

DVDs: "Love & Friendship" Delights; "The Night Manager" Shines; "Star Wars Rebels" is the "



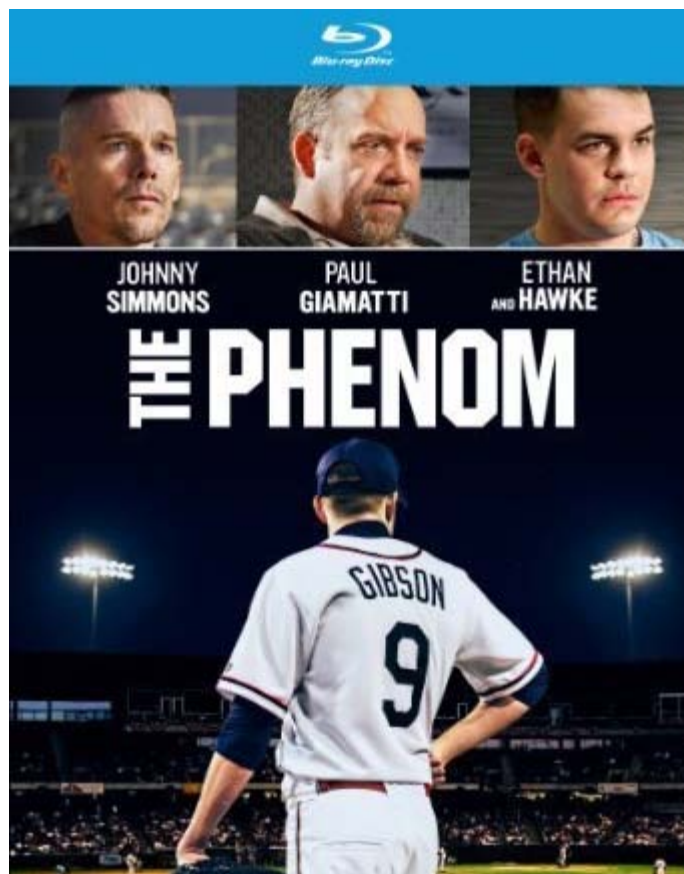
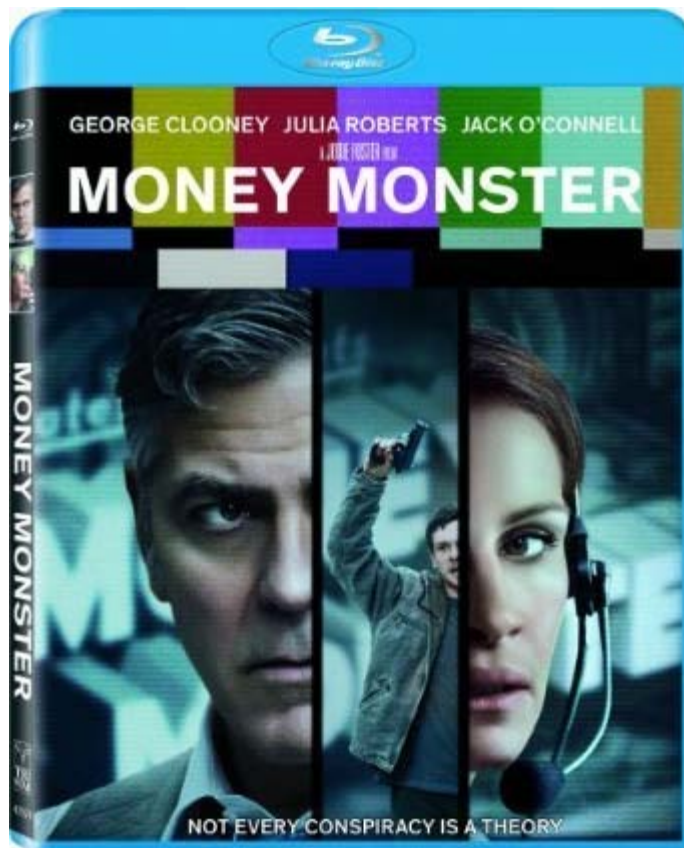
Michael Giltz, ContributorBookFilter creator

DVDs: "Love & Friendship" Delights; "The Night Manager" Shines; "Star Wars Rebels" is the "Star Wars" You're Looking For

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A new week. A new collection of movies and TV shows to pour over, ranging from one of the best word of mouth hits of the year to an acclaimed miniseries to the utterly misguided live action "Jungle Book" and the "Star Wars" release that's actually good! Enjoy.







LOVE & FRIENDSHIP (\$30.99 BluRay; Sony Pictures Entertainment)

MONEY MONSTER (\$34.99 BluRay; Sony Pictures Home Entertainment)

THE PHENOM (\$29.97 BluRay; Image Entertainment)

MAGGIE'S PLAN (\$30.99 BluRay; Sony Pictures Home Entertainment)

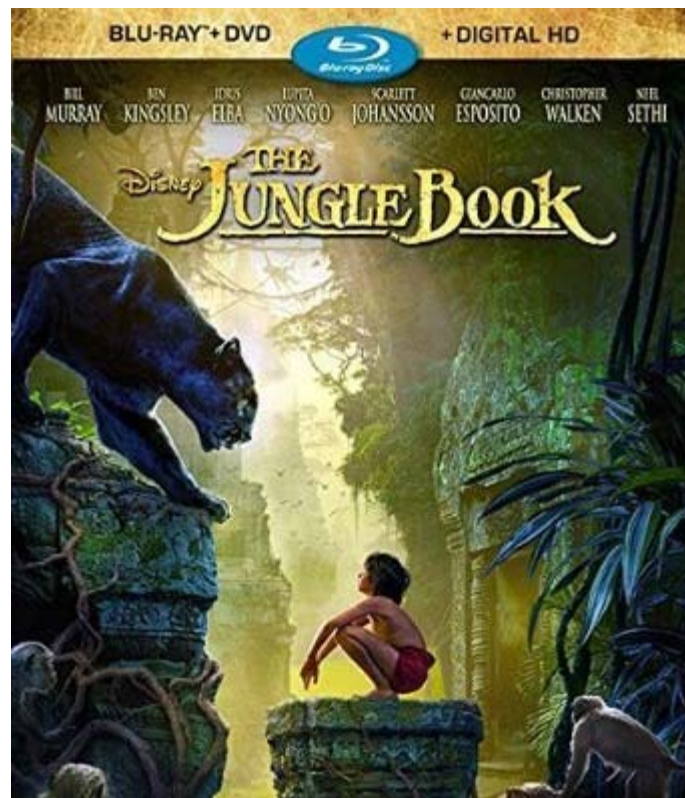
Whit Stillman's *Love & Friendship* is one of the best films of the year, featuring a career-best lead performance by Kate Beckinsale and another droll supporting turn by Chloe Sevigny. But don't be fooled: it is indeed based on a Jane Austen novella, but it's a subtly nastier Austen, one who hadn't yet refined her critique of high society to go down quite so smoothly as it would in her masterpieces. Nor does the story end with delightful "pairing offs" for one and all. Indeed, it's called *Love & Friendship* but there's precious little of it. Stillman proves to be the perfect director to capture the right tone and he's filled the movie with hilarious and just-right actors in every role. A treat, but don't expect hearts and flowers.

Love & Friendship proved a genuine art-house hit, enjoying word of mouth success and a long run in theaters (by today's standards). It's the sort of film they don't make any more. Except they do: case in point being *Money Monster*. It's an intelligent adult drama directed by Jodie Foster. George Clooney and Julia Roberts star as a TV talking head (and his producer) that promotes stocks. He's taken hostage on-air by an irate investor who doesn't realize you shouldn't listen to on-air experts for financial advice. It's timely and well-made and I

wish it were better. But I'm glad it was made and ended up making money for all concerned. You can't make great movies if you can't make decent ones.

Which brings us to *The Phenom*. This baseball drama about a pitcher who can't succeed at the major league level because his dad was a pushy jerk was pitched as a feel-good sports flick. In fact, it's a less obvious, more subtle attempt than a *Good Will Bunting*. Writer director Noah Buschel has worked his way up the ladder in terms of budget and cast. Here he gives a good role to Johnny Simmons and meaty supporting turns to Paul Giamatti (the therapist) and Ethan Hawke, who plays the abusive dad with relish. Any fans of sports movies who also dig French cinema will be right at home. Everyone else is on notice that Buschel has real talent still looking to find its swing.

Hawke of course plays cads and untrustworthy dads with almost too much pleasure. Decency untroubled by strains of something more negative might just be beyond him — or rather, wouldn't interest him. He uses that rakish, vaguely untrustworthy appeal very well in *Maggie's Plan*, the new drama from writer-director Rebecca Miller. Greta Gerwig just wants to have a baby. But she ends up destroying the marriage of Ethan Hawke and Julianne Moore...only to decide maybe those two should be together after all. Hollywood used to call these women's pictures. But since women make up the majority of ticket buyers, maybe Hollywood should realize *all* movies are women's pictures and keep backing more of them. This one doesn't quite catch fire, but all concerned do just fine.



THE JUNGLE BOOK (\$39.99 BluRay; Walt Disney Studios)

I think the wrongly maligned Rudyard Kipling has slowly been rehabilitated. Well, he's not wrongly maligned since the guy was a champion of Empire and the white man's burden and not noticeably less racist than his British counterparts of the 19th and early 20th century. But his writing was much better than his politics, with the poetry awfully catchy, the novel *Kim* essentially admiring and fascinated and respectful of Indian culture (bar a brief bit of white supremacy) and the countless short stories varied and exciting and entertainments of the best sort. The *Just So* stories are creation myths, fairy tales so beguiling you'll imagine he is merely retelling stories that have always existed. *The Jungle Book* tales are similarly elemental in their masterful ways. The story of Mowgli, a boy raised in the jungle, is scary and exciting and never ever tip toes around the violence of nature or the simple fact that animals hunt and eat one another. Ultimately, Mowgli learns a great deal about (human) nature but he cannot remain with his friends...once he reaches an age of maturity, he simply must leave the animals, who may be hunter and prey but they do so to survive, not for sport or pleasure. In other words, they're not Man. None of this will be found in the new live action movie *The Jungle Book*. It tips its hat to the charming Disney animated version (which has a great set of songs by the Sherman Brothers). But everything about this Jon Favreau take is amped up to pointless effect, including action set pieces in case one gets bored, a kid with a far too modern sensibility and celebrity voices that detract from the marvelous special effects that allowed a human child and animals to interact so seamlessly. Bill Murray and Christopher Walken are fun, sure, but the fun comes at the expense of the story. The wisdom is lacking (animals can love each other!), the acceptance of reality lacking (Mowgli can stay!), the snatches of songs shoehorned in to ill effect and it's all noisy nonsense. Disney did a similar botched job in 1994 with Jason Scott Lee. In both cases, you can hardly believe anyone actually read and loved the stories. If they did, they certainly didn't understand them. Andy Serkis, we're counting on you.

THE NIGHT MANAGER



THE UNRATED EDITION

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ROOTS

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ROOTS

YOUR NAME IS YOUR SHIELD





THE NIGHT MANAGER (\$40.99 BluRay; Sony Pictures Home Entertainment)

ROOTS (\$26.98 DVD; Lionsgate)

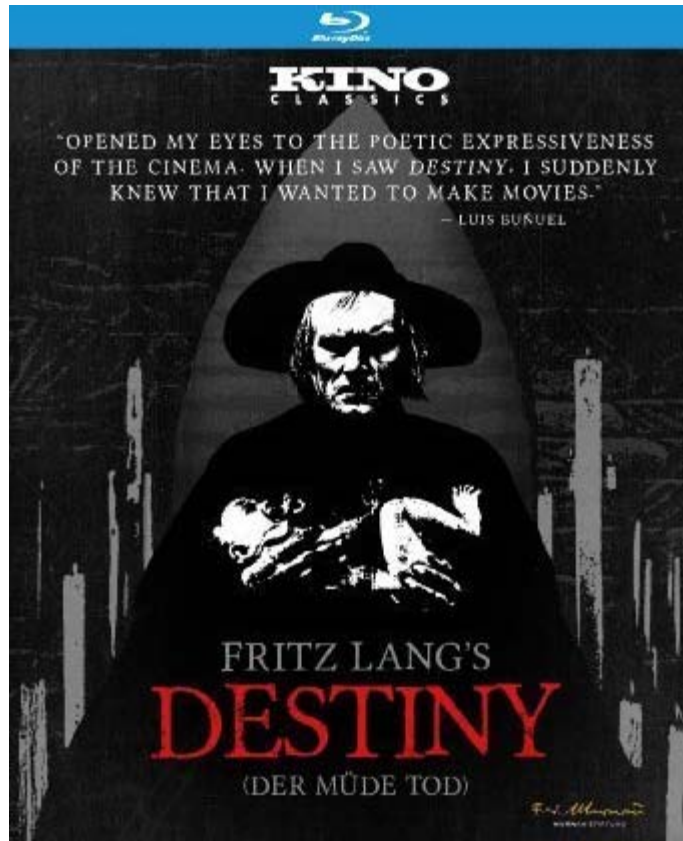
THE TUNNEL FIRST SEASON (\$59.99 BluRay; PBS)

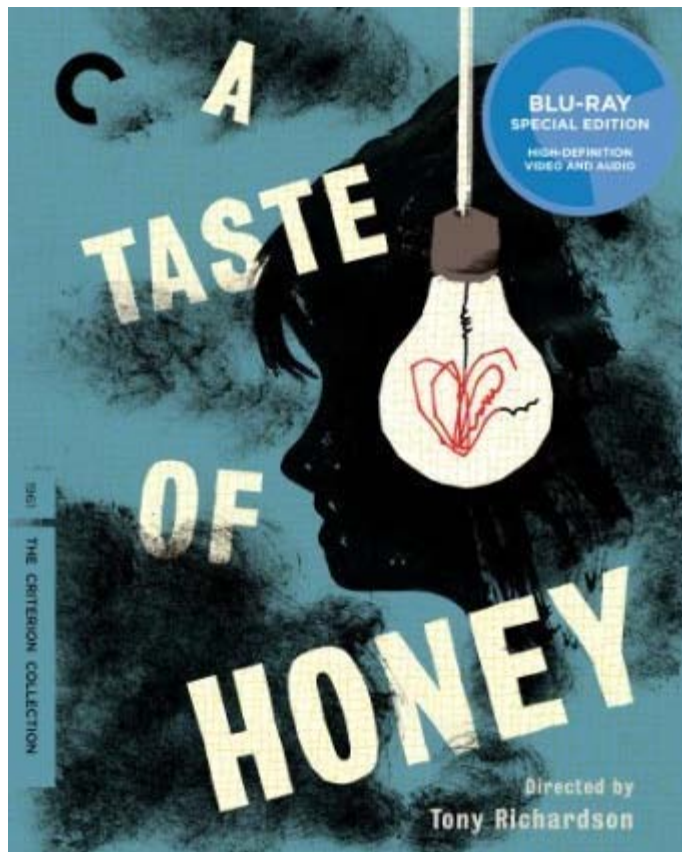
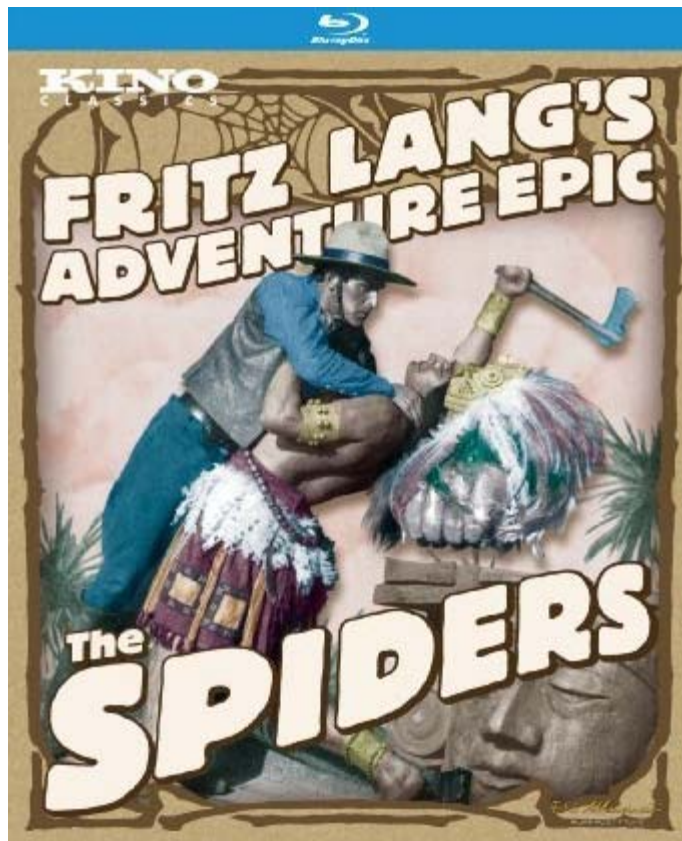
One of the best miniseries of the year, *The Night Manager* has the ill-fortune to be coming around when so many limited run TV shows get lumped into the miniseries category whether they deserve it or not. Even worse, it comes on the heels of the brilliant film adaptation of *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, which almost impossibly condensed an earlier adaptation of John Le Carre (which was a novel and became a legendary miniseries starring Alec Guinness) and did it brilliantly. So big shoes to follow. And *The Night Manager* succeeds brilliantly. Tom Hiddleston has been sort of a thinking person's It Boy actor the past year with big roles in a string of movies. Turns out his turn in this miniseries is where he comes into his own. Don't miss it.

Roots feels overlooked. Ironically, it's better than the original *Roots* but not so remarkably better that it could escape the shadow of that landmark TV event. The original's master-stroke was to cast beloved TV actors in the roles of slave owners, making the audience uncomfortably complicit in identifying with the owners and thus America's history of slavery and prejudice, a history that continues today, needless to say. This version can't and doesn't do that (today's TV landscape is far too diverse for a similar stunt). It's solid fare, but not so sophisticated and wrenching to make it seem more than dutiful in retelling a good story. The original was TV history. This one feels like a history lesson.

Hold on to your hat: *The Bridge* was a Scandinavian crime drama. It was adapted into a US series in 2013, also called *The Bridge*. It was also turned into a British-French co-production called *The Tunnel*. The severed body is now found not on a bridge but in a tunnel, or to be exact the Chunnel. (Hence the British and the

French and apparently a first for UK TV with two languages present in the show.) It's a bit in the shadow of the original season one from Scandinavia but Stephen Dillane and Clémence Poésy have good chemistry. Oh, did I mention this aired in the UK and France back in 2013, the same time we saw the US version of *The Bridge*? They've done a season two which reviews say is a step up and presumably we won't have to wait long.





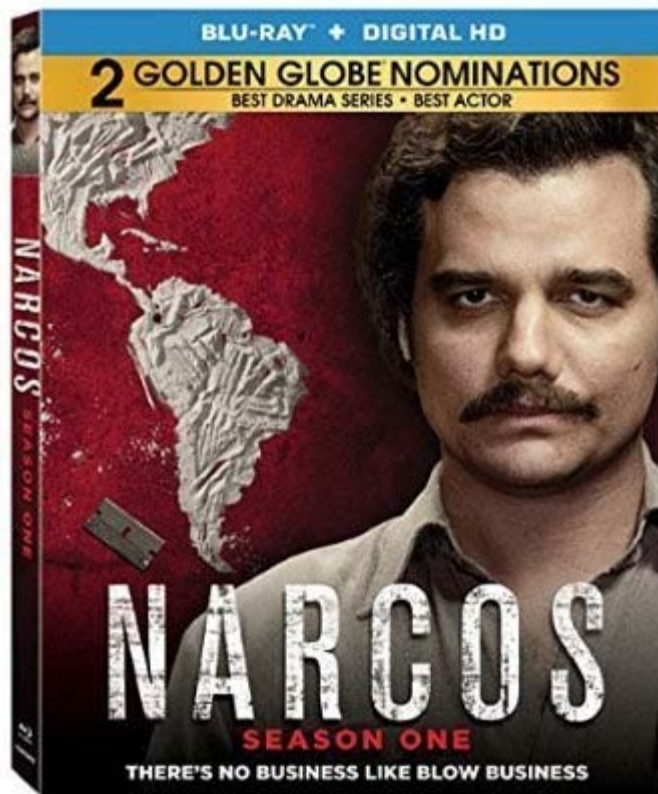
DESTINY (\$29.95 BluRay; Kino Lorber)

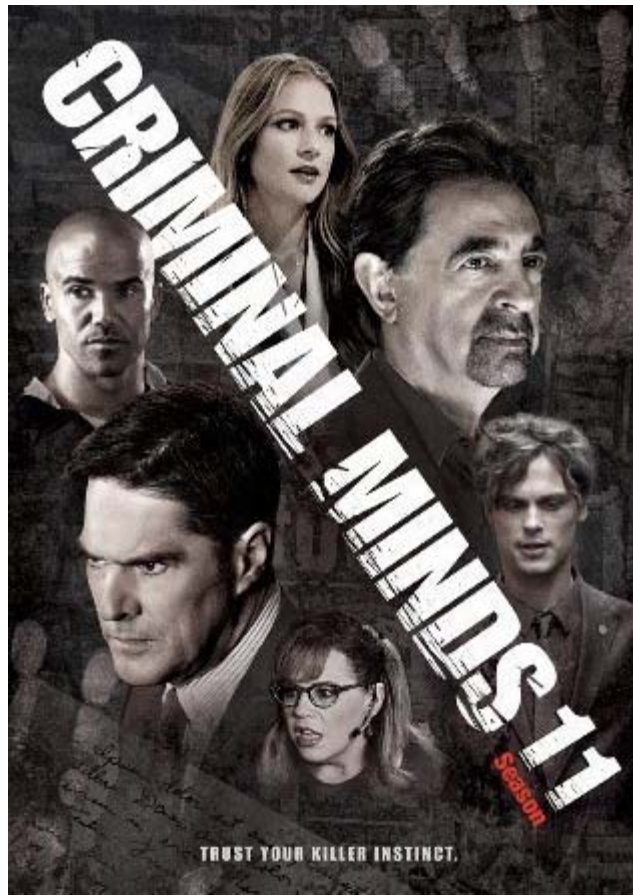
THE SPIDERS (\$29.95 BluRay; Kino Lorber)

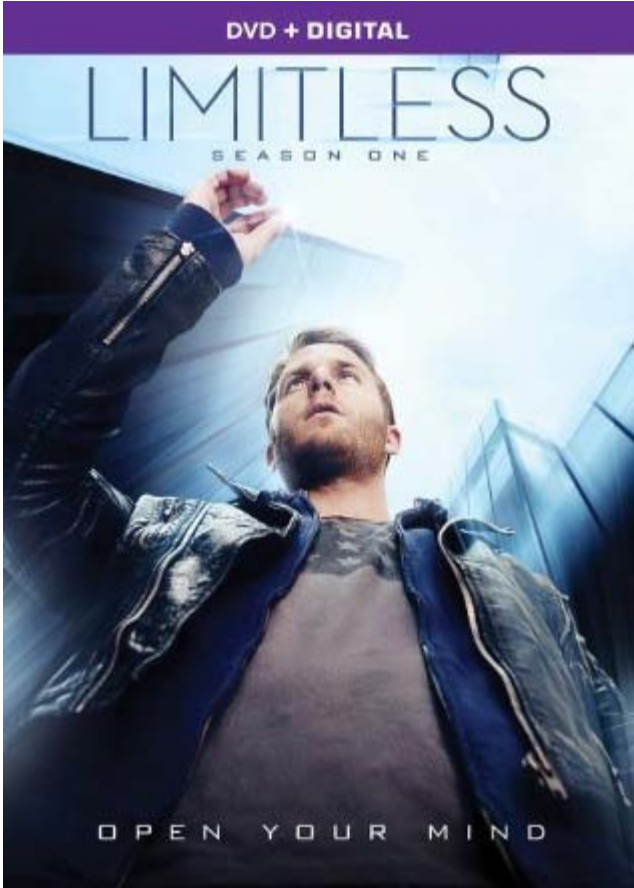
A TASTE OF HONEY (\$39.95 BluRay; Criterion Collection)

I've seen a lot of silent cinema. Well, a lot of silent cinema compared to most people. Actually, if you've seen any silent cinema, you're probably one up on most people. And what a pity since it really did reach a peak of visual and dramatic brilliance that sound cinema would mostly lack during the transition. And yet, one can boast but most silent cinema has long been lost and will never be recovered. Which makes what remains all the more precious. Here's director Fritz Lang with not one but two movies. *Destiny* (1921) showed Lang coming into his own visually, with a woman confronting Death to save her lover. It evolves into three separate stories in which love must somehow triumph at least once if the woman is going to succeed. In counterpart is the pure cliffhanger melodrama of *The Spiders* (1919-1920), in which an adventurer goes adventuring. Making its BluRay debut, this is exactly the sort of thrill ride Spielberg and Lucas had in mind when making *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*. Both are given caring presentation by Kino Lorber and will be savored by buffs.

A Taste Of Honey is a typically ground-breaking work by director Tony Richardson. The UK was obsessed with the dour lives of the working class in the kitchen sink drama movement and this is a great example. You've got race relations, abortion, sex workers, closeted gay men and of course class, just to name a few hot topics. Rita Tushingham is Jo, a working class gal who gets knocked up by a sailor and struggles to make ends meet. Murray Melvin is the anguished closet case who finds a reason to live by helping out Jo. (Thankfully he isn't "redeemed" by turning straight.) And Dora Bryan steals the show as Jo's prostitute mother, always around with a saucy line if not always genuine support. Impeccable extras from Criterion include new interviews with the two leads, a Cannes interview with Richardson, a short film of his and an interview with the writer of the play on which it's based.







ELEMENTARY SEASON FOUR (\$55.98 DVD; Paramount/CBS)

NARCOS SEASON ONE (\$29.97 BluRay; Lionsgate)

CRIMINAL MINDS SEASON ELEVEN (\$55.98 DVD; Paramount/CBS)

ENDEAVOUR COMPLETE THIRD SEASON (\$49.99 BluRay; PBS)

LIMITLESS SEASON ONE (\$55.98 DVD; Paramount/CBS)

MISS FISHER'S MURDER MYSTERIES SERIES 1-3 COLLECTION (\$119.99 BluRay; Acorn Media)

I'm not dissing Benedict Cumberbatch and *Sherlock*. (Not that much.) I am dissing the movies starring Robert Downey Jr. and Jude Law (great casting; awful scripts). But not since, well, a long time has a new spin on Sherlock Holmes been as rich and satisfying as *Elementary*, with Jonny Lee Miller and Lucy Liu. It's on CBS so no one pays it no mind. If it were on HBO and delivered just ten episodes instead of 22, I'm sure people would be raving. It delivers both the weekly satisfaction CBS expects of procedurals along with the evolving characters sophisticated viewers demand. And all without convoluted plotting and elaborate conspiracies that sometimes make current dramas feel like homework. Dip into it or binge and you'll be highly satisfied either way, which is no mean trick. Both Miller and Liu are excellent and deserve much more praise than they receive.

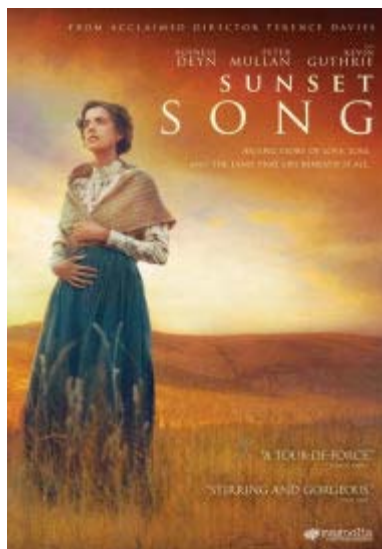
In contrast, *Narcos* stands in the shadows of countless tv shows like the miniseries *Traffik* and too many movies to mention. But because it was on Netflix and used subtitles, you'd think it reinvented the wheel. It's fine and well acted television. But this drama of Pablo Escobar has yet to engage me in some way that feels unique. What's the point?

Season Eleven of *Criminal Minds* is suddenly the long goodbye for actor Thomas Gibson, who had an unpleasant falling out with the show over his on-set behavior. Like Mandy Patinkin, I have always found this particular drama too grim for my taste. But did you catch the number of seasons it's been on? Eleven! It will survive Gibson but he has been a significant presence from the start so if you're a fan, this might be the point where you part ways.

Endeavour has certainly felt the shadow of the series *Inspector Morse*. This prequel tells of how the young Endeavour becomes the surly Morse. It began with solid mysteries but a shaky idea of how to tell the origin story of a beloved character. Now with season three it found its footing on the growth of Endeavour...only to lose its way on the mysteries. Now that he's been wronged by the justice system, unlucky in love and insisting everyone call him Morse, well maybe next season would it be too much to ask to have good character development *and* good mysteries? Still, Shaun Evans has grown just like his character and he's surrounded by top talent, led by Roger Allam. As for me, I would have stuck with being called Endeavour; it's much cooler.

Limitless is the one that got away. I chide people for not paying more attention to *Elementary* because it's on CBS. But in fact the show as is would suffer on cable or streaming. *Limitless* on the other hand would have flourished in another context. The movie version starring Bradley Cooper was about a guy who takes a pill and becomes limitless in his abilities via using his entire brain! (Everyone loves the idea we only use a tiny portion of our brain. It never gets old!) It seemed pretty limited in concept but they quietly turned a \$30 million budget into a movie that grossed \$150 million worldwide. So naturally they turned it into a TV series. The show proved just as adaptable as its hero's brain, either because it sensed this was never going to work out or the network just didn't care enough to insist on some sort of set formula. They seemed to make it up each week, spinning out one wacky idea after another, almost delivering one new kind of show after another. They seemed to be saying, "We could do this...or this...or this!" They topped themselves and had fun and Jake McDorman was a winner as the lead. The cumulative effect was much better than any one episode. Perfect for binging.

Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries was/is an Australian period mystery about a liberated young woman who solves crimes in an era when young women were frowned upon for being liberated. It's a harmless diversion for those who can't get enough of Agatha Christie but do realize the umpteenth adaptation of the exhausted Miss Marple may not be so thrilling. The show really has improved in its three seasons with Essie Davis charming as the flapper turned gumshoe. They haven't made new episodes in a while but no one seems to want to admit it's probably over. Maybe they'll make another season? Or a movie? Fans keep hoping but it's likely Season 1-3 might just be the complete series.





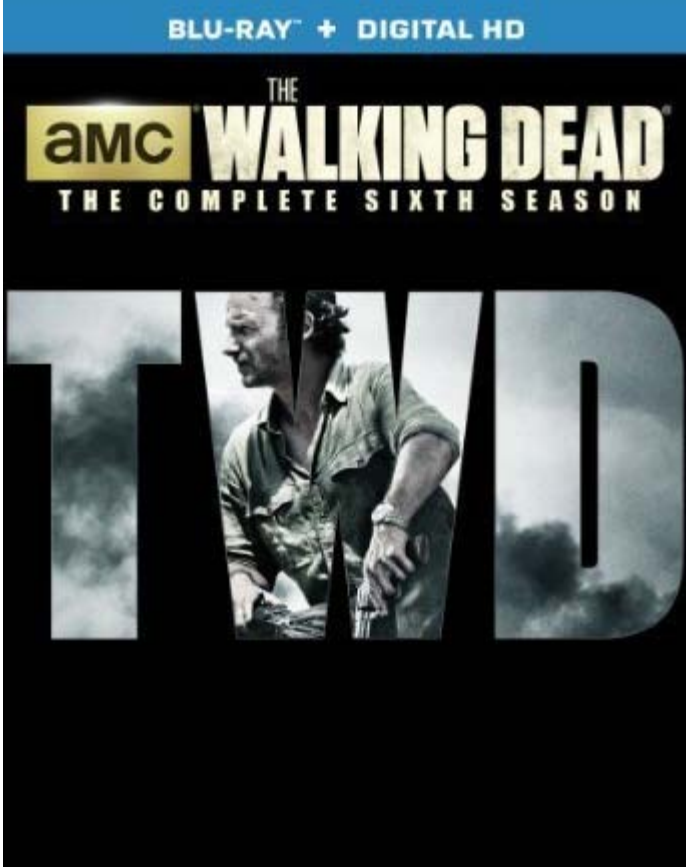
SUNSET SONG (\$26.99 DVD; Magnolia)

THE NICE GUYS (\$35.99 BluRay; Warner Home Video)

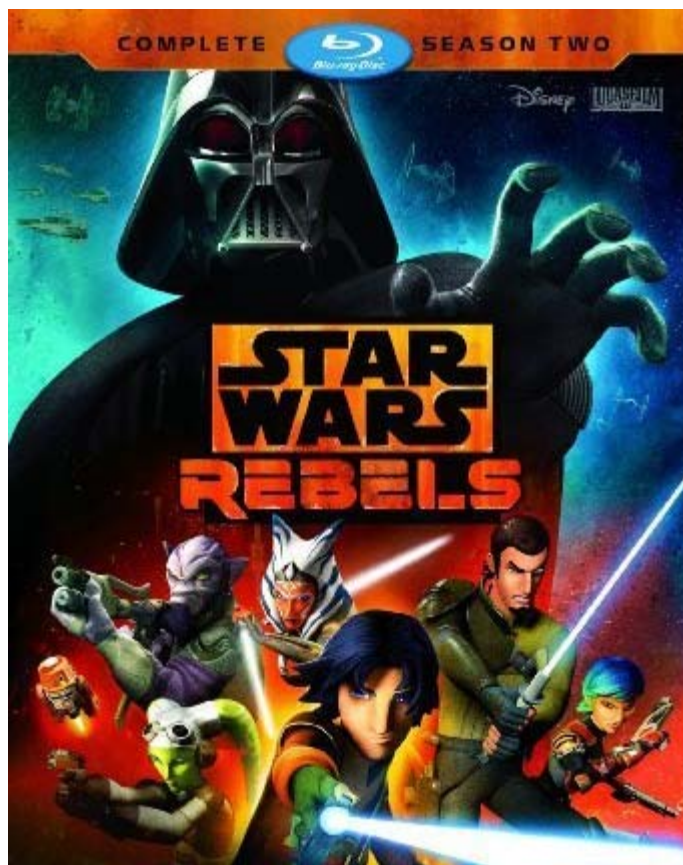
A passion project and a “comeback” of sorts.

Director Terence Davies is one of my favorites of all time. He strove for years to turn the classic Scottish novel *Sunset Song* by Lewis Grassie Gibbon into a film. If nothing else, his dream encouraged me to actually read the book (the first in a loose trilogy). It is indeed a stone cold masterpiece, using elements of so many stories that came before and after (a woman trapped in her role by society, a smart person in a small town striving for more but feeling the tug of home, a looming war) and spinning it into a story so specific and real I had absolutely no idea what would happen. The film Davies has made from it is of course beautiful, which is not to say it’s “pretty” but beautifully shot with a sensitivity to character and scenery-as-character and time and place so that the undeniably striking imagery is always there to serve the story, stunning you visually but telling a tale. (Any fool can make a pretty picture but pretty pictures soon bore.) Agyness Dean is the stunning model and actress playing the role of that young woman torn between wanting more and loving her home. I am not quite sold on her as anything more than decorative here. (Truly, she’s almost too pretty; no wonder she played Aphrodite in the recent *Clash Of The Titans*.) But she is surrounded by talent and it may take a second or third view to appreciate or definitively see her as a problem or success. Suffice to say the movie as a whole is well worth your time and a worthy addition to the Davies canon.

As for *The Nice Guys*, it was painted as a comeback for screenwriter Shane Black. Since he was typically derided for writing mindless popcorn features, I'd say this is more of an arrival. (He also directed the overrated *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* and the bad *Iron Man 3*.) This loopy Seventies flick has Ryan Gosling and Russell Crowe as private eye and muscle who must work together to find a missing girl. It's *Chinatown* but funnier and weirder and goofier. This is exactly the sort of offbeat fare that gets discovered on DVD, so what are you waiting for?







THE WALKING DEAD SEASON SIX (\$79.99 BluRay; Anchor Bay)

SHAMELESS SEASON COMPLETE SIXTH SEASON (\$39.99 BluRay; Warner Home Video)

ARROW COMPLETE FOURTH SEASON (\$54.97 BluRay; Warner Home Video)

DC'S LEGENDS OF TOMORROW COMPLETE FIRST SEASON (\$44.98 BluRay; Warner Home Video)

STAR WARS REBELS COMPLETE SEASON TWO (\$45.99 BluRay; Walt Disney Studios)

This. Changes. Everything. That's what *The Walking Dead* has done in season six (again). Arguably (and easily) the best horror show in TV history simply because there's precious little competition, there's no question *The Walking Dead* lost some mojo. *Game Of Thrones* became the phenom of the moment in part to being the best fantasy in TV history. (See above for the reason.) And *Dead* lost its way in season four and five, a little uncertain of itself despite having the original comic books to chart its course. Now it's moved forward in a big way. But it needs to actually move forward and decide where it's headed creatively. Do they want to spin this out for years and years to come? Or do they want to choose an end point and head there fast? Truly, they could succeed commercially and critically either way. But they have to decide fast. Right now, one senses they don't know whether *The Walking Dead* will be the *Gunsmoke* of zombie shows or the *Breaking Bad*. Figure it out and then maybe season seven will put them back on top.

Shameless has never lacked oddball certainty. No one seems to be paying attention to this Showtime nuttiness so they've simply let their freak flag fly and do whatever they want. Season Six has the usual out-there plot twists for the Gallagher family, with heroin and AA and child custody battles and a really bad wedding all in the mix. William H. Macy has the role of his career in Frank and I doubt he's going to give it up easily, icy Chicago river or no icy Chicago river.

Arrow pretended to change everything at the end of season three with our hero riding off into the sunset with his true love. It will not be a spoiler for anyone to say that the Arrow returns to crime fighting. So self-serious, the show wants to sort of lighten up but can't. And the stakes are raised so high it almost feels a little silly anyway. (There's a reason this is the lowest-rated season yet, though they're fine enough for the CW.) It's not going anywhere...but that's just as true creatively as it is commercially.

DC's Legends Of Tomorrow is a huge, sprawling cast in search of a show. Bursting with talent — Victor Garber, Wentworth Miller, a totally wasted John Barrowman and many, many, many more — it's nothing if not ambitious...and a hot mess. They had a big season one arc, combining heroes and villains to save the world and fight off the Time Lords (I mean Time Masters!) at the same time. It's all been tossed out for season two apparently with even more new characters being tossed into the mix. Since the show trended down in enthusiasm all season long, I'm not sure what kept it afloat. But maybe they'll figure it out in time to actually give a sensible storyline to the many charismatic actors who kept all those plates spinning the first time around.

Meanwhile, the best *Star Wars* entertainment continues to be on the small screen, NOT the big one. *Clone*

Wars was a lot more fun than any of the three prequels. Many of the same people are involved in *Star Wars Rebels*, this tale of the dawning rebellion, which takes place before the first *Star Wars* movie (the 1977 original aka *Star Wars: A New Hope*, I add reluctantly). A ragtag team of rebels go on missions and otherwise cause mischief for the Empire while the gifted one among them begins his training as a Jedi. Like the many books written by many authors, it plays in the *Star Wars* universe without feeling the burden of continuing the Big Story. It's smart, well-voiced and while geared towards kids has an admirable seriousness of purpose. Season two if anything improves on the solid season one. Anyone who is any sort of fan of the three original movies and feels morning after regret for sort of wanting to like that remake posing as a "new" *Star Wars* movie called *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* can satisfy their cravings right here.





THE COMMITMENTS 25TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION (\$29.98 BluRay; Image Entertainment)

MIDNIGHT RUN COLLECTOR'S EDITION (\$34.93 BluRay; Shout! Factory)

Here are two justly beloved movies. Alan Parker's charmer tells the unlikely story of a band manager who needs a band and somehow turns a bunch of nobodies into such a smoking good bar band covering soul classics you think, "Bloody hell, they really could make it." In fact, it's actually a tribute to the many many bar bands around the world who for a thousand different reasons don't "make it" but can in fact entertain the locals and have people genuinely enthuse about their talent. It's the difference between making a movie about a young Van Morrison, say, and a movie about people who love making music and do it really really well but probably won't become world-beating superstars. It remains delightful.

I've never quite been on board for Midnight Run. But at the time it still seemed surprising to see Robert De Niro tackling comedy. And Charles Grodin had the best role he would ever have as the criminal being brought to justice. The two did have off the charts chemistry of the bro-mance sort and it certainly gets funnier the more you see it. Too successful to be a cult classic, it's just a good solid movie with two very funny turns and some very quotable dialogue.

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