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# DVDs: *The Red Balloon Vs. White Mane*

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Some delightful children's shorts have come to DVD recently. One is the all-time Albert Lamorisse classic *The Red Balloon*, a delicately charming, wordless tale of a little boy followed around the streets of Paris by a red balloon. Another is *White Mane*, director Lamorisse's first gem, this one about a wild stallion and the boy who befriends him. Finally, there's *Paddle To The Sea*, a Canadian short based on the picture book about a wooden canoe Indian which

manages to traverse much of the country in an unlikely journey shot over two years on location. All are available from Janus Films via the exemplary crew at Criterion for \$14.95 each, with basically no extras. Historically, *The Red Balloon* and *White Mane* are paired together in movie theaters since they're both 40 minutes or less. That's how I saw them at Film Forum recently and if you last saw *Balloon* as a little kid, you'll be delighted at how enthralling it remains. *White Mane* is nearly as good and a worthy precursor to *The Black Stallion* in the "boy and his horse" genre. It's marred only slightly by the fact that our hero, Folco, with his artfully torn clothes and pouty lips, looks far more like a Dolce & Gabbana model than a poor fisherman. The surprise is that all three films are released on their own DVDs. As [Criterion argues on their excellent blog](#), *White Mane* has always been the B-side to *The Red Balloon* and been overshadowed by that film for far too long. This individual release is meant to let it stand on its own. Consider that the wrong decision made for the right reason. *White Mane* is indeed an absolute pleasure, but the simple fact is that it will be bought and seen far less when sold on its own than when it's paired with *Balloon*. Better to be second fiddle than ignored completely. Frankly, all three films should have been on one DVD, since *Paddle To The Sea* is markedly inferior, albeit not without interest for the very young. All on one disc, they'd total 102 minutes and make a fine triple bill. By all means, don't miss *White Mane*. And skip the English narration track -- almost the entire narration is unnecessary (not to mention a bit melodramatic) and it's far less distracting in French with English subtitles. Don't worry --

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your kids will be able to follow the story just fine, even if they don't read the subtitles. Finally, I've avoided the re-imagining of *Red Balloon* as the feature length French film *Voyage of the Red Balloon* by Hsiao-Hsien Hou and starring Juliette Binoche because it seemed like such an awful idea. Why mess with perfection? But friends have told me that it's really quite different and not an expanded remake and well done, so now I'm ready to check it out.

Also out this week: *The Golden Compass* (\$28.98; New Line), which has the right production design, the right cast (especially Nicole Kidman as Mrs. Coulter), the right special effects, the right inspiration (Philip Pullman's brilliant books) -- pretty much everything except a touch of magic to make it come alive; *I'm Not There* (\$29.99; Weinstein/Genius) is a shaggy Dylan-esque mess but there's sure to be some storyline that appeals -- I like the little black boy Dylan and of course Cate Blanchett and **the soundtrack is seriously entertaining**; *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (\$29.99; Miramax), is a beautiful, sexy gem that is far too entertaining to label "inspirational" but it's that too, thanks to a brilliant performance by Mathieu Amalric; *The Films of Morris Engel* (\$39.95; Kino), is a great peek at New York City in the Fifties thanks to three cinema verite trifles led by the minor classic *Little Fugitive* (1953) (about a little boy running away to Coney Island) and followed by two similar films that glimpse the city in unadorned delight via wafer-thin storylines; *The Adventures of Young Indiana Jones Volume Three* (\$129.99; Paramount) concludes the TV series in fine fashion with Sean Patrick Flanery making the most of young Indy (he's truly winning) and George Lucas making good on his pledge to educate and entertain by including more than two dozen quite substantial documentaries about the historical events Indy dashes through; the acclaimed Bollywood musical *Saawariya* (\$26.96; Columbia TriStar) is as good an introduction as any to that wonderfully over-the-top genre; *Sense & Sensibility* (\$34.98; BBC Video) and *My Boy Jack* (\$19.98; BBC Video) with *Sense* needing three hours to convince me there was a need to revisit the tale told to perfection by Emma Thompson and Ang Lee and Daniel Radcliffe using the story of Kipling's doomed son to make his claim for a post-Harry Potter career more likely every day; *2007 Academy Award Short Films* (\$29.98; Magnolia), which contains eight shorts (five live action and three animated) including the two winners; Disney's foray south of the border *Saludos Amigos* and *The Three Caballeros* on one disc (\$19.99; Disney), a venture which has gone from being considered welcome to vaguely stereotyped to appreciated for the sympathetic if superficial effort it was; *The Living End* (\$27.99; Strand), Gregg Araki's breakthrough which led to his masterpiece *Mysterious Skin*; *Twister* (\$20.98; Warner Bros.), the Jan de Bont nature attacks thriller that seemed dated the moment it came out (were we really that excited by flying cattle?); *Beverly Hills 90210 Fourth Season* (\$59.98; Paramount), the crucial year when they headed to college rather than trying to pretend Jason Priestly, Luke Perry et al were eternal teenagers and giving the show true legs; *Abel Raises Cain* (\$20 plus \$5 shipping) a documentary about the legendary media con artist Alan Abel directed by Jenny Abel & Jeff Hockett and currently available only through **their website**; *Bernard and Doris* (\$26.98; HBO), with Susan Sarandon and Ralph Fiennes sparking each other as the billionaire Doris Duke and her gay butler Bernard Lafferty; the above average sword and sandals epic *The Fall Of The Roman Empire* (\$24.95; Weinstein/Genius) whose superior cast (Alec Guinness, James Mason, etc) keeps it from taking place in real time, the way you might fear; *The Waltons Seventh Season* (\$39.98; Warner Bros.) in which niceness takes a beating thanks to tuberculosis and Pearl Harbor among other tragedies; *Cheers Ninth Season* (\$39.98; Paramount) and an sitcom lasting this long is happy to produce the occasional chuckle, which this one does; *The British Empire In Color* (\$24.99; Acorn), reveals a remarkable amount of color footage that can detail the Empire's last days; *Military Intelligence and You* (\$14.99; Echo Bridge), a mockumentary that does its best to trump the black-humored absurdity in government that prevails today; *Speed Racer The Next Generation: The Beginning* (\$19.98; LionsGate), the pilot for the cartoon spin-off from the new movie; *Che Guevara: Hasta La Victoria Siempre* (\$19.99; Kultur), a 66 minute documentary from 1999 with archival footage hoping to gain more attention in the wake of the new Steven Soderbergh movies about Ernesto; *African American Lives 2* (\$24.99; PBS), *Roots* comes to life with this intriguing series hosted by Henry Louis Gates Jr. featuring Maya Angelou, Tina Turner, Chris Rock and others; *Nanking* (\$27.98; Think Film), a formally bold (or is that foolish?) docu-drama of sorts about the rape of Nanking and the crucial role of some Westerners in helping to save thousands; *Senior Skip Day* (\$24.98; First Look), a comedy which leaves maybe only gym class and the science fair as unexplored high school rites of passage); and finally *The BBC Natural History Collection* (\$199.98; BBC Video), a tremendous 17 disc collection that includes *The Life of Birds*, *The Life of Mammals*, *Planet Earth* and my personal favorite *Blue Planet*, four documentaries that are exceptionally entertaining and visually stunning.

So, do you remember seeing *The Red Balloon* as a child (grade school teachers loved to kill 40

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