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Farrah Fawcett Is Hospitalized



Madonna Tot's Dad Found: 'At Last I Can Be Part Of Mercy's Life'



Reality Show Choreographer Accused Of Raping 4



Michael Giltz

Posted December 24, 2008 | 06:28 PM (EST)

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DVDs: The Rest Of The Year

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I'm cleaning out my DVD pile as we approach the end of the year. Here are the top releases from December. Most of them are in the stores now but a few hit shelves in the next week. They saved some great stuff for the end of the year, so bear with me if I throw out one too many superlatives.

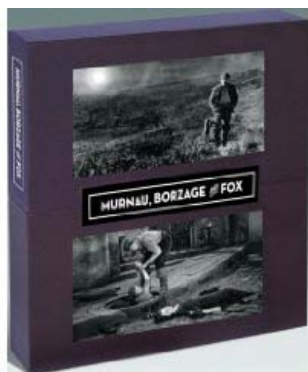
THE BEST TV SHOW OF ALL TIME? -- I put a question mark there because I hate to throw out definitive statements like that. But unquestionably *The Wire: The Complete Series* (\$249.99; HBO) is ONE of the best shows of all

time. Obviously *Generation Kill* (\$59.99; HBO) pales in comparison. But anything following *The Wire* would have paled in comparison and this Iraqi war drama plays better seen over a few days rather than over a few months.

THE BEST MOVIE OF ALL TIME? -- That slot goes to *Citizen Kane* the way "best album" always goes to *Sgt. Pepper*. No one else can do what they did because of their massive influence. But any short list of the greatest movies of all time invariably includes Murnau's gorgeous silent film *Sunrise*, which is available in a wonderful new print in the massive, bulky, awkward (you'll have to buy a coffee table to display it on) boxed set *Murnau, Borzage and Fox* (\$239.98; Fox). But what a collection. You get 12 films, ranging from pretty good to great, a top-notch documentary and a book devoted to a lost Murnau classic as well as ANOTHER book that's lavishly illustrated. I hope they have the decency to release this restored version of *Sunrise* on its own right away because it should be readily available to anyone and everyone for renting and buying. But I've spent months talking about boxed set packaging and this is a wonderful example of an expensive but terrible job. It LOOKS impressive and weighs a ton but the DVDs are awkwardly stored, hard to get at and the boxed set itself is almost impossible to store. Great movies and great care was taken with the films. But bigger and bulkier does NOT mean better.

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THE BEST MOVIE OF THE YEAR? -- It's definitely the best live action movie based on the comic strip *Batman*, but while I STILL don't find it wholly satisfying, it's on so many other best of the year lists that *The Dark Knight* (\$34.98 or \$35.98 on BluRay; Warner Bros.) probably is the de facto best movie of the year. It looks just stunning on BluRay, by the way and Heath Ledger seems certain to win the Oscar. Deservedly so; he's the best special effect in the movie -- great acting.

THE BEST WILL SMITH MOVIE SET IN AN APOCALYPTIC FUTURE? -- Yes, *I Am Legend* is certainly that. And if you're looking for a lavish version of this movie on DVD because *7 Pounds* made you cry and now you want to watch Will Smith save the world (again), then this Ultimate Collector's Edition (\$49.98; Warner Bros.) is the way to go. It has animated comics, a sketch book, a commemorative geegaw, and loads of featurettes including an alternate ending.

THE BEST SHAKESPEARE SEQUEL EVER? -- Actually, that would be the Tom Stoppard play *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*. Or the movie *Shakespeare In Love* which he coauthored. But *Hamlet 2* (\$29.98; Universal) is a fitfully amusing premise (high school teacher writes musical take on *Hamlet*) and it's always fun to see Steve Coogan. Too bad this wasn't his US breakthrough.

BEST REMAKE? -- The cooler than cool Jason Statham gets the top award for *Death Race* (\$29.98; Universal). Personally, I still have fond memories of the now chronologically challenged *Death Race 2000*, but this is one of Stephen King's faves of the year and I'm too scared of him to question it.

THE BEST REASON TO CHECK OUT THE ORIGINAL FILM? That would be *The Women* (\$28.98; New Line), a seemingly foolproof idea -- remake the scathing, hilariously acerbic classic comedy about backbiting gals -- that took years to get going and then was somehow thoroughly botched.

THE BEST REASON TO TURN THE SOUND OFF? Rowan Atkinson takes a lot of care with the sound mix, I'm sure but *Mr. Bean: The Ultimate Collection* (\$69.95; A&E) gathers together all of the mostly silent comic's appearances, from the classic original TV series (the only thing casual fans really need) to the movies and even the animated spin-off.

THE BEST BEGINNING TO A CAREER THAT BEGAN IN 1996? Criterion offers it up in *Bottle Rocket* (\$39.95; Criterion), the charming little movie that set Wes Anderson on the road to the classic *Rushmore* and fine followups like *The Royal Tenenbaums* and *The Darjeeling Limited*. Their usual top-notch extras include the original short. James L. Brooks and Polly Platt have individually and collectively mentored lots of great talents. Anderson is one of the best. Also just out is the impenetrable but confident Lars Von Trier film *Europa* (\$39.95; Criterion), which contains audio commentary, a making-of documentary, interviews with Trier and others and more, as one expects from Criterion.

THE BEST REASON TO CHECK OUT EXTRAS? I'm actually not a big fan of extras, but *Deadwood: The Complete Series* (\$179.97; HBO) has a couple of doozies, from creator David Milch's lacerating stroll through the empty set of the show he killed off too soon to Titus Welliver's hilarious imitations of Milch, Al Pacino, Robert De Niro and others. Gosh, I miss this show.

THE BEST REASONS TO GET OVER YOUR FEAR OF DOCUMENTARIES? -- Sure, documentaries are wildly popular compared to 30 or 40 years ago. But since a giant hit in the docu world is a movie that grosses \$10 million, obviously a lot of you still avoid them. That means you're missing out on the high school dissection *American Teen* (\$29.99; Paramount), the classic Cold War look *The Atomic Cafe Collector's Edition* (\$39.95; Docurama), the marvelous political x-ray *Frost/Nixon: The Original Watergate Interviews* (\$24.95; Liberation), the acclaimed World

"Washington Unplugged"

Arianna was on CBS' "Washington..."

Alex Leo The "Real Housewives Of New York City" Flowchart Of Hate

I'm a little embarrassed to love this show as much as...

"BRUNO" TRAILER! Calamity, African Babies, Chase Scenes And More (NSFW VIDEO)

IT'S HERE! The trailer for this July's Sacha Baron Cohen...

NATO Leaders Focus On Afghanistan, But Most Reject Obama's Plea For Troops (SLIDESHOW)

STRASBOURG, France — On the eve of the NATO...

First Lady Fashion At Friday's NATO Concert (PHOTOS)

Another night, another fashion opportunity for NATO leaders and their spouses! See...

Diana Palin, Sarah Palin's Sister-In-Law, Arrested For Breaking Into Home

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — Police say Alaska Gov...

John Oliver Explains The Real Reason You Never Touch The Queen (VIDEO)

John Oliver was upset enough to drop his monocle when he...

Obama Teases Reporter From India During Press Conference (VIDEO)

Obama held a conference packed with press from around the world on Thursday. He called...

Jim Cramer Declares The Depression "Over" (VIDEO)

On Thursday's episode of "Mad Money" host Jim Cramer declared that the depression...

Scientists Find Rocket Fuel Chemical In Infant Formula

ATLANTA — Traces of a chemical used in rocket fuel were found in samples of...

Least Wasteful Cities In America (SLIDESHOW)

It's great to love the city you live in, and better to

Trade Center tight rope adventure *Man On Wire* (\$26.98; Magnolia), the miscarriage miscarriage of justice *Pregnant In America* (\$24.95; Intention), the war buff treasure trove *The Royal Air Force At War* (\$34.98; Koch), the Richard Sandler close-ups of the only city that matters in *Brave New York/Sway* (\$19.95; Brink), and the water expose *Flow* (\$29.95; Oscilloscope).

THE BEST MOVIES TO MAKE UP A SILLY BOXED SET? -- I have absolutely no complaints about the individual movies included in *Great Directors Volume 1* (\$79.95; Kino). Five genuinely great directors -- Kurosawa, Tarkovsky, Chabrol, Antonioni, and Schlöndorff. Five interesting films. But why does this boxed set exist? If the titles are available individually, surely fans already own some of them. And who is going to say they need these five particular films by these five directors. You might like Scorsese and Spielberg and John Huston -- but do you really need a boxed set of *Mean Streets*, *ET* and *Under The Volcano*? It's just hard to imagine any situation where any film buff would actually want to buy these five films at once and it seems the only reason it exists is because they owned all five and wanted an excuse to package them together. Five films by one director, sure. Five musicals or five gangster flicks, okay. But five random albeit good movies by five different directors? It's too easy to say they're good guys. This boxed set just makes no sense.

THE BEST TITLES TO CONFUSE? I can't seem to keep *Towelhead* (\$27.98; Warner Bros.), the indie film where Aaron Eckhart plays another patented creep and *Baghead* (\$28.96; Sony), the bare bones horror spoof straight in my head. Maybe if they were better.

THE BEST REASON TO IGNORE PETA? - Anyone seeing Maggie Cheung in leather in the Olivier Assayas witty film satire *Irma Vep* (\$29.99; Zeitgeist)...well, animal cruelty would be the last thing on any person's mind.

THE BEST REASON TO REWATCH THE BRITISH VERSION OF 'THE OFFICE?' -- It's true that the American version has proven to be far, far better than I expected. But very few comedies can equal the UK show's originality. And seeing Ricky Gervais try to shoehorn himself into Hollywood flicks like *Ghosttown* (\$29.98; Dreamworks) -- the harmless story of a guy who dies briefly and is haunted by Greg Kinnear simply makes you want to remind yourself the greatness he is capable of when given free rein.

THE BEST REASON TO SING "TAKE A CHANCE, TAKE A CHANCE, TAKE A CHANCE?" -- Obviously, that would be the shaky, silly wildly successful ABBA movie *Mamma Mia* (\$34.98; Universal), which continues to be an inexplicable but hard to get angry about success of the equally paper-thin stage musical. But hey, if this is what it takes to get the great Meryl Streep a payday, I'm all for it. And seeing James Bond (ie. Pierce Brosnan) sing and dance is hard to beat.

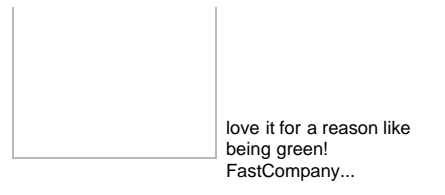
THE BEST AND WORST REASONS TO GO OFF THE GRID? -- The best reason is the paranoid techno-thriller *Eagle Eye* (\$34.98; Dreamworks), which can't offer up anything scarier than a computer that thinks it's human. But it was a hit and Shia LaBeouf is the luckiest actor around. The worst reason is *Lost: Season Four* (\$59.99; Disney) because if you go off the grid that's where you could end up. Some say the show regained its footing last year; I still find it hard to dive back in.

THE BEST REASON TO TAKE A SECOND LOOK? The slow-burning comedies of the Coen Brothers always improve with time and repeated viewings and *Burn After Reading* (\$29.98; Universal) (with Brad Pitt -- who is having a stellar year -- and George Clooney) is sure to be no exception. In a year or two they'll call it a cult comedy and soon after that it'll get upgraded again and join the ranks of *The Big Lebowski* and *Raising Arizona*.

THE BEST REASON TO GO BACK TO THE BEGINNING? -- The pioneering shorts of a groundbreaker care collected in *The Early Works Of Cheryl Dunye* (\$24.95; First Run). You get six provocative, funny shorts -- or "Dunementaries" -- that led to her breakout film *The Watermelon Woman*. Here's hoping this means she can get her next project made.

THE BEST REASON TO WORK OUT? -- The scarily over-the-top surgeons of *Nip/Tuck Season Five Part One* (\$59.98; Warner Bros.). I do NOT want to go in for surgery with these guys working on me. They must to be awfully distracted with the madness that circles around them.

THE BEST REASON TO PUT ON YOUR SPURS? -- Westerns like the classic TV shows



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Gunsmoke Season Three Volume 1 (\$37.99; Paramount), Clint Eastwood's *Rawhide Third Season Volume 2* (\$40.99; Paramount), the modest flick *The Man Who Came Back* (\$26.98; Lionsgate) and keep an eye out for Ed Harris's *Appaloosa* (\$28.98; New Line -- due out January 13), which is the best of the bunch and a lot of fun.

THE BEST REASON TO GIVE COSTUME DRAMAS ANOTHER CHANCE? -- The costume epic *The Duchess* (\$29.98; Paramount) didn't get the attention it deserved. Keira Knightley, Ralph Fiennes and Charlotte Rampling head your usual cream of the crop UK cast.

THE BEST REASON TO CANCEL CABLE? -- Who needs it when so many shows are available on DVD? You can check out everything from 70s drama *Swingtown First Season* (optimistic title, that) (\$40.99; Paramount) to the 70s comedy *Happy Days: The Fourth Season* (which looked back to the 50s, of course) (\$40.99; Paramount), multiple episodes of the public access cult classic *Glenn O'Brien's TV Party* (\$19.95 each; Brink), the smash-em-up cartoon *Transformers Energon: The Ultimate Collection* (\$59.98; Hasbro), the goofily absurd *Aqua Teen Hunger Force 6* (\$29.98; Turner), and the mellow country comedy of *Petticoat Junction First Season* (\$40.99; Paramount).

THE BEST REASON TO INVEST IN BRENDAN FRASER STOCK? He's made three movies in his mummy franchise, including *The Mummy*, *The Mummy Returns* and *The Mummy: Tomb Of The Dragon Emperor* (\$29.98; Universal). And they've all made about \$400 million worldwide. Whatever they're paying our square-jawed hero, he's worth it. No wonder he's the lead in the new *G.I. Joe* movie.

THE BEST REASON TO BUY WALL-E? -- I've always disliked Disney's straight-to-DVD moneymakers like *The Little Mermaid 2: Return To The Sea* (\$29.99; Disney). They're so cynical and half-baked, it dims the pleasure of the original for me. And how Jim Henson's name got on the cheapo *Goldilocks and the 3 Bears* (\$18.99; Weinstein) is beyond me. He'll be rolling over in his grave as soon as he stops throwing up. (Ouch! But it really is way beneath Henson's legacy.) They both make the merely competent Jim Carrey flick *Dr. Seuss' Horton Hears A Who* (\$29.98; Fox), but as someone said, Horton is one of the more dignified storybook characters so a manic Jim Carrey is not smart casting, however entertaining he might be.

Happy holidays!

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You forgot Criterion's superb DVD of Pier Paolo Pasolini's brilliant, extremely controversial (even today) film Salo, or the 120 Days of Sodom.

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thx for reading. My best of the year DVD column will come in January. This was just a cleaning out the closet column covering the final releases of the year. And when it comes to criterion, I could list most of their titles and have a great best-of column right there. I usually pick just one or two of theirs. But I have to admit - I'm not terribly squeamish but I've never been able to get through it :)

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