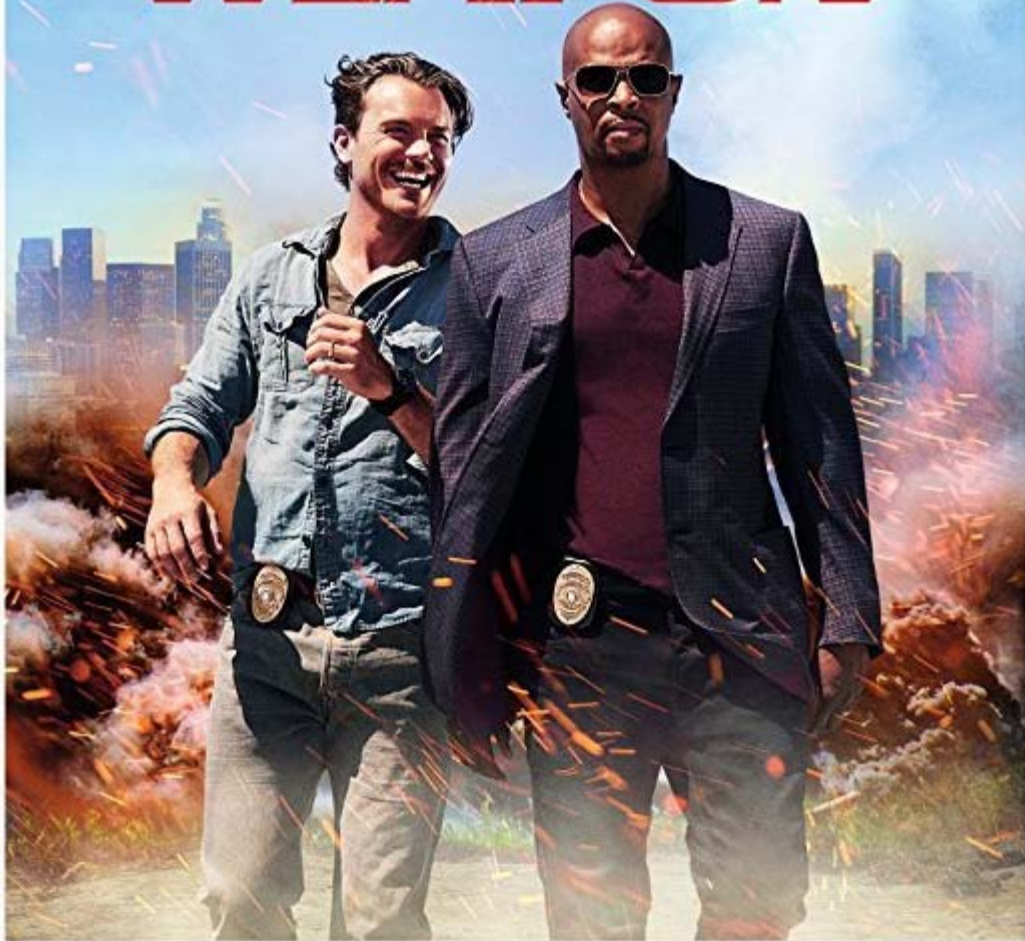






THE COMPLETE FIRST SEASON

LETHAL WEAPON





ELEMENTARY FIFTH SEASON (\$49.99 DVD; Paramount)

SCORPION SEASON THREE (\$49.99 DVD; Paramount)

HAWAII FIVE-O SEVENTH SEASON (\$49.99 DVD; Paramount)

LETHAL WEAPON COMPLETE FIRST SEASON (\$44.98 BluRay; Warner Bros)

ARROW COMPLETE FIFTH SEASON (\$54.97 BluRay; Warner Bros.)

CBS makes it look easy, turning out TV shows that provide easy entertainment that plays around the world and often in any order (the key to episodic tv that makes a LOT of money in foreign sales and syndication). It ain't easy. *Elementary* is the trickiest success story of their current crop because the show and the characters really have evolved. You'll enjoy it a lot more if you watch it from the start and watch the relationship of Jonny

Lee Miller and Lucy Liu develop in all its complex glory. Here's hoping they announce in advance when the show is ending so it can plan a proper finale. *Scorpion* on the other hand is silly nonsense, with a goofy cast of geeky experts and the pleasurable ability to toss off random facts that make you feel like you've learned something science-y while they've been diverting you for an hour. *Hawaii Five-O* doesn't bother with all that; they just deliver up the buddy cop formula thanks to the bro-mance of Scott Caan and Alex O'Loughlin. Meanwhile Daniel Dae Kim and Grace Park handle all the unpleasant crime work. No wonder they left. *Lethal Weapon* has nothing but the bromance of Damon Wayans and Clayne Crawford as they put a new spin on characters created by Danny Glover and Mel Gibson. They'll have to catch up in the interesting crime department if they hope to hold onto viewers, though season one did manage a certain cookie cutter appeal though the show is on Fox and not CBS. It definitely held onto an audience but whether they'll be compelled to return for season two is the question. In contrast, *Arrow* doesn't even pretend to offer self-contained episodes. Sure, each episode has its own plot. But if you want to truly enjoy this soap/comic book offering you're gonna have to take notes and dig into the backstories of everyone involved. Fans are ardent and they'll bring you up to speed if you're interested.



THE BIG SICK (\$39.99 BluRay; Lionsgate)

Saving the best for last perhaps? *The Big Sick* is a winning indie film that jumped from film festival to an art house release to genuine wide release success. It's a triumph for Kumail Nanjani, who co-wrote and starred in this comic romance about an interracial couple falling in love and making it work. Nanjani wrote it with his real-life wife and it has both the slickness of a comedy and the desire to make an implicit comment on how America is always adapting and learning and benefiting from immigrants. Don't be surprised if this early year audience favorite is remembered come Oscar time.

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