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DVDs: New Christmas DVDs For Your Stocking

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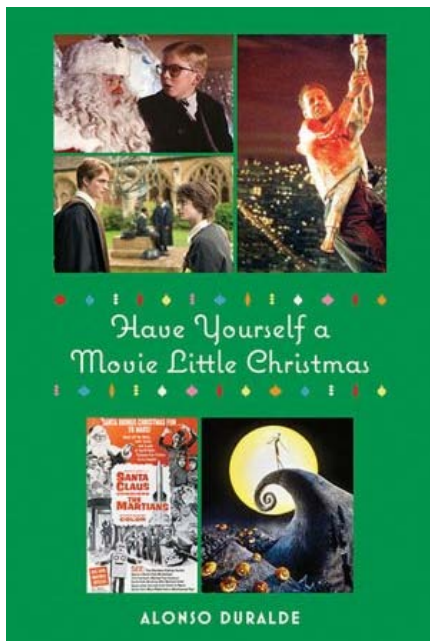
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This is not a list of the best Christmas-themed movies of all time. For that, you should check out my friend [Alonso Duralde's](#) book *Have Yourself A Movie Little Christmas* (\$16.99; Limelight).



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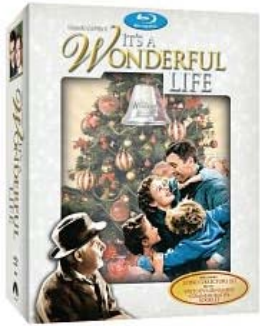
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Duralde covers every Christmas movie in the world, from the wonderfully good to the wonderfully bad. If I was making a list of favorite Christmas-themed DVDs, it would certainly include *It's A Wonderful Life*, *Going My Way*, *Nightmare Before Christmas*, *Fanny & Alexander*, *Miracle On 34th Street*, the Alistair Sim's *A Christmas Carol* and *Bad Santa*. But I'm not making a list, no matter how much you plead.

This column is devoted to new DVD releases over the past few weeks. If you wonder why studios keep repackaging classic titles and pretending they're "new," it's because stores like Wal-Mart won't keep a library of DVDs on their floor and refuse to order "old" titles. Even though customers would gladly buy *A Christmas Story* DVD even if it did come out three years ago and didn't have some new peg, studios have to go through the bother of adding some minimal content and calling it "new" to get big box stores to sign up.

So here we are, some of the top DVD releases of the past few weeks that might make it into your stocking or hopefully your shopping cart so you don't have to wait till Christmas day to watch them.



IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE ON BLURAY WITH EXCLUSIVE ORNAMENT (\$39.99; Paramount)

-- Another year, another repackaging of the greatest holiday film of them all. Strike that. This Frank Capra classic starring Jimmy Stewart (who almost quit movies after WW II because it seemed so foolish after what he'd seen but was begged onto the set by Capra), well, it's not just the greatest Christmas-themed film of them all. It's one of the greatest films, period. The tinkly ornament included means every time you shake your unwrapped present, an angel gets their wings! On the other hand, in a bad bit of packaging the enclosed booklet (presumably from an earlier set) won't fit inside the BluRay case. Someone's getting coal in their stocking this year!



MEET ME IN ST. LOUIS (\$35.99 BluRay; Warner Bros.) -- Another beloved holiday film, but this one just doesn't do it for me. I've watched a number of times over the years, hoping its charms would reveal themselves. But the love interest for Judy Garland is too bland, the family doings too mild and Margaret O'Brien's nervous breakdown over the prospect of moving to New York City is so over-the-top you'd think the little girl was a soldier suffering from World War I. My friend calls director Vincente Minnelli the George Stevens of musicals. Ouch. Mind you, every time Judy Garland sings it becomes gloriously good, including "The Trolley Song" and "Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas." But it's not enough to save this trifle. This BluRay set looks gorgeous and is stuffed with extras including a four song CD sampler and an introduction by Liza Minnelli.

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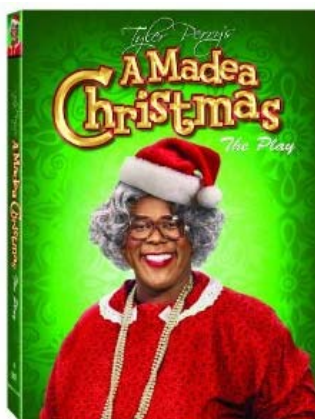
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PETER PAUL AND MARY: THE HOLIDAY CONCERT (\$16.99; Shout) -- Here's a treat, the perennial favorite on PBS stations around the country, this concert with the folk trio Christmas (and Hannukah) tunes is shown year after year after year. Now it's finally on DVD so this 90 minute show can be enjoyed whenever you want (and without pledge drive pleas!).



ICE AGE: A MAMMOTH CHRISTMAS SPECIAL (\$14.99 BluRay; FOX) -- I don't care for the Shrek or Ice Age movie franchises, but they've both produced Christmas specials that are better than the movies. In this, Sid gets put on Santa's naughty list (it's not his fault!) and heads to the North Pole to plead his case. The BluRay combo pack includes a BluRay, a DVD and a digital copy. Yes it's short, but that's till pretty great for a title that costs less than \$10 on sale.



TYLER PERRY'S A MADEA CHRISTMAS: THE PLAY (\$24.99 BluRay or \$19.99 DVD; Lionsgate) -- Tyler Perry has been touring with this show for years and now you can own it on DVD. It's not a movie, just a filmed recording of one of the play's performances. He doesn't skimp on the Madea in this entry in the Madea canon. You know what to expect. Modest extras include a making-of.



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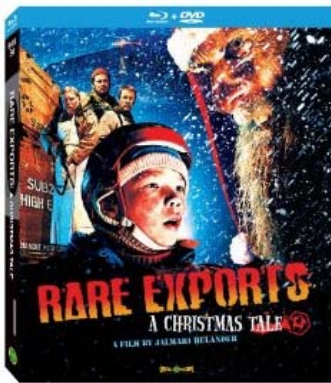


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THE LITTLEST ANGEL (\$19.98; Anchor Bay) -- The best-selling children's book about a little boy in heaven who goes back to earth to find a gift for Jesus, *The Littlest Angel* has been turned into a bare-bones animated film. Those who like VeggieTales and the sort may appreciate its tone and content matter, but the creative elements are rote and it's for very little kids at best. Finally, their claim that the book is "the 15th best-selling children's book of all time" is unlikely, to say the least though it has been printed and reprinted many times and you'd be better off reading the tale to your kids anyway.



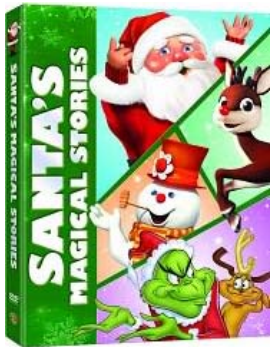
RARE EXPORTS: A CHRISTMAS TALE (\$39.99 BluRay or \$29.99 DVD; Oscilloscope) -- If *Gremlins* and *Bad Santa* are your idea of holiday fare, you definitely want to check out this critically acclaimed Finnish film about an archeological dig that unleashes the "evil Santa" of local lore on Christmas Eve. Mayhem ensues. A cult classic in the making, says *Village Voice* and it's easy to see why.



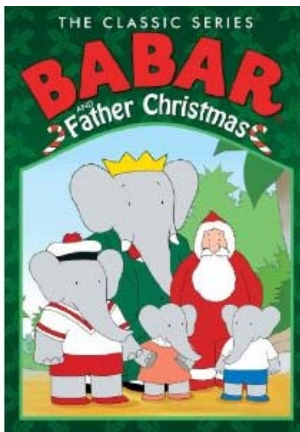
SHAUN THE SHEEP: WE WISH EWE A MERRY CHRISTMAS (\$14.98; Lionsgate/Hit Entertainment) -- No of course it's not as good as *Wallace & Gromit*. But this world created by Nick Park has its own quieter pleasures and it's ideal for adults and younger kids. The seven shorts included all have winter and holiday themes, naturally, including the title piece and "Bitzer's New Hat," "Snowed In" and the like. Gentle fun.



THE GATHERING (\$14.98; Warner Bros.) -- Ed Asner and Maureen Stapleton shine in this TV movie about a man always focused on business who suddenly discovers he only has weeks to live and tries to bring together the family he's ignored and pushed away all these years. A real heart-tugger from director Randall Kleiser, who had a hell of a year in 1978 when this won the Emmy and he released *Grease*. Ranks with *The Homecoming* as a genuine TV treat.



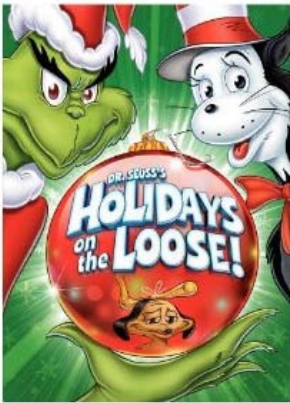
SANTA'S MAGICAL STORIES (\$29.99; Warner Bros.) -- If you don't own some of the best holiday TV specials by now, this set with nine titles in all is a good bargain with two of the absolute best. You get three discs with three specials on each. The first is headlined by *How The Grinch Stole Christmas*, the second by the exceptional *The Year Without A Santa Claus* and the third by the so-so *Jack Frost*. The bonus specials vary in quality but include some pretty good ones and overall this is a solid starter set with more than five hours of entertainment. Mind you, your kids will probably keep *Grinch* on repeat, but that's not so bad either.



BABAR AND FATHER CHRISTMAS (\$14.98; EOne) -- This DVD is pegged as "the classic series," but in fact the main, gentle TV special *Babar and Father Christmas* came out in 1986, three years before the Canadian series began airing there and on HBO. The other two holiday themed shows ("A Child In The Snow" and "The Gift" do indeed come from the series but it all feels of a piece both in the animation and storytelling. Like the books themselves, the series and special are quietly paced and a bit startling to kids raised on hyper-fast TV shows and pop culture referencing movies. Catch them young enough and they won't realize they're not supposed to enjoy it.



HOLIDAYS WITH SPONGEBOB (\$29.98; Paramount/Nickelodeon) -- I prefer my TV shows in complete season boxed sets but this holiday themed set is a little tempting. You get one DVD devoted to parties, one DVD built around Halloween and of course one DVD for Christmas, including "Christmas Who?" and "Snowball Effect," among others. With more than four hours of programming, it's a decent value. SpongeBob's giddy innocence seems just right for the holidays.



DR. SEUSS'S HOLIDAYS ON THE LOOSE (\$26.98; Warner Bros.) -- Three Dr. Seuss holiday specials. If for some reason you don't own *How The Grinch Stole Christmas* and don't prefer the more varied set above (Santa's Magical Stories), this trim DVD has three specials, including the classic *HTGSC*, *The Grinch Grinches The Cat In The Hat* and *Halloween Is Grinch Night*. The other two aren't up to its standards but they are Seussian and that's that.

*Thanks for reading. Michael Giltz is the cohost of [Showbiz Sandbox](#), a weekly pop culture podcast that reveals the industry take on entertainment news of the day and features top journalists and opinion makers as guests. It's [available](#) for free on iTunes. Visit Michael Giltz at his [website](#) and his [daily blog](#). Download his podcast of celebrity interviews and his radio show, also called *Popsurfing* and also [available](#) for free on iTunes. Link to him on Netflix and [gain](#) access to thousands of ratings and reviews.*

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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