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## DVDs: Should Steven Soderbergh Retire From Directing?

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**CONTAGION** (\$29.98 BluRay; Warner Bros.) -- Director Steven Soderbergh has insisted he'll stop directing movies soon, after a few more projects are finished up. He has *Haywire* out January 20 with a kick-ass female action hero; *Magic Mike*, a film about male strippers; and a *Liberace* biopic with Michael Douglas as the pianist and Matt Damon the down-low love interest. Why walk away from a profitable and interesting career? If *Contagion* is any indication, he might simply be bored. It's a fine rough draft

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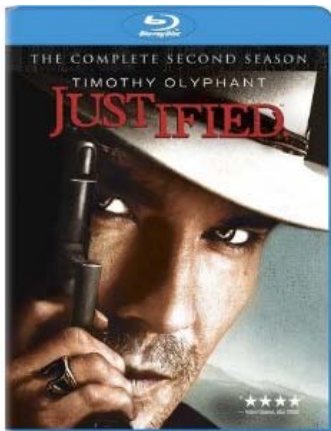
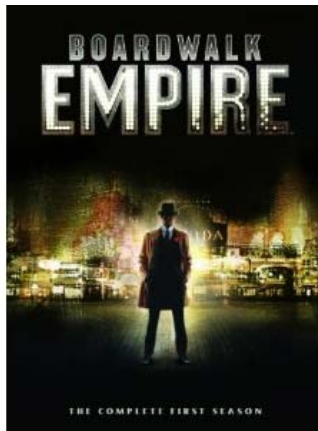
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for a smart contemporary drama/thriller about what would help if a pandemic truly broke out in the world, rather than just being a scare like the avian flu or other genuine health threats that don't follow a worst-case scenario. This film does follow that scenario and dutifully covers all the bases, from regular guy Matt Damon (whose wife Gwyneth Paltrow and son are dead in the blink of an eye) to CDC officials like Laurence Fishburne and Kate Winslet down to conspiracy theory bloggers like Jude Law. After a promising start, the only surprise here is how dull the movie turns out to be. In one typical subplot, Marion Cotillard is a health expert taken prisoner by villagers in China who want to ensure their children are given a vaccine as soon as possible after most of them drop dead. A fine, compelling set-up. Then she is promptly forgotten for most of the film until we pick up her story thread right near the end. The score by Cliff Martinez is not his best; the performances are fine as far as they go. But no one seems to have had their heart in it. This is not a frightening, unnerving film the way it should be. And it's all the more frustrating because all the elements were there. It seemed odd for Soderbergh to announce his retirement, and surely he'll make more movies some day. But perhaps a break isn't such a bad idea.



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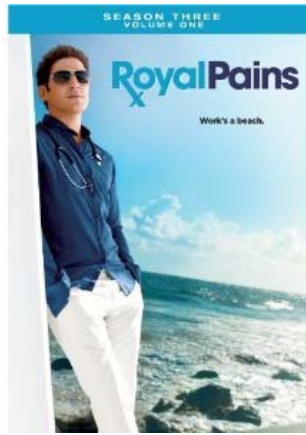
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**BOARDWALK EMPIRE SEASON ONE** (\$59.99; HBO)  
**JUSTIFIED COMPLETE SECOND SEASON** (\$49.95 BluRay; Sony)  
**SHAMELESS COMPLETE FIRST SEASON** (\$49.99 BluRay; Warner Bros.)  
**ROYAL PAINS SEASON THREE VOLUME ONE** (\$26.98; Universal)

By and large, American television does a TERRIBLE job releasing their new shows on DVD. In the UK, TV shows and movies and miniseries come out on DVD the minute the current season of the show has ended, sometimes even before. In America, the studios rather idiotically have decided to wait until right before the new season has begun to release the previous season. This has two results: one, most people writing about TV write about the new season, rather than the old season coming out on DVD six months after it ended. Two, fans who might want to "join" a show by catching up can't do so because the previous season comes out so close to the new season. Even worse are kids shows, which often see a single season broken up into multi-DVD releases that make them expensive and annoying to collect. HBO has added a new wrinkle to this. They want to encourage people to subscribe to HBO and access their entire library via HBO To Go, so they delayed the DVD release of their high profile series *Boardwalk Empire* (with the pilot directed by executive producer Martin Scorsese) until one month after the finale of Season TWO! This is a lavish series with a top-notch cast and a very familiar story of gangsters and the feds during Prohibition. I can't speak to its quality yet since I'm still catching up with episodes that aired some 16 months ago and many people have said the show didn't catch fire until season two. But it's certainly well-acted and intelligent. But HBO has it wrong. The more people that watch their shows the more likely they will be to subscribe.

Hiding a show from DVD for a year longer than necessary goes against everything we've learned about creative content: make it available to consumers any way they want, whether it's digital, on a tablet, on BluRay, on demand, or via their cable subscription. Keeping *Boardwalk Empire* from DVD doesn't make HBO more desirable. It keeps their shows less well-known and therefore less important. For 16 months, I haven't even been able to discuss *Boardwalk Empire* or read a single story to avoid spoilers. How is that a good idea? Season two debuted to lower numbers than the season one finale. On the bright side, it's only \$60 retail on DVD, far lower than HBO's usual premium price.

No one else has gone as extreme as HBO but they don't do it right, either. Anyone wanting to catch up with one of the wittiest action dramas on TV -- Timothy Olyphant's *Justified* -- has one week to watch 13 hours before season three debuts on January 17 on FX. I can't quite get over the idea that *Shameless* is an unnecessary remake of a raunchy UK show. But it has a fun cast and I've been hearing good buzz. Maybe I would have caught up with it before season two debuted on Showtime last Sunday, and if I'd watched one episode a night since the DVD was released on December 27, I could have just barely done that. Imagine if it had come out right after the season one finale, just over nine months ago.

Finally, the USA network show *Royal Pains* is good junk food with a doctor catering to the filthy rich in the Hamptons. But now they've split up the season into two sets, releasing volume one now and volume two later. Fans don't care about scheduling. In this case, 10 episodes aired from June through August and another six will be broadcast starting January 18. Is that any reason to split the DVD release up? No. wait 'til February 22 and put it all out at once. As you can see, if they can screw up the DVD release of a TV show, they will. The major studios need to radically rethink their approach and understand that putting out the DVD in as timely a manner as possible in a reasonably priced package will increase the long-term value of the show.



Isaac



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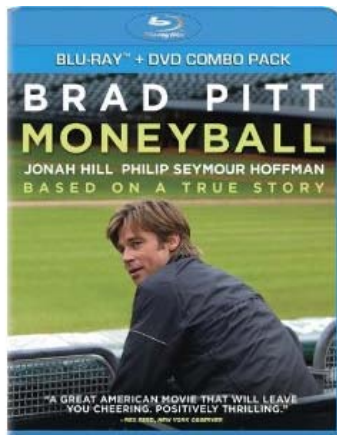


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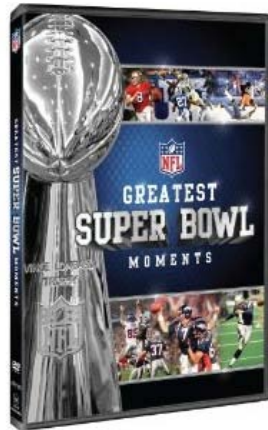


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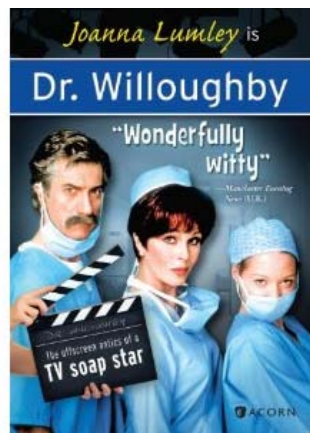
**MONEYBALL** (\$40.99 BluRay combo; Sony) -- I don't actually play fantasy baseball but that's about the only way this movie could be more up my alley. I love baseball (I have season tickets to the Yankees in the bleachers). I watch the off-season moves with alarm and interest. I appreciate the revolution that statistics have achieved in how players are measured (though it's gone too far and statistics can be just as misleading as your "gut".) And I loved director Bennett Miller's *Capote*. And yet this film left me cold on many levels. It never transmitted a love of the game. It never brought the players alive. And it certainly didn't help that Brad Pitt's character avoided the stadium during games. I have enjoyed Jonah Hill, who stars here as a geeky numbers guy feeding to Pitt ideas on who to value on the team and who to let go. But Hill spent the entire film frozen, as if someone were holding a gun to his head and telling him that this was a "real" film, not one of his dumb comedies and if he ever loosened up or got jokey by God they would let him have it. It's arid and unpersuasive emotionally and as a look at the changes roiling the game. I think perhaps the way to humanize the story would have been to focus on the players -- as hard as that is. Watching a catcher like Scott Hatteberg face the trial by fire of adjusting to first base and getting royally mocked by fans and the media while his bosses insist it'll all work out -- that's a sidebar in this film but maybe it's where the real drama lies. I suppose sabermetrics would tell you to focus on Brad Pitt's character, but sometimes you have to go with your gut.

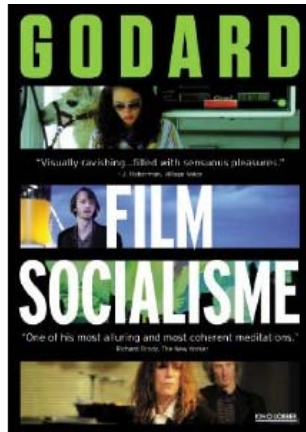
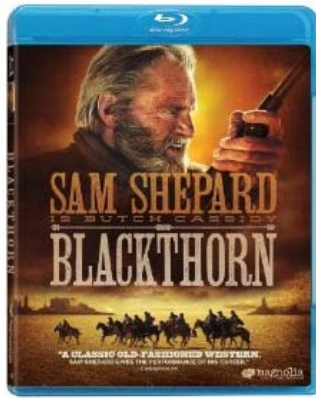


**GREATEST SUPER BOWL MOMENTS** (\$14.93 VIVENDI/NFL) -- Sports coverage provides endless amounts of packaging -- greatest touchdown passes, greatest goal line stands, greatest dunking of coach with water! But this modestly priced DVD contains more than two and a half hours of highlights from the first Super Bowl game to the most recent, including Joe Namath, Tom Brady, Marcus Allen and most every other highlight that springs to mind when you think of the Super Bowl. If you're an addict, this is a good fix and probably a lot more fun to watch than the pre-game shows that will go on and on and on this February 5.



**MILDRED PIERCE** (\$49.99 BluRay; HBO) -- This carefully crafted HBO miniseries by director Todd Haynes spared no expense in bringing the James M. Cain novel to life. But what director Michael Curtiz told so deftly in under two hours, this miniseries drags out interminably in over five. The adult cast is solid, with Kate Winslet winning the Emmy as the self-made, self-loathing career gal and Guy Pearce snagging a supporting actor Emmy for his work as a dissolute man about town. But the insufferable, poorly written role of the daughter Mildred sacrifices everything for is not well played by Morgan Turner for the first three, dragging episodes, while the excellent actress Evan Rachel Wood does a little better in the final two. But it doesn't matter: the miniseries includes a plot twist in the fourth episode that is so absurdly laughable that the entire miniseries goes off the rails for good. It's the sort of ludicrous detail that you might include in an old movie where audiences were more gullible but for a modern remake simply readjust at least a little. Seriously, couldn't the daughter have turned out to be a good pop singer, rather than a full-blown coloratura operatic superstar overnight when it's a skill that takes literally a lifetime to master? Plus, drawn out to this length just makes your impatience with Mildred grow and grow. After all, unless the child is a bad seed, it's her fault for raising such a spoiled brat.





**THE GUARD** (\$35.99 BluRay; Sony Pictures Classics)

**DR. WILLOUGHBY** (\$29.99; Acorn)

**BLACKTHORN** (\$29.98 BluRay; Magnolia)

**FILM SOCIALISME** (\$29.95; Kino Lorber)

Four DVDs to catch up on. Don Cheadle is enjoying some of the best reviews of his career for the new Showtime sitcom *House Of Lies*. Maybe that will bring renewed attention to *The Guard*, a seemingly standard odd couple paring of Cheadle as a tightly wound FBI agent and Brendan Gleeson as a shoot-from-the-hip Irish cop. I ignored it when it came out but have seen the movie popping up here and there on end of the year lists as unfairly overlooked. With *AbFab* back on the air (if briefly) Joanna Lumle fans who want to double down on their favorite acerbic actress can catch *Doctor Willoughby*, a 90s sitcom about a soap star desperate to maintain her position playing a brilliant surgeon on the sleaziest soap on telly. What if Butch and Sundance didn't die but retired to Bolivia? That's the premise for *Blackthorn*, a western starring Sam Shepard that went completely under my radar. But an online friend touted it as one of his favorite films of the year and I love westerns so it's on my to-do list. Finally, Jean-Luc Godard is one of the giants of cinema but I've let his prickly personality color my appreciation for his films. (I'm a Truffaut man all the way, always valuing story over intellectual ideas.) Yet, I find an increasing number of his classic films appealing to me and can't deny it when his latest work *Film Socialisme* [ranks at #11 on Film Comment's survey of film critics about the best movies of the year](#). You simply can't talk about the best films of the year until you've checked it out. And that's one reason I haven't put out my list: Godard is waiting.

READERS: So tell me what you think. Should director Steven Soderbergh retire from directing? Or just take a break? And what's your favorite Soderbergh film?

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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