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Michael Giltz
Freelance writer and raconteur
Posted: October 14, 2010 02:21 AM

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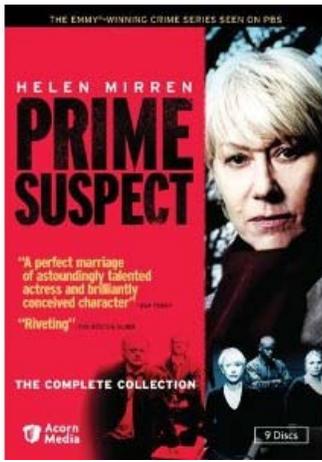
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Boy, do I have a lot of catching up to do. So if most of these are really strong reviews, it's because I'm cherry picking from the past six weeks of releases.

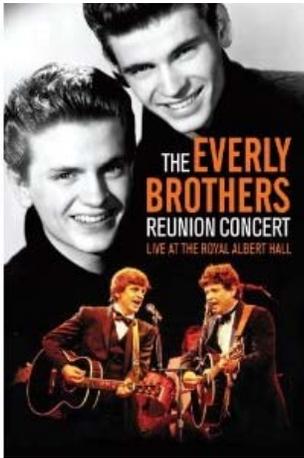
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PRIME SUSPECT: THE COMPLETE COLLECTION (\$124.99! Acorn) -- No question about it, Detective Jane Tennison is one of the great TV characters of all time. And if you say "one of the great *female* TV characters," then you're little better than the casually sexist men she has to deal with and fight and gain the respect of during this series. The first two miniseries stand alone and are absolutely brilliant. The quality dips and dives after that (the third mystery is good, the fourth through sixth so-so and the seventh a decent swan song) but what never wavers is the uncompromising brilliance of Helen Mirren. If you already own these movies, there's no reason to upgrade; the picture is marginally better if not identical to previous versions and the extras are nice if minimal. Also, it's a shame they didn't create a more compact set for this 9 disc collection. But if you haven't seen them or don't own them yet, you'll undoubtedly want to watch them all and own at least the first two.



THE EVERLY BROTHERS REUNION CONCERT (\$11.98; Eagle Records) -- One of the great rock duos of all time, I fell for the Everly Brothers just after this legendary reunion concert took place. They recorded a new album -- *EB 84* (absurdly, out of print) -- filled with great originals and some choice covers (Dylan, a new Paul McCartney song written just for them, etc.) that stood up to their best. Little did I know they'd been feuding for a good decade right up to September 23, 1983, when Don and Phil set aside their differences and reunited onstage (really reunited; they didn't even rehearse) for this London show. Their voices may have deepened but they blended together with the same magic as their heyday while delivering hits like "Bye Bye Love" and "All I Have To Do Is Dream." Their joy in performing together again is palpable and set them touring and recording for much of the next decade to solid success. No wonder they rate this night as a highlight of their long and illustrious career. The bonus feature is a shortened version of a documentary running about 45 minutes. The concert itself is in decent shape visually and sounds good. It's not a brilliant film so much as a document of a very special moment. Fans who don't own it will be pleased. If you don't know them, **for heaven's sake, start listening.**

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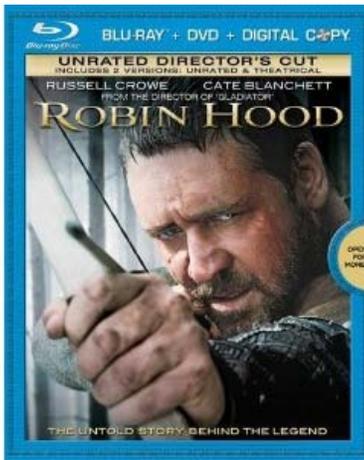


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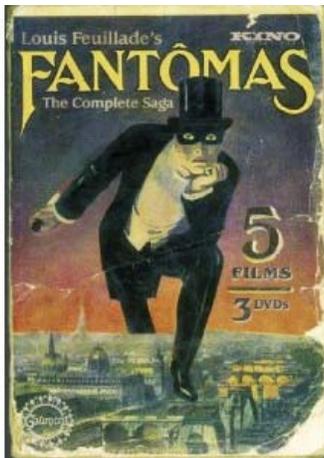
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William and Kate's Love Story



ROBIN HOOD (\$39.98 BluRay or \$29.98 regular DVD; Universal) -- Everyone wants to reboot franchises and get gritty and do unexpected origin stories and mix it up so they can make a stodgy old "property" seem cool. But when you're running in fright from every single identifiable element of a classic tale (in this case: the tights, the Merry Men, the archery, a nobleman risking everything to help out the weak, and most of all the fun), then something is wrong and you should ask yourself, why has this tale been popular for hundreds of years and why am I avoiding so much of that story? It's a shame, because Russell Crowe makes a good Hood, even if his embrace of Universal Human Rights comes hundreds of years early and seems a little silly. But the film really gets daft at the finale where Maid Marian (Cate Blanchett who, not surprisingly has been strong and proto-feminist throughout) plays an absurd part in battle. Loaded with extras and it certainly looks and sounds good. But what a shame.



FANTOMAS: THE COMPLETE SAGA (\$34.95; Kino) -- This collection of five serials starring the dastardly criminal Fantomas is catnip for silent film buffs. First, Kino presents the films with care, including commentary and shorts from director Louis Feuillade (*Les Vampires*). Dating from 1913-1914, it's one long epic tale in which the criminal is truly vicious, the police relentless and the adventures grow increasingly baroque and outrageous. And the price is perfect for a specialty item like this that can't have been cheap to produce. It's just inexpensive enough to encourage casual movie buffs to check it out, while fans of serials and Fantomas won't have to break the bank to enjoy them. Great fun.



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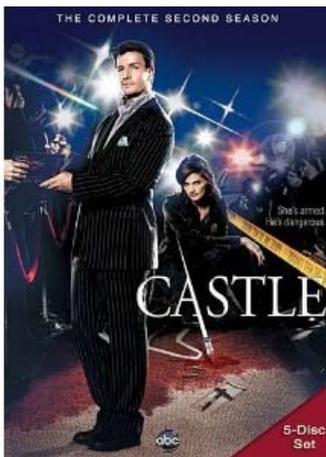
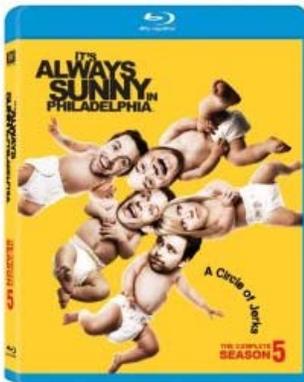
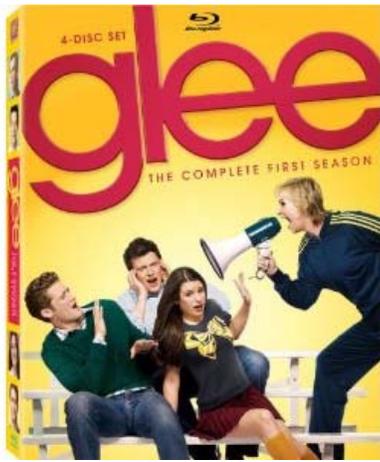
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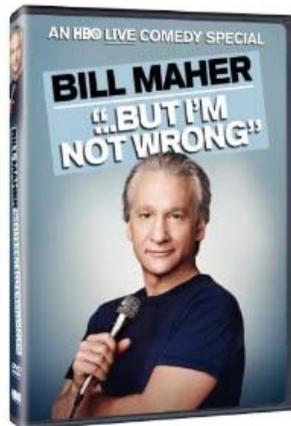
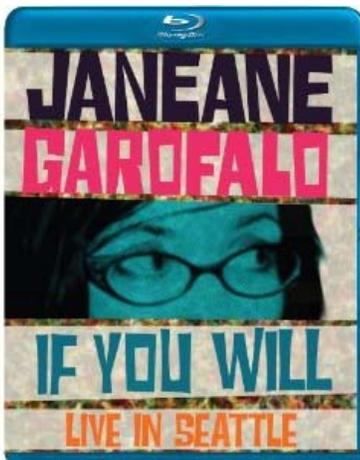
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THE BIG BANG THEORY THIRD SEASON (\$54.97 BluRay or \$44.98 regular; Warner Bros.)

IT'S ALWAYS SUNNY IN PHILADELPHIA SEASON FIVE (\$49.98 BluRay or \$39.98 regular; FOX)

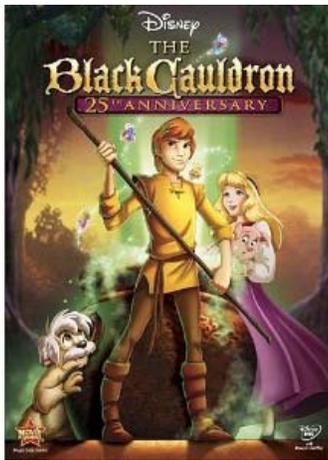
CASTLE COMPLETE SECOND SEASON (\$45.99; ABC) -- Okay, tv boxed sets come fast and furious so here goes. *Glee* is wildly uneven, but it's so fresh and original and the episodes that do hit their target are so enjoyable that it's a can't miss TV show, even when it misses. (Does that make any sense?) Plus, you can just watch the musical numbers when that's what you're in the mood for...or do karaoke, which I never do. I swear. I understand why *Big Bang Theory* is successful -- it's a joke machine. But it's also relentlessly "jokey" with nary a moment for real characters to peep through. Funnier than many sitcoms but to me never more than fitfully amusing. *Sunny In Philadelphia*, on the other hand, is original and fresh in a *Seinfeld/Arrested Development* sort of way. The addition of Danny DeVito has been a blessing and the cast has grown in confidence. As they warn you on the set, the show was shot in standard def (basic cable shows can't always afford fancy cameras) so no real point in splurging on the BluRay for this one. And finally I am thrilled that Nathan Fillion is in an honest to goodness hit with *Castle*. Yeah, this is a standard issue mystery show but he's got charm to spare and great chemistry with his cop costar (Stana Katic) and it's undeniably fun, even if I don't feel gutted when I miss an episode. And how much more do we appreciate his poker night with mystery writer buddies like Stephen J. Cannell now that Cannell is gone for good? And yes, I do keep thinking, wow, since this show is a hit do you think maybe they'll bring back *Firefly*.



JANEANE GAROFALO: IF YOU WILL (\$17.97 BluRay and \$14.97 regular; Image)

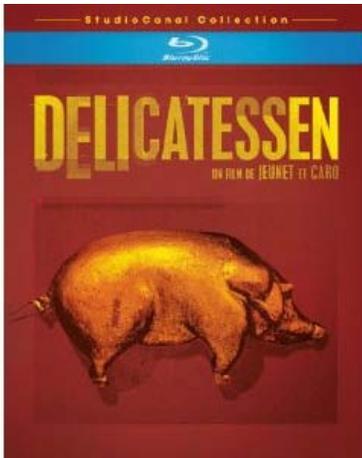
BILL MAHER: BUT I'M NOT WRONG (\$19.98; HBO) -- The latest performances by two stand up comics who struck it big. Garofalo is probably better known for her acting and radio gigs than her stand-up. But after a long absence, she returns to the stage with a more self-deprecating, more generous if still razor sharp outlook on life. Nothing groundbreaking here, but she's funny and puts enough of a spin on Twitter and semi-fame to make the hour spent with her worthwhile. (You gotta love someone who tells a story on themselves about walking into a Starbucks and having an employee say, "No offense, but you look like Janeane Garofalo.") Bill Maher, on the other hand, is less effective as a stand-up today because he's so clearly found the perfect medium for his witty insights on his TV political shows, including the current HBO series *Real Time With Bill Maher*, which is the only thing that keeps me sane when politics and especially the media coverage of politics can be so asinine. Maher is really smart and pointed and focused on that show; he'll make a funny joke if he can, but not to defuse the subject or let his

interviewee off the hook the way Jon Stewart might. Maher's jokes always skewer pretension and lies too deftly for that. Stand-up just seems superfluous when his real gift is political commentary. Mind you, he's still fun to see and I hope some other topic engages him the way religion did and he makes another documentary because *Religulous* was great. But plain old stand-up makes me feel like I'm not getting the full Maher. It's like going to a massage parlor and having them walk away before the happy ending. Maher would never stand for that, would he?



TINKER BELL AND THE GREAT FAIRY RESCUE (\$39.99 BluRay and \$29.99 regular; Disney)

THE BLACK CAULDRON (\$19.99; Disney) -- I give Disney a lot of grief for their straight-to-DVD line of movies, which I think cheapen major properties like *The Lion King*. But it's often a proving ground for new talent that graduates to feature films. Plus, when they're focusing on a minor character like Tink and building her up, it doesn't seem so awful to me. This is the third Tinkerbell feature and the series is improving and showing a little more spunk and action, which is welcome in a girl-oriented series like this. Why should the boys have all the fun? And the guest voices (Kristen Chenoweth, Michael Sheen) are top-notch. *The Black Cauldron* has always been an intriguing example of the road not taken by Disney. It was a PG film made during the early days of their renaissance (right after *The Fox and the Hound* but before *The Great Mouse Detective* and of course *The Little Mermaid*). It's based on a series of fantasy books and relatively darker (hence the PG rating) though hardly envelope-pushing in any way except a tad more scary to very small kids. Disney wanted to break out of its formula but couldn't quite bring itself to do so; the mature fantasy is undercut by typical Disney comic relief. Plus, they weren't ready to do really stunning animation yet so the backdrops are nice but relatively flat and static. Close, but no cigar, which is a shame: animated features are too constrained by the family friendly formula when they should be tackling sci-fi and so many other genres...and not always have to be appropriate for eight year olds.



THE THIRD MAN (\$39.98 BluRay; Lionsgate/Studio Canal)

DELICATESSEN (\$39.99 BluRay; Lionsgate/Studio Canal) -- Two great films offered in BluRay by Studio Canal, which has funded thousands of movies over the years and recently launched a line of DVDs branded with its name. *The Third Man* is a masterpiece, of course, with Joseph Cotten and Orson Welles superb in Carol Reed's dark tale of post-war Europe. The question is how does it compare to the now out-of-print Criterion BluRay it in effect replaces? Basically, not so good. The extras are solid, though not as thorough; still, I do appreciate hearing from Welles biographer Simon Callow and clearly Studio Canal knew they needed to do a solid job on that front. But the most important issue is the film itself and clearly this remastering is softer and not nearly as sharp and crisp as the Criterion print. Since *The Third Man* is one of the great films of all time (and taught me the meaning of mise en scene), its image is of paramount importance. It's a decent print, better than you'd see in many revival houses back when they had revival houses or showed old prints on late night TV. If you have nothing to compare it to it's fine. But not world class. If it's all you can get, you needn't fret; but it's a shame they didn't do better. Studio Canal is on firmer ground with the more recent film *Delicatessen*, a very black comedy from Jeanet & Caro, responsible together or alone for later films like *Amelie* and *A Very Long Engagement*. This is a striking film with wildly inventive camerawork. I have no earlier print to compare it to, but it seems rather...orange. And yet, I think that might be the choice of the directors, who also filmed many scenes with fog for their post-apocalyptic (?) tale of very hungry apartment dwellers. In short, the Studio Canal brand promises solid extras and decent prints that are acceptable if not the absolute premium best.

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 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 to consider for review. He typically does not guarantee coverage and invariably receives far more screeners and DVDs than he can cover each week. Also, Michael Giltz freelances as a writer of DVD copy (the text that appears on the back of DVDs) for some titles released by IFC and other subsidiaries of MPI. It helps pay the rent, but does not obligate him in any way to speak positively or negatively of their titles.

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Steven Shehori: The Off-Topic Interview: *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia's* Rob McElhenney

We recently sat down with Rob McElhenney, creator of Sunny... to discuss the secret to the series' longevity, the legendary Danny DeVito, and some eyebrow-raising storylines planned for future episodes. Then things got a bit off topic. My bad.

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