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Blu-Ray DVDs: Loved Up? Watch *A Bug's Life*



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I've written repeatedly about the unprecedented streak of Pixar both critically and commercially. (They're 10 for 10 now that the delightful *Up* is their second-highest grossing movie of all time in the US. And that streak is sure to continue with *Toy Story 3* next June.) But somewhat lost in the shuffle is *A Bug's Life* (\$39.99 on BluRay and \$29.99 regular DVD;Disney). It was Pixar's second film and while it was a critical and commercial smash (it grossed even more than *Toy Story* worldwide), this loose remake of *Seven Samurai* in which bugs band together to fight off

marauding grasshoppers is rarely mentioned today. It's certainly superior to some later Pixar films, such as *Cars* and *Monsters, Inc* (the two Pixar films I'm least fond of). I can think of two reasons why it doesn't get its due: the far less interesting animated film *Antz* was released at the same time and *A Bug's Life* is dragged down by its rep and the very next Pixar film was *Toy Story 2*, one of the all-time great sequels and a movie that sent Pixar into the stratosphere on every level. It looks just sensational on BluRay, as do most animated films and BluRay exclusive extras include an in-depth look at the first draft of the script and a chat with the creative talent involved. You also get the original extras like audio commentary, an Oscar-winning Pixar short "Geri's Game," the Silly Symphony short "Grasshopper and the Ants" and more. I can't quite argue for an upgrade if you already own this film on regular DVD. But if you haven't bought it yet, an extra \$7 for the BluRay plus a digital copy you can watch on your computer or portable device is well worth it. *A Bug's Life* was the first indication that Pixar wasn't just a company making movies but a group of artists dedicated to making great movies and every animation buff and certainly every family with kids should rent or own it.

A NOTE ON BLURAY -- This column today is dedicated to BluRay DVDs. I'll talk about the title and whether it's worth owning or upgrading if you already own the regular DVD. Even if you never plan to rent or buy a single BluRay, if you own a deluxe home entertainment system (especially a

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1080p plasma or LCD screen with great sound), you should definitely buy a BluRay player. Most players, like the Sony PlayStation 3 which I own, will "upconvert" your regular DVDs and make them look better. It's a noticeable jump in quality. And of course BluRays look smashing and can be rented very cheaply at Netflix for a modest surcharge. Finally, an increasing number of BluRays include a digital copy and/or a regular DVD as well, which make them even more appealing. If there wasn't still a leap in price, there'd be no debate.

For those of you who own BluRay or are thinking about it, here's a glimpse at some of the BluRay titles that have been released in the last few weeks -- just the tip of the iceberg, frankly.

JONAS BROTHERS: THE 3D CONCERT EXPERIENCE (\$44.99 on BluRay; Disney) -- Wrongly tagged as a flop by some, this is in fact the second highest grossing concert film in movie history (#1 is *Hannah Montana/Miley Cyrus: The Best Of Both Worlds Concert Tour*, which featured the Jonas Brothers as guests). It mixes concert footage with behind the scenes glimpses of the brothers (OMG, even waking up in bed!) as well as endearing shots of fans breaking down in tears whenever the brothers are nearby. While their albums contain some great pop songs, the brothers aren't yet a force to be reckoned with live. This is strictly a souvenir for fans, though I do applaud the filmmakers for slightly less frantic editing than one would usually see in a film like this. Perhaps the 3D forced this? The DVD comes with four sets of glasses but the experience is not great. You do get a 3D-like experience, but the glasses in movie theaters are so much better now that the flimsy cardboard ones just don't cut it. Yeah, it's cool when their glasses are tossed towards the camera but the image is very greyed out and dull. It's a lot more fun to just watch the movie in 2D. The set is only \$5 more than the deluxe regular DVD (and only \$3 more on sale at Amazon) so it's basically the same and includes a regular DVD and a digital copy. So if you own all their albums and must have it, the BluRay is well worth getting.

BOND, JAMES BOND -- All the James Bond titles are flowing onto BluRay and except for the one-off *Never Say Never Again* from a different company, these are crown jewels presented with care. Roger Moore's *The Man With The Golden Gun* (\$34.98 BluRay; MGM) is the last one with a semblance of dignity before Moore descended into camp once and for all. That stunt with the car is still one of the great Bond moments that doesn't seem digitally enhanced. And Timothy Dalton is still smarting over the rave reviews for Daniel Craig's gritty Bond since they tried the same thing with Dalton to rather good effect in his two Bond outings. In *The Living Daylights* (\$34.98 on BluRay; MGM), Dalton is hunting down a drug lord and you know he means business: Dalton is the first Bond since Sean Connery who actually seems like a killer. (Craig is the next.) But should you buy them? It depends on how rich you are, I guess. They certainly look better than the regular DVDs, but the price is \$34.98 versus \$14.98 for the regular DVD 2007 edition of these titles. On sale at Amazon, the difference is even worse: you'll pay \$21 to \$23 for the BluRay versus \$6 -- yes, \$6 -- for the regular DVD. In other words, you can buy FOUR Bond titles on regular DVD for the price of about one BluRay. Plus, the BluRay doesn't include a regular DVD or a digital copy for watching on your computer or portable device. Hard to justify.

24 SEASON 7 (\$69.99 on BluRay; Fox) -- Inexplicably, this stellar series was not nominated for Best Drama even though it had arguably its best year since Season One. Not only is it a great show (at least every odd year, since the even years tend to be weaker :)), but it's a great-looking action show that looks even better on BluRay. Really, it's motion picture quality. The extras aren't overwhelming and they could have included the TV movie prequel, but the show is so darn good it doesn't matter. It's about \$20 more than the regular DVD set, which is about \$3 per disc. I wish the price were the same, but given the high quality of the series, this is one show worth splurging on.

MAJOR LEAGUE (\$29.99 on BluRay) -- If Dad watched the All Star Game last night, he either owns or would love to own this silly comedy about a group of misfits brought in to the Cleveland Indians to lose miserably but can't do even that right. Typically, you think of BluRay when it comes to special effects movies and widescreen extravaganzas. And rightly so. Sure, this comedy looks better on BluRay and has all the extras you'd expect, but the regular DVD is \$12.98. If you're a huge, huge fan of the movie and don't own it already, the decision to buy would be easier if it contained a regular DVD and a digital copy. Since it doesn't, I'd take a pass.

PAN'S LABYRINTH (\$35.99 on BluRay; New Line) -- One of my favorite movies from 2006, this is a gorgeous, dark fairy tale from director Guillermo Del Toro that makes him the ideal person to take over from Peter Jackson for *The Hobbit* and the "midquel" that will bridge the story from that movie to *The Lord Of The Rings*. Mind you, this is not for children. It's set during World War II in Spain, when a young girl and her pregnant mother are at the mercy of a cruel military official the mother has unwisely married. (It's nice to see an evil stepfather instead of the usual evil

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Tiny Drizzle Wreaks Havoc In Desert City SANTIAGO, Chile — In one of the driest regions on earth, even a drizzle

stepmother, for a change.) The young girl is drawn into a dark alternate world where possibly malignant creatures prey on her vulnerability and get the girl to complete dangerous tasks. Haunting and beautiful, this is a memorably creepy film. While the tone of *The Hobbit* should be much lighter (indeed, *The Hobbit* is much lighter than *LOTR* in general), *Pan's Labyrinth* shows Del Toro can take fantasy very seriously indeed. The deluxe regular DVD is \$26.98 and the standard DVD is \$12.98 so on sale you will be paying \$7 to \$12 more for the BluRay. In this case, it's worth it.

FARGO (\$29.99 on BluRay; MGM) -- This droll, Oscar-winning movie isn't my favorite by the Coen Brothers (that would be *Miller's Crossing*) but it's arguably their most popular. However, it costs twice as much as the regular DVD, which makes it essential only for hardcore Coen Brother fans who can argue for the ironic screwball brilliance of *The Hudsucker Proxy*.

ROCKERS (\$24.95; MVD) -- Trust an independent film company to be smart about BluRay. *Rockers* is a low budget ode to reggae that's always been in the shadow of *The Harder They Come*. Still, like that movie it is loved mostly for glimpses of reggae stars in their prime, such as Burning Spear, Gregory Isaacs, Robbie Shakespeare and others. The story is subpar Robin Hood but it's all about the music. The BluRay isn't a big improvement over the standard DVD, mostly because the source material was so rough to begin with. But on sale at Amazon it's only \$1 more than the regular DVD so the choice is clear.

GENERATION KILL (\$79.98 on BluRay; HBO) -- A miniseries from the people who brought you *The Wire* (one of the best shows of all time), *Generation Kill* has just been nominated for Best Miniseries alongside *Little Dorrit*. (It won't be easy beating Dickens.) I watched the first two episodes and then drifted away, but virtually everyone I know who watched the entire show says it grew more complicated and interesting as it went along. Certainly it looks and sounds smashing on BluRay. Unfortunately, it costs \$20 more than standard DVD, which is about \$7 extra per disc.

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY (\$29.99 on BluRay; MGM) -- One of the all-time great westerns, this flick is more fun the bigger your TV screen (and really, if you're seeing it for the first time, a movie theater is ideal). Clint Eastwood is the Man with No Name, a drifter who finds himself gunning for Confederate gold while fighting off countless competitors. has any movie created more suspense out of cutting from one close-up of a face to another just as a gunfight is about to begin? You can't overestimate the importance of Ennio Morricone's iconic score. This is where he B movie spaghetti westerns went from tremendous fun to mythic greatness. And it's the type of movie where cost considerations go out the window. I may have owned a boxed set with it or the recent two disc collector's set or the 1998 bare bones edition. But I'm still gonna want it on BluRay. Happily, on sale at Amazon it's only \$6.50 more than the two-disc collector's set from 2007, so that's a pretty easy choice. Loaded with extras.

THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT MARY (\$34.98 on BluRay; Fox) -- The ribald comedy that seemed to stamp the Farrelly Brothers as geniuses. (Certainly it and *Dumb & Dumber* was a great one-two punch.) Unfortunately, they've never done anything as remotely consistent and funny again. Still, it's a scatter-shot joy and Cameron Diaz wouldn't be this bouncily sexy again until her great work in the awful *Charlie's Angels* flicks. (Maybe it was the shorts.) I wish studios would just put out one version of every movie, rather than a single disc and two disc special edition and on and on. Even better is the Disney approach where they bundle a BluRay, a regular DVD and a digital copy into one (preferably low-cost) set. It's the smartest way to fight against slowing DVD sales and a resistance to BluRay. So what do I compare this BluRay to in terms of cost? Presumably, if you're considering BluRay, you would be the sort of person to buy the collector's set. In that case, it's \$34.98 versus \$19.98. However, on sale at Amazon, the BluRay is \$19.99 versus \$17.99, so that's essentially the same. You can also buy the standard disc for \$9.49 on sale. Frankly, since I'm not enamored with extras, that would be the one for me, however much I enjoy the movie.

FRIDAY THE 13TH -- KILLER CUT (\$35.99 on BluRay; New Line) -- A low budget horror flick on BluRay? I wish *Friday the 13th* were a better movie to deserve the gloss. Plenty of horror movies like *Frankenstein* and *Halloween* do, but this inexplicably popular franchise isn't one of them. On the plus side, the BluRay includes both the extended cut that's 9 minutes longer and the original theatrical edition of this latest spin on Jason, as well as a digital copy to watch on your computer or portable device. (Maybe when you go camping?) The regular DVD of this version is \$28.98 but you do get that digital copy. What can I say? Not a horror fan.

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by Michael Giltz

LOST FIRST SEASON (\$69.99 on BluRay; ABC) -- This is a tricky one. Everyone who loves *Lost* enough to buy this already owns the standard DVD set. Is it worth upgrading? Only if you're a fanatic who can draw out a timeline explaining who went back and forth in time and what it all means. Personally, I grew bored with the show at the beginning of the third season when it became clear to me they really didn't know where they were headed. (And no, announcing that the series would end in two and a half seasons wasn't proof of that.) If this had been a two or maybe three year series with a beginning and middle and end clearly mapped out from the beginning, it might have been an all-time great. As it is, you can enjoy Season One as an open-ended miniseries with a tantalizing finale. And it does look good on DVD (the island has never seemed more appealing). On sale at Amazon (I always mention Amazon, since they're such a prime source for catalog titles), you'll pay \$14 more than the standard DVD set, which is only \$2 per disc. However, it's really \$48.99 more since you almost certainly own the standard DVD set already and are buying it all over again. There is a substantial discount offer for people who already purchased the standard DVD set, which is nice, but I'm not sure how it works.

PINK PANTHER 2 (\$39.99 on BluRay; MGM) -- For fans of the original Blake Edwards classics or just fans of Steve Martin, this lowbrow spin on Inspector Clouseau is depressing on many levels. It's so easy to make a slapstick comedy, but oh so hard to make them well. Happily, I can report that kids who watch this movie will just as happily watch the originals, so why torture yourself? If you must buy it, the \$9 premium over the standard DVD is nigh on impossible to justify.

TAKEN EXTENDED EDITION (\$39.99 on BluRay; Fox) -- This fun revenge flick was the biggest hit of Liam Neeson's career as a star (I'm not counting *Schindler's List* since that wasn't "his" film) but was unfortunately overshadowed a bit by the untimely death of his wife Natasha Richardson. The trailer was great fun ("I will find you. I will kill you.") and the movie delivers on the premise of a one-time spy whose daughter is kidnapped -- much to the regret of her kidnapers. Best of all, the BluRay edition is the same price on sale as the regular DVD and contains both the theatrical and extended cut. The single disc regular DVD is however \$10 less and since I'm not a fan of extended cuts, may be fine for most casual fans. Nonetheless, it's good to see BluRay at the equivalent price as special editions regular DVDs.

FERRIS BUELLER'S DAY OFF (\$29.99; Paramount) -- Can I make a confession? I'm not a crazy fan about this 1986 beloved comedy. The subplot about the principal trying to check up on Bueller is tiresome in the extreme. Bueller's little sister gets old fast (though her scene with a young Charlie Sheen is a gem). The hateful parent of his best friend seems like a retread of *The Breakfast Club*. And it's all rather shticky. BUT...but Matthew Broderick has so much charm and his role as a delightful manipulator is so appealing I love it anyway. It's more than double the cost of the standard DVD and as with so many comedies and simple dramas, the BluRay is hard to justify.

TRUE BLOOD (\$79.98 on BluRay; HBO) -- As with *Generation Kill*, I was really looking forward to this series. I had read the first four mysteries about Sookie Stackhouse and found them amiable fun, mixing as they did the vampire and mystery genres with genial aplomb. However, I found the tone of the TV series completely wrong. The show in true HBO fashion wanted to be edgy and envelope-pushing. The books are nothing of the sort. The show had a faint air of condescension about the white trash world it's set in. The book loves that world and those people. So after three or four episodes, I stopped watching. And people immediately said the show started to get better. By the end of the season, the consensus was that it was much better, so thank goodness for DVD. I can give it another shot and catch up on Season Two, which debuted to its best ratings yet. Who knows? Maybe they got it right. While the BluRay is \$20 more than the standard DVD set, on sale the price difference is only \$6, or just \$1.20 per disc, hardly worth mentioning.

THE ARRIVAL (\$29.99 on BluRay; Lionsgate) -- This is a genuine, old fashioned, B movie gem. Charlie Sheen stars as a radio astronomer who gets word of an impending alien invasion and has to avoid being captured or killed by collaborators while trying to get the word out to a skeptical world. Great fun, all done on pennies back when Sheen was at a low point in his career (which would rebound with the sitcoms *Spin City* and *Two And A Half Men*). It's \$16.49 on sale but that's compared to \$6.49 for a standard DVD that includes the movie and its sequel. The sequel isn't worth your time, but \$10 is \$10. If you know it and love it, you probably already own it. It's not such a technically accomplished film that the BluRay will improve it dramatically but I have such a fondness for it, I can't help being glad it's out. And really, \$17 for a movie isn't that much, is it?

SPACEBALLS (\$29.99 on BluRay) -- Mel Brooks started to approach Woody Allen territory right around this movie: he was producing so many inferior movies they began to overshadow the genuine classics he'd made early on. Movies like *The Producers* and *Blazing Saddles* and especially

his all-time classic *Young Frankenstein* started to recede in the distance as minor fluff like *Robin Hood: Men In Tights*, *The History Of The World Part I* (whose only funny bit was the trailer for *History Of The World Part II*), *Silent Movie*, *High Anxiety* and this tired goof on *Star Wars* piled up one on top of the other. *Galaxy Quest* is a similar goof but sheer genius in comparison. It's twice the cost of the regular DVD so unless you're offended by my dismissal of what you consider a hilarious film, it won't matter anyway.

BURN NOTICE (\$59.99 on BluRay; Fox) -- In the grand tradition of enjoyably mindless television comes this light-hearted romp about a former CIA agent gone freelance. Jeffrey Donovan hits just the right cheeky tone and he's got a great supporting cast: Sharon Gless, Bruce Campbell, Gabrielle Anwar and Tricia Helfer in a recurring role. (Helfer should have been nominated for a Best Supporting Actress for *Battlestar Galactica* not just this year but the last four seasons.) It's \$10 more than the standard DVD (\$13 more when you get down to the sale price.) But I'm not even sure it's the sort of show you SHOULD buy. Yeah, it's got a throughline of sorts. But each episode stands on its own and this is the sort of show DVRs were made for. Just tape it and *Law & Order* and their ilk and store them on your harddrive and catch whichever episode is handy whenever you want to turn off your mind.

FATAL ATTRACTION (\$29.99 on BluRay; Paramount) -- This spurned woman gone wild flick is a B movie with A movie pretensions -- at least in the media. As a film, it's nothing but sheer fun until the horror movie finale has one too many scares for my taste. (The alternate ending is fun to watch but audiences wanted Glenn Close's character to PAY.) It's fun and an excellent example of the stupidity of DVD pricing. In 2002 they released a Special Collector's Edition for \$9.98. You can get it on sale at Amazon for \$7.49. In 2008, they branded a bunch of movies with the "I Love The 80s" logo and decided it should cost \$14.98 (or \$13.49 on sale). Now it's on BluRay -- a format you have to buy an entirely new DVD player and a \$1000+ TV and a stereo system to appreciate -- and it costs \$29.99 (or \$18.99 on sale, which is more than double the cheapest DVD available). So the movie came out in 1987 and has been on DVD for at least a decade but it now costs more than ever? Ridiculous.

T2: JUDGMENT DAY (\$29.99 on BluRay; Lionsgate) -- Then of course there are movies you throw prices and logic out the window for. *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* has always been the standard bearer for every new format. One of the great action films, it's thrilling fun and explosively exciting whether on VHS or laserdisc or DVD or BluRay. It's been on BluRay before, just three years ago, actually and at \$10 cheaper. But on sale this is \$14.99, only \$3 more than the last BluRay. And it has 8 hours of extras and -- always -- state of the art quality in picture and sound. Until *Avatar* comes out, this is as close as you can get to James Cameron's state of mind. I'm not geeky (ie. smart) enough to make comparisons to previous versions, but suffice to say it looks awesome. Some people have already bought this movie five or more times in a row and they'll keep buying it as long as new tweaks keep changing and improving it. If you don't have it, it's essential.

NOTE TO MOVIE STUDIOS -- Most people have already made up their minds about BluRay: they don't need it. Regular DVDs look great and even if they buy a BluRay player to make those DVDs look even snazzier (or they bought a PS3 for the kids and realize they have a BluRay player now) they certainly don't need to replace the library of DVDs they built over the past decade with BluRay. Besides, BluRays can't be watched by the kids in the car or on most computer laptops or in the bedroom or on a portable DVD player etc. so it's far less useful to anyone but hardcore film buffs with a room dedicated to watching films. Keep BluRays at their current luxury pricing and you guarantee they'll disappear in five years. You need to do one of two things or preferably both: 1. Adopt Disney's model and include regular and BluRay AND free digital copies of movies on EVERY release. Eliminate all the numerous single and double disc and special editions you churn out for every release and have just one title on offer. 2. Lower the price. BluRay should not be a premium format. It should be the standard format and that won't happen unless you lower the cost of it to the same as regular DVD. You won't turn it into the standard format by any stretch but at least it can keep people happy and feel they're getting more quality for the same price so they'll continue buying DVDs rather than switching to downloads completely. Downloads are fine but DVD sales are a lot more profitable. So don't blow it.

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