

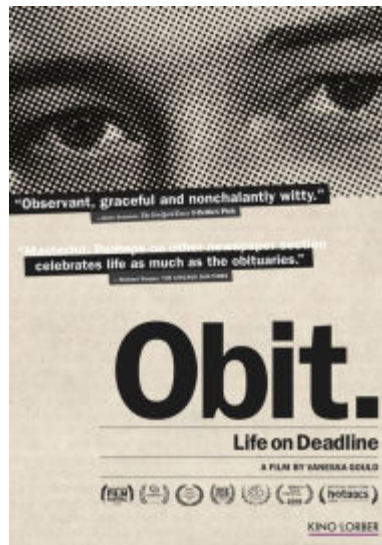


Michael Giltz, ContributorBookFilter creator

## DVDs: Little Documentary Scores Big; HBO's "Big Little Lies" Scores Bigger; Albert Brooks Lives On

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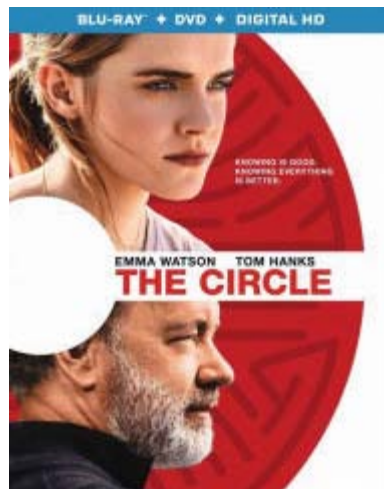
The dog days of August are not a good time for movies and TV shows coming out on DVD and BluRay. Bigger titles wait for the fall when people are back from vacation or looking for gifts. But among the misfires and bad ideas are so commercial hits and a documentary gem about the not so unlikely topic of obituaries. Watch on!



**OBIT** (\$34.95 BluRay; Kino Lorber)

Soon people will be writing the obituary for newspapers (not to mention a free press). Of course, one not so secret fact is that someone has already prepared the obituary for such an august institution as print media, just as they prepare obituaries for famous folk before they're dying, even going so far as to politely interview said famous person in the twilight of their years, with both interviewer and subject knowing full well why they're there" you'll die one day soon and we will be writing your epitaph. I've always been fascinated by the idea of interviewing people in preparation for their obituary. But the old-fashioned documentary *Obit* shows there's a lot more to be fascinated by when it comes to the obituary department of the New York Times, from the people working there to how they create fitting memorials to people they love and (even harder) perhaps sometimes hate. Anyone who is an avid reader of obituaries like myself will dive right in. Just don't write the

obit for straightforward, no-fuss documentaries like this one any time soon.



**GOING IN STYLE** (\$35.99 BluRay; Warner Bros.)

**GHOST IN THE SHELL** (\$39.99 BluRay; Paramount)

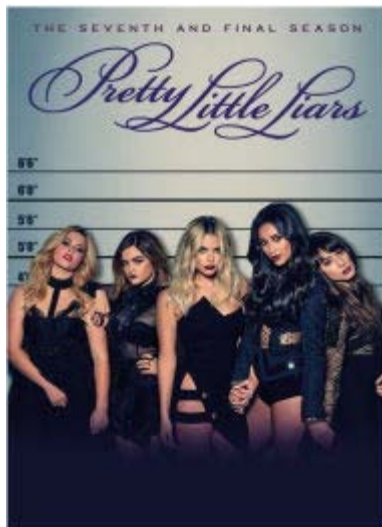
**THE CIRCLE** (\$39.99 BluRay; Lionsgate)

Once upon a time, movies starring “mature” actors weren’t stunts or excuses for foul-mouthed grandpa humor or sources of astonishment. (Old people have sex? Who knew!) Once upon, those were just known as movies while the ones that focused on kids were B flicks rather than the main attraction. No more. Director Zach Braff surely hoped for better but this remake of the George Burns heist flick from the 1970s remains bland, despite an injection of naughtiness. (Ann-Margret certainly helps!) It’s hard not to enjoy the screen presence of Michael Caine, Morgan Freeman and Alan Arkin. *Going In Style* unfortunately makes that easier.

*Ghost In The Shell* probably seemed like a sure-fire hit. Scarlet Johansson has proven her chops as an action hero star in *Lucy* and *The Avengers* flicks. The Japanese manga has been successfully turned into all sorts of properties including an animated film beloved by geeks. But from the angry annoyance over seeing such an iconic Asian character changed to a Caucasian to the film’s generic comic book slickness, everything about *Ghost In The Shell* seemed to dilute the ingenuity and greatness of the original. In other words, it may seem really easy to churn out franchise hits like Marvel and Disney do, but when it goes wrong suddenly it seems very hard.

And how could anyone take issue with a classy adaptation of a Dave Eggers novels starring beloved Everyman Tom Hanks (playing a bit against type here) and Emma (actually, I DO want to be a movie star) Watson? Well, actually everyone could since somehow this modestly budgeted movie inspired some of the most negative reviews of the year from both critics and audiences. It’s surely not that bad...well, maybe it is. But I think the virulent attitude came because people have so given up on major studio films being any better than “not bad” that they invest more and more hope in star-studded indie flicks like this maintaining a certain level of intelligence and quality. When it falls short, they feel betrayed? Do you want them to stay home and watch TV, they seem to be asking? If the next three titles are any indication, perhaps Hollywood is just fine with that.





**BIG LITTLE LIES** (\$49.99 BluRay; Warner Home Video/HBO)

**GIRLS: THE FINAL SEASON** (\$34.98 BluRay; HBO)

**PRETTY LITTLE LIARS: THE SEVENTH AND FINAL SEASON** (\$49.99 DVD; WarnerBros.)

TV is where the action is for good quality entertainment for anyone over 12 years of age. More importantly, if you're a woman and not Gal Gadot, it's practically the only game in town for roles you can respect. Hence the big names flocking to the HBO limited series (that's miniseries to you old people) called *Big Little Lies*. Based on the bestselling book by Liane Moriarty, it is set in suburbia and spins off a murder mystery. But the murder isn't nearly as important as dissecting the lives of Nicole Kidman, Shailene Woodley, Laura Dern (!) and Reese Witherspoon because I saved the best for last. David E. Kelley did the adaptation and he has a long history of creating iconic roles for women. It scored so big that it's no surprise that Amazon has it dubbed "Season One" rather than the official designation of "Limited Series Event." Yes, they may somehow try to cook up bigger little lies and a season two.

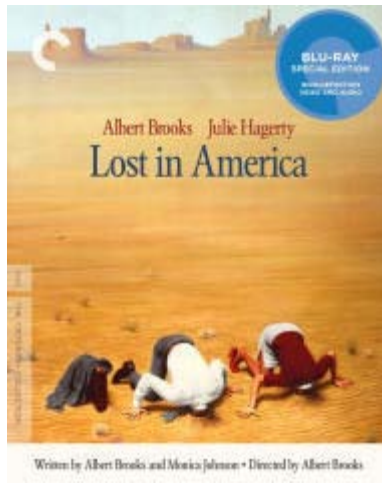
One show that clearly broke ground a la *Sex and the City* in its depiction of female friendship is *Girls*. It ends a six season run without any of the hoopla and (slightly) bigger ratings that marked its debut on HBO. Still critics have been loyal from start to finish. It was always more of a hit among hipsters than actual viewers and the overnights for the final season remained stuck at around 500,000. Which just goes to prove you don't have to be big to be influential. Creator Lena Dunham clearly made the show she wanted to make from start to finish and how many folk can say that?

While I have certain misgivings about the politics of *Big Little Lies*, both it and *Girls* in their way feel a lot bolder and more progressive at least in spirit than the soapy drama *Pretty Little Liars*. I know, I know, the women on *Pretty Little Liars* (what's with all the lying?) actually own their sexuality and are agents of change etc etc. Still, you look at the cover art where they dress like prostitutes (pardon me, sex workers), you follow the storylines (where the minor queer and transgender characters were inevitably killed off) and can't help thinking, is this progress? Like *Big Little Lies*, it's propelled by murder mysteries and plot twists...and actually that describes a lot of soap operas for the past 60 years. They just did what works and had a little sexy fun and it worked for seven seasons.



**THE BOSS BABY** (\$36.99 BluRay; DreamWorks Animation)

It's based on a picture book. It features the voice work of Alec Baldwin, Lisa Kudrow, Steve Buscemi and Topher Grace. (Someone get Topher Grace a really good TV show or movie, stat! He's a terrific actor.) It proved a welcome hit for the beleaguered DreamWorks Animation, grossing \$500 million worldwide. There will be a sequel. I wish everyone well. And yet, perhaps it's Baldwin and the way the baby wears a suit, I can't help thinking of Trump and that spoils whatever very mild pleasure this innocuous comedy might hold. It's not right. It's not fair. But there you are. Your ten year old child will surely be less politically inclined and enjoy it just fine.



**LOST IN AMERICA** (\$39.95 BluRay; Criterion Collection)

Criterion is the gold standard for the presentation of great movies on BluRay and DVD. They can help you discover little known gems. They can bring new insight to classics. And with a movie like *Lost In America*, they can help someone like me who is already an avid fan of writer/director/star Albert Brooks get a goofy grin on our faces at the mere prospect of revisiting it and say, “God, I love this movie.” Brooks has a particular, slow-burn style of comedy and it is the sort that blossoms under repeated viewing. The first time you watch this story about a hapless man adrift in Reagan’s America you will laugh, a lot. The tenth time you watch it, you’ll be helpless with laughter from start to finish. An early scene shows Brooks determined to do well at a job interview. He insists his wife Julie Hagerty do an improv with him: she pretends to offer him a salary that is too low and Brooks remains resolute, adamant, confident and secure. No, no, he’s going to need to make X amount of dollars or he walks. In the very next scene, we see the businessman make an absurdly low offer of a salary and Brooks juts out his hand to accept it almost before the words leave the man’s lips. (His facial reaction about this comes just a split second later and is even funnier.) I giggle just thinking about it. *Lost In America* is a road trip that has delicious fun with Brooks and his usual, nervous, insecurely verbal character. It’s a real gem, one of four truly great movies he made in a row, from the spot-on satire of early reality TV called *Real Life* to *Modern Romance* (which I swear has a great punch line in common with a section of Marcel Proust’s *In Search Of Lost Time*) to *Defending Your Life* and this film. He’s made other films and given great performances in more. He is surely one of the most naturally funny people around and even his voice mail messages should be collected and saved for posterity. (I’m thinking of a Rolling Stone profile that quoted them at hilarious length.) Yes, I’m a fan and you will be too once you watch this. The extras aren’t copious but since we hear from Hagerty, fellow director James L. Brooks and Albert Brooks himself, they’re plenty.

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***Note: Michael Giltz is provided with free copies of DVDs and Blu-rays with the understanding that he would be considering them for review. Generally, he does not guarantee to review and he receives far more titles than he can cover; the exception are elaborate boxed sets, which are usually sent with the understanding that they will be reviewed. All titles are available in various formats at varied price points. Typically, the price listed is merely the suggested retail price and you'll find it discounted, not to mention available on demand, via streaming, physical rentals and more.***