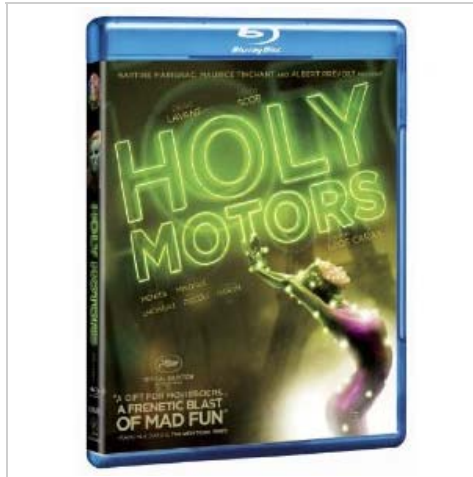


DVDs: Masterful *The Master*, *How to Survive a Plague* and Hidden TV Gem *Garrow's Law*

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A clutch of new releases, including more Oscar nominees (that should have won but didn't), along with some enigmatic road movies and a little-seen TV series that mystery buffs will enjoy.



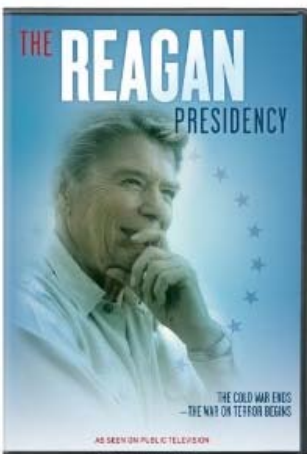
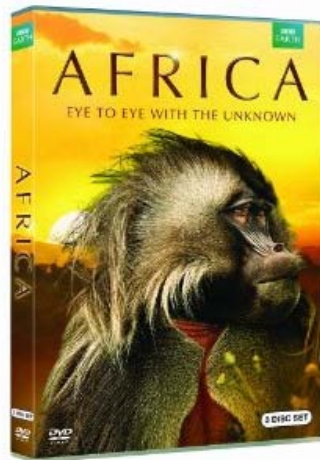
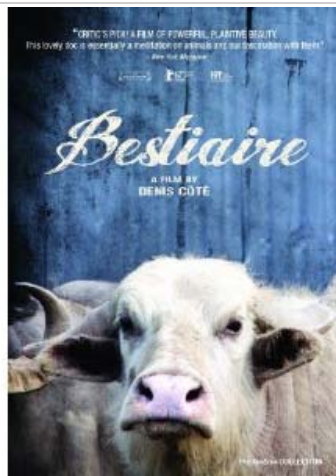
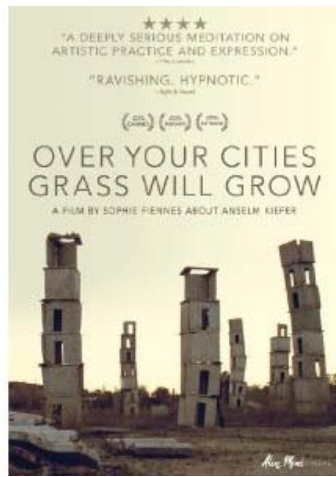
THE MASTER (\$39.99 BluRay combo; Weinstein/Anchor Bay)
HOLY MOTORS (\$39.95 BluRay; Vivendi)
A SIMPLE LIFE (\$29.98 BluRay; Well Go) -- One of the best films of the year, it's almost a shame to see *The Master* in your home rather than in gorgeous 70mm in a movie theater. But nowadays with BluRay and large screen TVs, chances are you'll be seeing a very good presentation of this hypnotic, brilliant film indeed. I admired and enjoyed it tremendously on first viewing. But once I knew the landscape, once I had seen the film, a second viewing allowed it all to "click" and I fully appreciated what



writer/director Paul Thomas Anderson accomplished here. The entire cast is at their peak, especially Joaquin Phoenix as a loser seemingly ripe for the picking by a cult/religion/self-help philosophy, Amy Adams as the Master's controlling and focused wife and Philip Seymour Hoffman as the innovator/self-deluder himself. Though clearly inspired by the broad brushstrokes of the early days of Scientology, this is not an expose and it's not a look at how someone can be drawn into a cult. It's about a troubled veteran of World War II, a broken and confused young man who always had trouble dealing with others and tamping down his own personal demons. This cult, this religion, this family is his best shot at a happy life but he may be incapable of taking it. That is the fascinating story that emerges. If you're looking for a tale of a shyster, you will be disappointed. That's why those who embrace Scientology might not be bothered by the film and it's also why this is a richer, more complex work than yet another tale of a hypocritical con man a la *Elmer Gantry* and the like. Among the extras is the very unexpected and very welcome appearance of director John Huston's 1946 documentary about WW II veterans called *Let There Be Light*. Far more opaque is *Holy Motors*, another movie beloved of critics in 2012 but not seen by a wide audience. I grew frustrated by the film which has a vague driving narrative that they seem to spell out or hint at (it's never fully clear what's going on) but

then break their own rules. Nevertheless, Denis Lavant has great fun as a mysterious man sent around a city in a limousine to don disguises and act as a catalyst in various scenes and/or real life events. He plays women and men, young and old and it's a genuine treat to watch him cavort, even if the film is ultimately a rather flimsy excuse. I did especially love the beautiful scene done in a motion capture studio set. Far more direct and accessible is *A Simple Life*, another critically acclaimed film and under the radar to most. It deserves a bigger audience on DVD and BluRay since this story of a famed movie producer who must suddenly care for the nanny that has served his family for decades is universal and appealing. Andy Lau and Deanie Ip star as the mogul and the maid.

HOW TO SURVIVE A PLAGUE (\$24.98 DVD; Sundance Selects/MPI)
OVER YOUR CITIES GRASS WILL GROW (\$29.95 DVD; Kino Lorber)
BESTIAIRE (\$29.99 DVD; Zeitgeist)



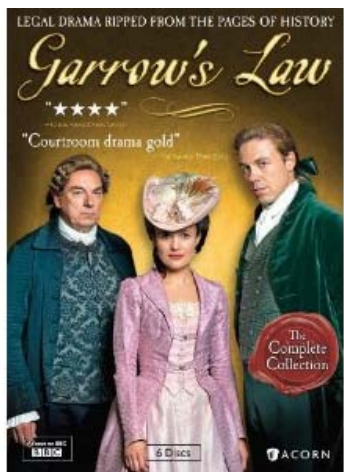
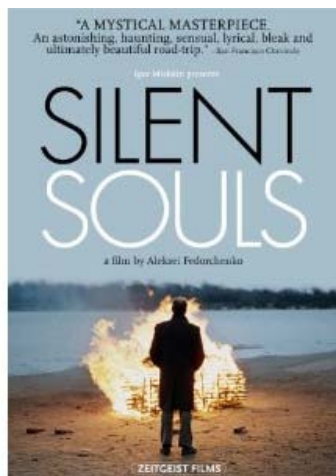
Anselm Kiefer and his creative process in developing large scale works. Gorgeous. *Bestiaire* is an odd duck, a film that watches people watching animals, or is that animals watching people. Deceptively simple but quite interesting and very well shot. *Africa* is a typically gorgeous looking BBC documentary, narrated by the voice of God naturalist David Attenborough. Not equal to their peak work but solid. Finally, writer-director Chip Duncan takes an "unbiased" which is to say sober but not terribly insightful look at *The Reagan Presidency* in a three hour work best at illuminating his decisive part in ending the Cold War alongside Mikhail Gorbachev.



AFRICA (\$29.98 DVD; BBC Earth)
THE REAGAN PRESIDENCY (\$24.99 DVD; PBS) -- Five new documentaries including one of the best films of the year. *How To Survive A Plague* is about the AIDS crisis and how a group of volunteers educated themselves and fought back when faced with massive indifference by the government and the medical community. Without minimizing the constant loss, the film is actually a positive one, filled with humor and insight. It also tackles a very complex issue -- how AIDS groups like ACT-Up revolutionized medical research and care forever in this country and around the world by giving patients a voice and a place at the table where decisions are made -- and tells it with deceptive ease and clarity. Excellent. (It's no surprise ABC is turning this into a miniseries. Smart choice.) Sophie Fiennes continues to grow as a documentary filmmaker with *Over Your Cities Grass Will Grow*. This is a strong look at the artist

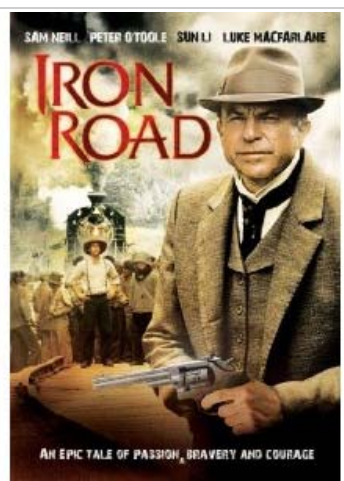
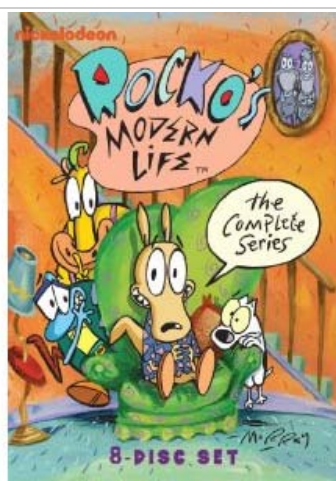
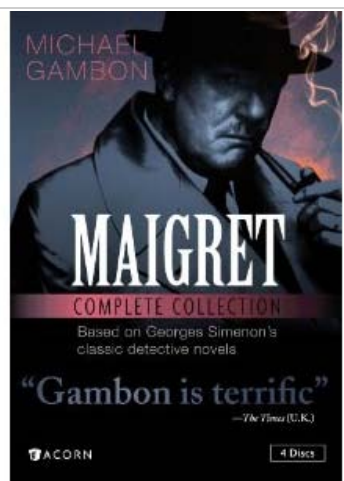
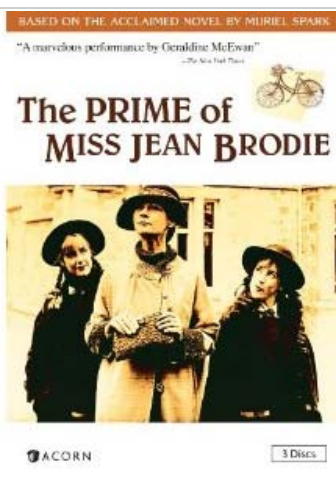
THE LONELIEST PLANET (\$24.98 DVD; Sundance Selects)
SILENT SOULS (\$29.99 DVD; Zeitgeist) -- Two enigmatic road movies. *The Loneliest Planet* stars Gael Garcia Bernal as one half of an engaged couple that heads out on a hiking trip in Georgia, formerly of the Soviet Union. You must pay close attention to this one; a brief moment is the hinge on which the movie turns. Miss it and you'll be wondering exactly what the heck is going on. It enjoyed great acclaim from the art house critics. Also set in Russia, *Silent Souls* shows a husband taking his late wife's remains on a

pilgrimage, telling the story of their marriage along the way. Beautifully shot, it and other road movies from that country seem to indicate all of Russia is on a quest of some sort, lost and mapless at best.



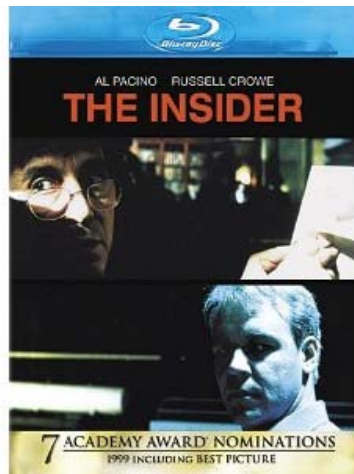
GARROW'S LAW THE COMPLETE COLLECTION (\$79.99 DVD; Acorn)
THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE (\$49.99 DVD; Acorn)
MAIGRET: THE COMPLETE COLLECTION (\$59.99 DVD; Acorn)
ROCKO'S MODERN LIFE THE COMPLETE SERIES (\$29.93 DVD; Shout)
IRON ROAD (\$19.98 DVD; EONE)

-- *Garrow's Law* hasn't made much of an impression in the US. And to make matters worse, it was cancelled in the UK after just three seasons. But it's a superior courtroom drama/mystery series that Anglophiles should snap up. Not in the absolute top tier of *Foyle's War*, but very satisfying. Andrew Buchan stars as the historical figure William Garrow, the man who became famous for his work at the Old Bailey, where Rumpole would later harrumph around. Each episode typically involves a case that illuminates life in the 1700s and allows Garrow to learn from his mentor (Alun Armstrong) and benefit from the support of Lady Sarah (Lyndsey Marshall of *Being Human*). Fun stuff. *The Prime Of Miss Jean Brodie* is a seven part miniseries from 1978 starring Geraldine McEwan in the role made famous by Maggie Smith in the earlier film of the same name. Author Muriel Sparks preferred McEwan but of course she had the advantage of telling the story more fully. The great Michael Gambon is always a joy to watch and his intelligence and sheer presence make *Maigret* worthwhile. But the mysteries and supporting actors are not up to snuff and keep this series from being more than a pleasant diversion. *Rocko's Modern Life* was among the wave of anarchic cartoons that led by *Ren & Stimpy* pushed the boundaries for what mere cartoons could tackle. This set contains all 52 episodes (the broadcast versions so a three minor trims keep some naughty



bits sadly unavailable) and is welcome anarchy and silliness about a wallaby who tries to get along after moving from Australia to the US. Finally, *Iron Road* is a better than average Canadian miniseries about the building of the railroad. it stars Sam Neill and Peter O'Toole in one of his final turns.

THE TERMINATOR (\$19.99 BluRay; MGM)
THE INSIDER (\$20.00 BluRay; Touchstone) -- *The Terminator* is a genuine B movie by James Cameron, a bit of sci-fi nonsense made on a dime with a lot of wit and smarts to compensate for the



low budget. it's always the lavish T2 that gets the deluxe treatment on laser disc and DVD and BluRay. But the original Terminator finally gets a proper transfer to BluRay and looks terrific. *The Insider* is simply director Michael Mann's best film; this look at corruption in the tobacco industry and journalistic ethics can stand alongside *All The*

President's Men and that's high praise indeed. Excellent cast all around.

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