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DVDs: Monty Python's Cinematic Peak Out Now on BluRay

Posted: 03/16/2012 11:02 am

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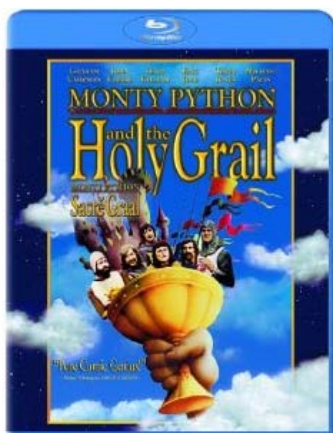
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MONTY PYTHON AND THE HOLY GRAIL (\$19.99 BluRay; Sony) -- This is Monty Python at its absolute peak. Their show just ended its 5 year run on the BBC and now their first movie with all original material was opening in theaters. Quite simply, it's one of the funniest comedies of all time and signal moment in the career of one of the most influential groups of comics in history, ranking alongside fellow Brits the Beyond The Fringe fellows, Canada's SCTV and Saturday Night Live. It looks surprisingly good on BluRay for such a low-budget, throw anything against the wall and see if it sticks movie. New extras (like some bonus footage and bloopers as well as animated bits, sit alongside extras from earlier editions.

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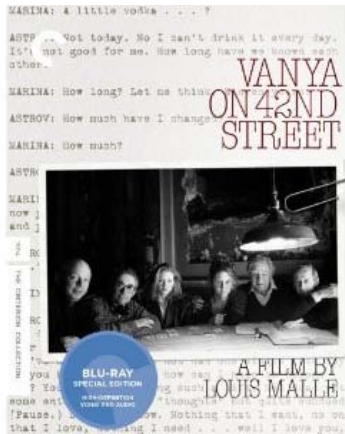
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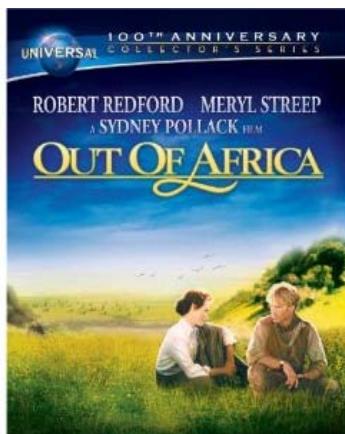
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It's a complete pain in the neck to access the app with a making-of story and tons of bonus material (you have to pay for it and then get a rebate), but this physical copy is loaded as is. The movie? Brilliantly silly, stupidly clever as always. I jumped randomly to one scene to check picture quality. King Arthur is asking peasants who lives in the castle nearby and the levels of humor are breathtaking. He calls an old man "old woman." The peasant reacts angrily and then later says, "I'm 37," also taking offense at being called old. Arthur tries to steer the conversation where he wants, but they're puzzled by his claim of being King of the Brits. Who named him king? He launches into a speech about the Lady of the Lake who handed him Excalibur and the peasant rudely interrupts with a discussion of feudal systems and his preference for a vaguely socialistic set-up. Arthur tries again, and finally in anger demands the peasant stop talking, who then explodes in mock anger, exclaiming "I'm being oppressed!" All throughout this, the peasants are mindlessly kneeling on the ground, slapping mud into little piles. If the peasant were so clever, it wouldn't be funny. But in amongst all the other levels of humor, the peasant is really rather annoying, much like a college student who is spouting off with his newly discovered knowledge about power structures as if he's the first in the world to discover it. Python, Monty both celebrate erudition but also mock their cerebral ways. Of course, much of the film involves farts and flying cows and maidens who like to be spanked and knights who say "Nee!" How I love it.



VANYA ON 42ND STREET (\$39.95 BluRay; Criterion) -- I think Anton Chekhov is a much better source for great movies than great plays. I know, he's one of the most acclaimed playwrights of all time. (And his short stories are where his greatest achievement lies.) Nonetheless, his plays are notoriously difficult. I've seen great productions but far more often -- even with the most talented cast in the world -- I've seen Chekhov plays that remained emotionally inert. I think that's because his material works best in close-up. His rich language is best delivered very, very quietly. Perhaps that's why this adaptation of Uncle Vanya works so beautifully. It's certainly a late career peak for director Louis Malle and a signal work for the entire cast. They share their stories in a new substantial documentary. Malle is missed, but like Chekhov his work will live on. *Chekhov's The Duel* was another terrific film from 2010. He's one of our greatest writers and film I think is the ideal medium for his dramatic work. Criterion's usual care presents the film beautifully.



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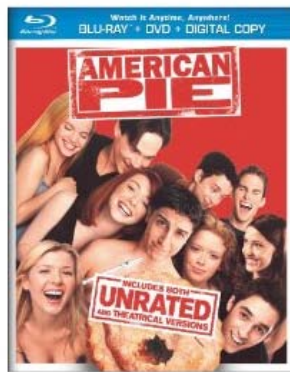
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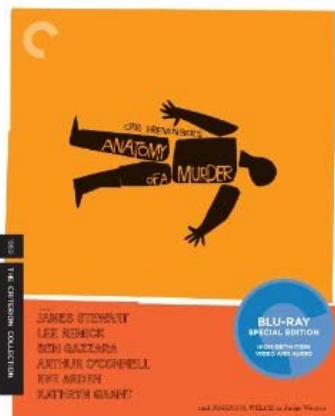


OUT OF AFRICA COLLECTOR'S SERIES BLURAY (\$39.95; Universal)

THE DEER HUNTER COLLECTOR'S SERIES BLURAY (\$19.95; Universal) -- These two films have swapped places in my estimation since i first saw them. Enthralled with Meryl Streep (quite rightly), I ignored the picture postcard thinness of Sydney Pollack's romance when it first came out and put it on my best of the year list. Streep is very good but having since read many of writer Isak Dinesen's stories, I feel the film is even wider of the mark compared to what it might have been. (Though any true depiction of Dinesen and her work would be complicated by her maternalistic attitude toward Africa). I was a little cool to *The Deer Hunter* at first, but its power in key scenes has only grown with the years. Both it and *Apocalypse Now* are problematic for me, but both have a strange mystery that keeps me watching. Director Michael Cimino never had the major career one might have expected, but watching this reminds you of why people expected it. Both films look very good, thanks to Universal's celebration of its 100th anniversary by presenting some of its key films as lovingly as possible.



AMERICAN PIE 1/2/WEDDING (\$19.98 each on BluRay; Universal) -- Far less prestigious but probably far more profitable than *Out Of Africa* is the *American Pie* series, the raunchy comedy that made home-made pie lovers wary forever. The series gets a new edition with the inevitable American Reunion and that's an excuse to put out all three in the series onto BluRay with the big new extra a three-hour (!) making of documentary about the series on the original film's release. Thin stuff, though Seann William Scott is amusingly perfect for this sort of stuff.



ANATOMY OF A MURDER (\$39.95 BluRay; Criterion) -- Director Otto Preminger often made self-consciously "important" films, like *Advise and Consent* (Washington corruption) and *The Man With The Golden Arm* (drug addiction). This may be a process film -- showing how murder trials really work -- but



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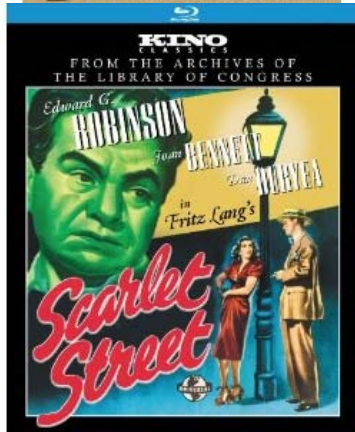
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it's pure fun as well and his greatest movie. Jimmy Stewart as the righteous defense attorney is pitch perfect but it's a great cast up and down the line. This loaded release contains strong extras from new interviews with a Preminger biographer and Gary Giddins on the landmark score by Duke Ellington to a fun 10 minute segment showing Preminger debate William F. Buckley Jr. on film censorship. One of the greats in a worthy presentation.



SPIDERS (\$29.95; Kino)

SCARLET STREET (\$29.95 BluRay; Kino) -- Director Fritz Lang had a hell of a career from his early silents to German peaks (*M* and *Metropolis*) to a heady Hollywood period. Two new releases from Kino capture that breadth. *Spiders* is a two-part movie that plays like one of those old serials, following an Indiana Jones-style adventure (oddly named Kay Hoog) who is often on a search for treasure while combatting gang of criminals known as the Spiders. It's a bit creaky but fun. Better is his late period noir *Scarlet Street* (1945) with Edward G. Robinson as a timid little man thoroughly transformed by an obsession with street-walker Joan Bennett. Both look strong, given their provenance.

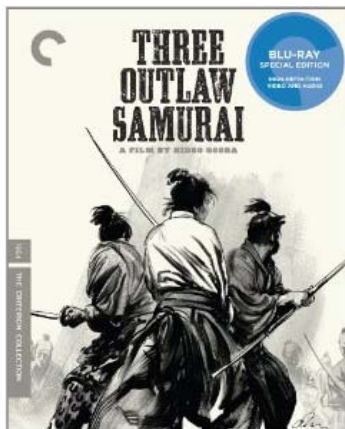


NIJINSKY (\$24.95; Olive/Paramount) -- Director Herbert Ross followed his smash hit *The Turning Point* with another dance melodrama. *Nijinsky* contains some strong dance scenes but was far less successful, due perhaps to the gay love story at its heart. In the early 1900s, Nijinsky is at his peak, but torn between a ballerina and the imperious Diaghilev (Alan Bates) and the pressure drove him bonkers. Literally. Also notable is Jeremy Irons in his film debut right before *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and *Brideshead Revisited* made him a star.



MY MAN GODFREY (\$14.98; Universal)

SULLIVAN'S TRAVELS (\$14.98; Universal) -- Universal's 100th anniversary has meant a fine excuse to provide fine new prints of some of the key films in its library. *My Man Godfrey* is a classic example of the screwball comedy. William Powell is perfect as a down on his luck bum who becomes the perfect butler -- and more -- to a madcap heiress (Carole Lombard). It's Hollywood at its very best. Many hold *Sullivan's Travels* in equally high esteem. It's the most personal movie from the great Preston Sturges. Here Joel McCrea is a director tires of making silly comedies and years to go out and find the "real" America and tell a real story. Rather insultingly, to my mind, he finally accepts that the lowly common man wants frothy comedies to take their minds off mundane reality. It's heavy-handed Hollywood satire. I'll take the real deal of *My Man Godfrey* over a movie about a man who spends most of his movie thinking *Godfrey* is a waste of time.



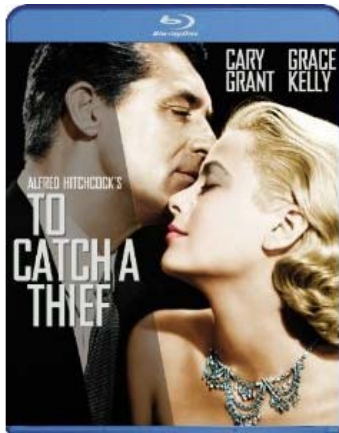
THREE OUTLAW SAMURAI (\$29.95 BluRay; Criterion) -- My interest is always raised when Criterion adds a film I'm not familiar with to its lineup. *Three Outlaw Samurai*, I'm happy to report, is a corker. It's the spin-off from a wildly successful Japanese TV series and is a key film in the "chanbara" genre. I'm not quite clear how chanbara differs from other samurai films, but it's great fun. Released in 1964, it's the origin story of how the three traveling do-gooders first got together. One is an unemployed ronin who stumbles upon some peasants that have kidnapped the local leader's daughter to try and force him to pay attention to their desperate straits. He's amused by their haplessness and stands by while they flounder until he accepts the dignity of their cause. The other two are in the employ of the evil leader but are soon won over by the code of honor they've almost entirely abandoned. It's pure narrative fun, beautifully shot and with some excellent fight scenes and above all terrifically vivid characters. Any fan of spaghetti westerns and classic samurai movies should jump.



THAT SHOW WITH JOAN RIVERS (\$24.98; Synergy)

LAWRENCE WELK CLASSIC EPISODES 1-4 (\$39.99; Synergy) -- Neither one of these releases will win any points for picture quality. They're just old episodes tossed onto DVD. The Joan Rivers show is a genuine time capsule. Rivers hosted a local show in NYC that followed a familiar pattern. Rivers performed a monologue, brought in an expert to discuss a topic (like Nudism, Natural Childbirth, the Jet Set and the like) and then brought in a personality to expand the discussion. It's great to see Rivers coming into her own here on these 18 shows. The Welk set has 12 hour-long episodes of his easy listening show from the early 1960s when it was broadcast in black and white. It's of rather so-so picture quality but those hankering for a shot of nostalgia will care more about memories stirred up than sharpness on the DVD. Others should stay away.





CHARADE (\$14.98; UNIVERSAL)

TO CATCH A THIEF (\$22.99 BluRay; Paramount) -- We all know Cary Grant is a great actor. Even with the best actors, it's not always clear who will have chemistry with whom. Sometimes great stars simply bump up against each other on screen rather than complementing one another. So that brings us to another remarkable element of Grant's movie success. He had off-the-charts chemistry with more co-stars than almost anyone else in history, from Katharine Hepburn to Doris Day. Here are two classic examples: Grant is charming with Audrey Hepburn in the lighter-than-air caper film *Charade* and sizzling with Grace Kelly in one of Alfred Hitchcock's lesser entertainments *To Catch A Thief*. Quite simply, like the best athletes on a team, Grant made everyone around him better. The BluRay transfer of *Thief*, by the way, is exceptionally good.

MOST TITLES LISTED HERE WILL BE AVAILABLE IN MULTIPLE FORMATS AND IN MULTIPLE COMBINATIONS, INCLUDING DVD, BLURAY, DIGITAL DOWNLOAD, VOD, STREAMING AND THE LIKE. THE FORMAT LISTED IS THE FORMAT PROVIDED FOR REVIEW, NOT ALL THE FORMATS AVAILABLE. IT IS OFTEN THE MOST EXPENSIVE VERSION WITH THE MOST EXTRAS. DO CHECK INDIVIDUAL TITLES FOR AVAILABILITY IN ALL THEIR VARIOUS GUISES AND PRICE POINTS.

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Note: Michael Giltz is provided with free copies of DVDs and BluRays 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.

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04:59 AM on 03/28/2012

good post. I think everyone will consider it after reading this seo information. A special thanks for sharing this information
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-swift

Can you put your country before your party?

727 Fans

08:29 AM on 03/20/2012

Out of Africa was where I learned that girls will use you to take them to movies and dinner then tell you they think of you as just a friend. So I owe the creators of the film that. That, and I had a pretty long nap, because the movie is like seventeen hours long.

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proveit2me

Snarky Cold Medina

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11:14 PM on 03/18/2012

Wallace Shawn and Julianne Moore were memorable in Vanya on 42nd Street- generally not a big Chekhov fan but I really enjoyed this production.

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shanghaislim

Is this creamy white enough for my micro bio....ch

644 Fans

09:40 AM on 03/18/2012

I saw the original in the theatre when I was 14. They ran a promotion and the first 50 people got coconuts.

We really had no idea who Monty Python was at the time but my older brother convinced me and my father to come.

We are all sitting in our seats holding coconuts thinkin' WTF.....and then the movie began. During the Black Knight scene my father rolled off his chair in laughter and almost stopped breathing.

My outlook on comedy has never been the same.

I also have a Book of the Script with all the changes and notations in the sides and the original First Draft of the movie.

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Joseph Schmoe

338 Fans

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02:44 PM on 03/17/2012

Yes, Holy Grail is hilarious.

What isn't hilarious is any attempt to describe a Python sketch as if you were 10 years old. "Then this guys says...then that guys says....."

Please, reading your description of that classic scene was excruciating and no one new to Monty Python would buy the DVD based on that humorless summary.

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Lorindol

I shall consider it . . .

828 Fans

03:34 AM on 03/18/2012

"It's like those miserable psalms - they're sooo depressing."

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donnyraindog

Grass shack nailed to a pinewood floor

1610 Fans

10:43 PM on 03/16/2012

She turned me into a Newt!.... A Newt?..... I got better.

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ArjenBoatsma

No such thing as too much coffee.

280 Fans

07:04 PM on 03/16/2012

30/40 years later Monty Python is still brilliant!

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The Mighty Pathos

54 Fans

12:58 PM on 03/16/2012

Dennis the peasant in Holy Grail says he's 37, not 35.

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Michael Giltz

freelance writer

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02:53 PM on 03/16/2012

That's what I get for not putting the disc back in when writing my comments. I'm going to change it now. Thanks!

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FearlessFreep

A radical leftist with a JS Woodsworth avatar.

552 Fans

01:20 AM on 03/16/2012

The final scenes in SCARLET STREET were echoed in the classic Warner Brothers cartoon ONE FROGGY EVENING.

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proveit2me

Snarky Cold Medina

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11:12 PM on 03/18/2012

F/f for the screen name. Give me the whole roll, I'm a splurgin'!

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