



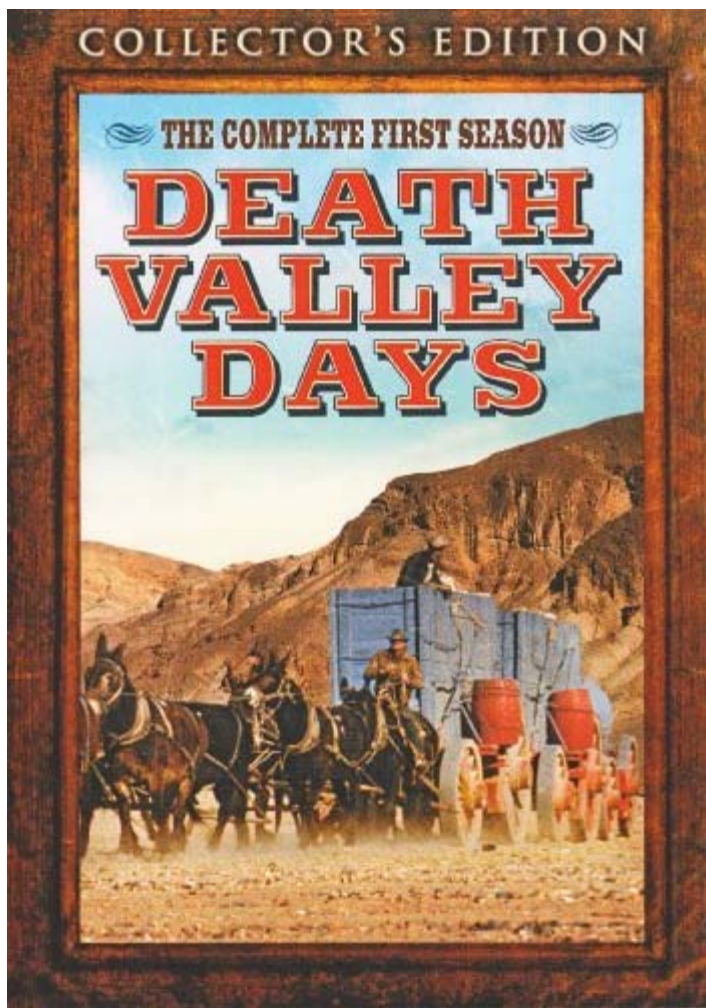
Michael Giltz, ContributorBookFilter creator

DVDs: Tarantino's Dip, 'Archer' On Top, A Bunch of Movies And 'Freaks And Geeks' Like Never Before

03/31/2016 02:38 am ET | Updated Mar 31, 2017

A new western and a forgotten western series that endured almost as long as *Gunsmoke*, two shamefully ignored TV shows, a film classic from Taiwan and a film curio from the 1970s, some arty fare, some movies that hit and some that missed...and one of the greatest TV shows of all time like you've never seen it before! Yes, it's a typical week in the new release section for BluRays and DVDs. Here we go!





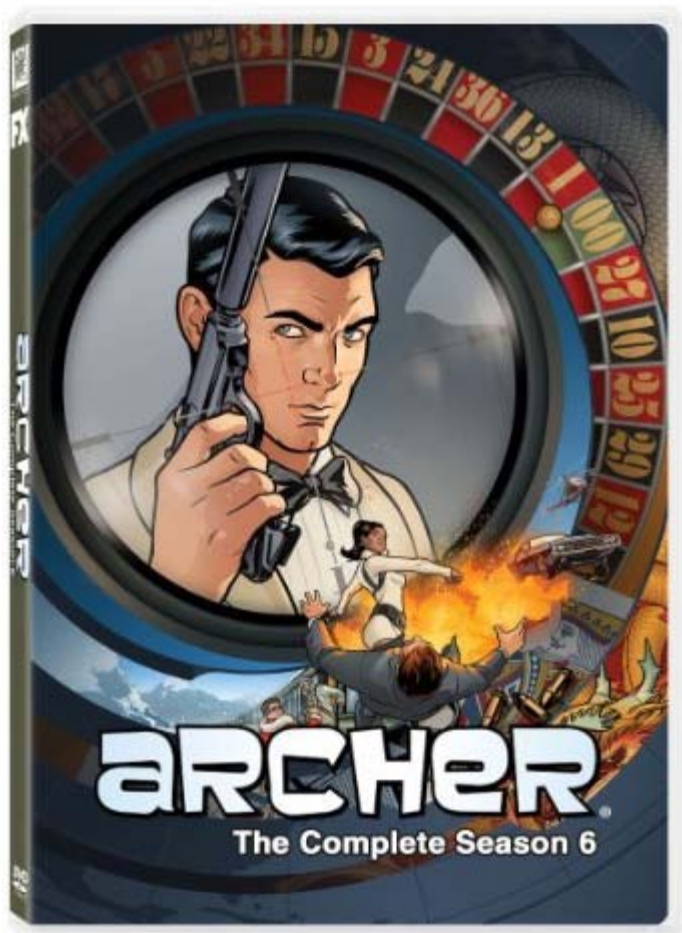
THE HATEFUL EIGHT (\$39.99 BluRay; Weinstein Company)

DEATH VALLEY DAYS: THE COMPLETE FIRST SEASON (\$24.98 DVD; Timeless Media Group)

Quentin Tarantino's latest film has to be considered something of a disappointment, simply because it isn't great. A perfectly good, violent, out-there Western is fun (they just don't make Westerns anymore and they NEVER made 'em like this). But *Django Unchained* and especially *Inglorious Basterds* displayed a new level of maturity and formal restraint. Oh, they were Tarantino-esque, but they also harkened back to classic Hollywood style. Whereas *The Hateful Eight* feels like it could have been made at any stage of his career. The set-up is simple: a bounty hunter has a violent woman in his custody and finds himself trapped for a few days in a cabin with a motley group of people. Some want to free her, some want to claim her so they can get the reward and some just wanna stay out of the damn storm and be left alone. Words fly a lot more than bullets, but not to worry. The bullets fly too. The cinematography is gorgeous and there's something crazily wonderful that this film set almost entirely in a one room cabin has a super widescreen aspect ratio. That's Tarantino for you. It's violent, it's funny, and the cast is a hoot. But he's raised the bar emotionally and aesthetically and that makes *The Hateful Eight* feel more like a goof or a diversion, a step backwards rather than the latest step forward from a newly mature artist. Turning it into a stage play seems like a nutty, uninteresting idea. But his movies are never uninteresting and fans will enjoy this.

Still, he had me at "western." We just don't get enough of them anymore. And anyone complaining about the endless wave of super hero movies should remind themselves what pop culture was like in the 1950s and 1960s. Dear God, it was westerns, westerns, westerns morning noon and night. Westerns at the movies, both

features, B flicks and serials. Westerns on the radio. And TV! Westerns dominated so much it seemed like westerns were all they knew how to do. Case in point: *Death Valley Days*. This anthology series (with every episode based on "real" events) aired on the radio from 1930 to 1945. Then it aired on TV for 18 years of originals from 1952 to 1970, which gives the venerable *Gunsmoke* a run for its money. I usually complain when old shows release single season sets. Fans of *Gilligan's Island* don't want one season; they want the whole series so why split them up? In this case, since they made more than 450 episodes, well, I understand. The longest-running host was Stanley Andrews, you'll spot all sorts of stars in guest roles and it's syndicated so the budget is somewhat smaller than network TV. This set has all 18 episodes of season one. There were a LOT more to go.



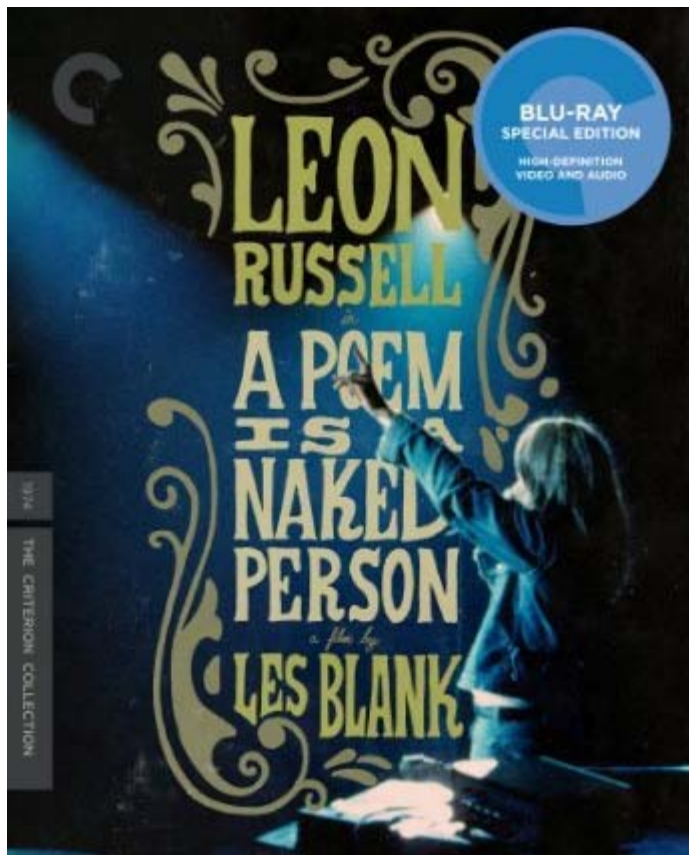
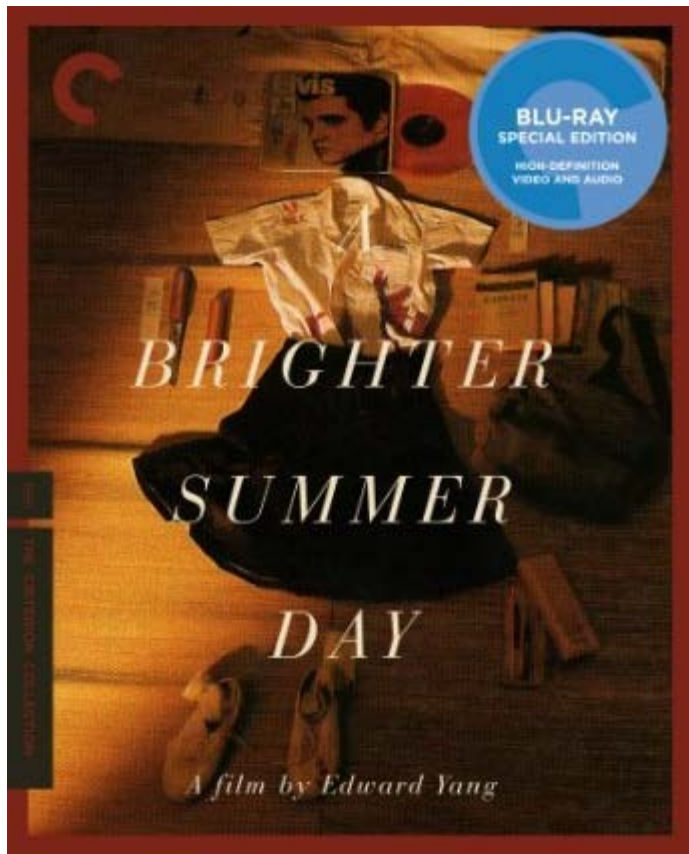


ARCHER SEASON SIX (\$29.98 DVD; 20th Century Fox)

TURN: WASHINGTON'S SPIES SEASON 2 (\$49.98 DVD; Anchor Bay)

Here are two of the less appreciated shows on TV. Heck there are so many good shows on TV it would be amazing if some great shows weren't overlooked. But why *Archer* is overlooked by the Emmys and most viewers escapes me. It isn't the best voice cast on TV; it's the best comedy ensemble on TV, period. It lost a little gas but season six righted the ship and season seven (which is just beginning) looks set to spin the series off in an entirely new direction. The James Bond/workplace comedy setting remains ripe for humor, especially when they downplay making minor characters insanely weird. The more real they are, the funnier it is. And funny is precisely what *Archer* remains, thanks to good writing, a perverse imagination and those terrific actors.

Turn is the complicated look at the American Revolution, an era that remains puzzlingly resistant to dramatizing in movies and TV, by and large. (*1776* and *Hamilton* being obvious theatrical exceptions.) Here they zero in on spies who live with British patriots but are working for George Washington. Jamie Bell is a marvelous actor but there was no disputing season one got off to a very slow, murky start. Season two notably improved in pacing and impact, for the few critics that still paid attention. It's coming back for season three on April 25 on AMC and bless that network for being patient with shows that others would have abandoned by now. (I'm looking at you, Starz.) Like HBO, they know a passionate fanbase needn't be big to make a show important for a network. This is only on DVD for the moment though I assume like Season 1 it would eventually be available on BluRay. So buyer beware.



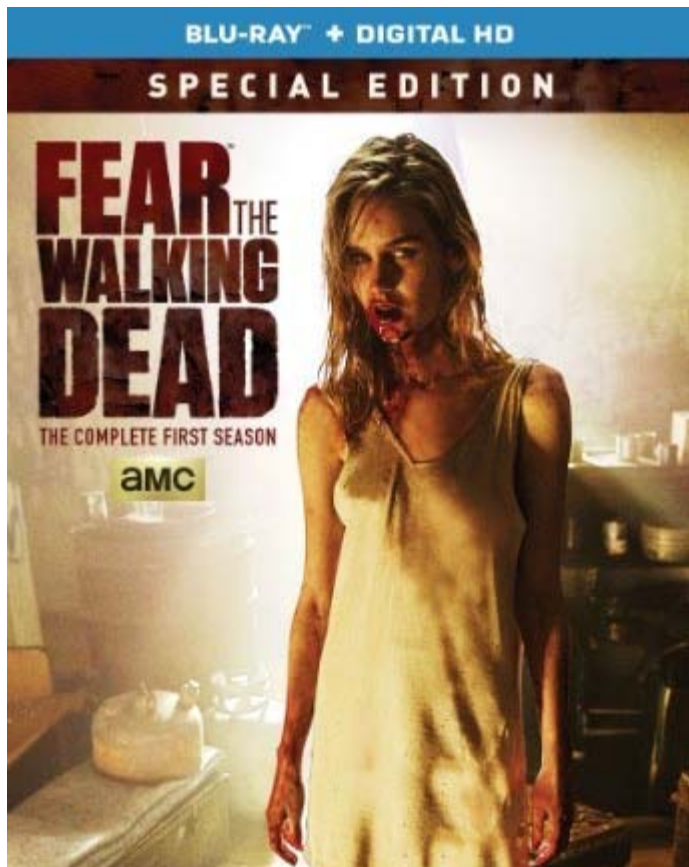
A BRIGHTER SUMMER DAY (\$39.95 BluRay; Criterion)

A POEM IS A NAKED PERSON (\$39.95 BluRay; Criterion)

Edward Yang's *A Brighter Summer Day* looms larger with every passing year. I had an almost spiritual connection when first seeing his lovely *Yi Yi* but this is his masterpiece and a major film in Taiwanese cinematic history. The 1991 film is four hours long, sprawling (obviously), hypnotically compelling and a must-see for any film buff. It's so specifically Taiwanese that comparisons are misleading, but *Rebel Without A Cause* or other youth films are a natural touchstone....until the film pivots into more familial concerns, making it one of the quietest epics you'll ever see and one that transcends juvenile delinquency to embrace the eternal angst of adolescence. It's beautifully restored to the original 237 minute running time and the extras are bounteous: a new interview with star Chen Chang, a two hour documentary about New Taiwan Cinema, a new commentary track and even a videotaped performance of a 1992 play by Yang.

More problematic is Les Blank's *A Poem Is A Naked Person*. This long lost documentary about singer Leon Russell has been tantalizingly out of reach for many years. Here it finally is, a shaggy time capsule of early 1970s when the rock and roll stars of the day were filmmakers...and rock and roll stars. Russell would mostly remain a cult item but for a brief period he was a huge star and somehow Blank tagged along to film his world. We get amazing glimpses of Russell in concert, some footage of other people in concert and lots and lots of 1970s flavor, ranging from celebrities to hangers-on to, well, pretty much anything that crossed Blank's path since Russell was clearly so loathe to cooperate in any way. Russell is so good you can't help yelling at Blank, get out of the way and just show him performing! I'll need another viewing or two before I can appreciate and judge the film he made rather than the film I wanted. Like the Rolling Stones' *Cocksucker Blues*, it's probably more fascinating to wonder about than actually watch. But boy does it capture an era.





HUMANS SEASON 1 (\$39.99 BluRay; Acorn Media)

FEAR THE WALKING DEAD SEASON 1 SPECIAL EDITION (\$59.99 BluRay; Anchor Bay)

Sure, horror endures because people like to be scared. And sci-fi endures because people will always wonder what comes next. (Rising oceans, apparently.) But the horror and the sci-fi that's made transcends those passing concerns because these genres are so good at helping us see the present with fresh eyes. *Humans* is an interesting UK series about a near-future where "synths" (robot slaves that are confusingly akin to humans) are omni-present. Naturally, it raises explicit issues about what makes us human. But ethical debates don't compel so much as a family dealing with the stress of a new member, even if that new member has to be plugged in. It'll be around for a while. Season One was Channel 4's highest rated drama in more than 20 years.

The Walking Dead began as pure entertainment. But you keep returning because of the tension at its heart: you'll do anything to survive but is it worth surviving if you have to abandon every shred of decency and humanity you once took for granted? The spin-off *Fear The Walking Dead* was determined to be different and boy did they succeed. Instead of horrific action, we got...tension, slow-building tension. And atmosphere. It hasn't really added up to anything yet and season two is set on a boat, which feels very much like the prison gambit of *The Walking Dead*. but we'll see. This is a special edition and I'd be hard-pressed to say the bonus scenes that didn't air are worth forking over for, especially at the rather pricey cost of this eight episode set.

BLU-RAY + DVD + DIGITAL HD

WILL
FERRELL

MARK
WAHLBERG

DADDY'S HOME

\$15 OFF
SPORTS
TICKETS
ticketmaster

DAD
VS
STEP-DAD

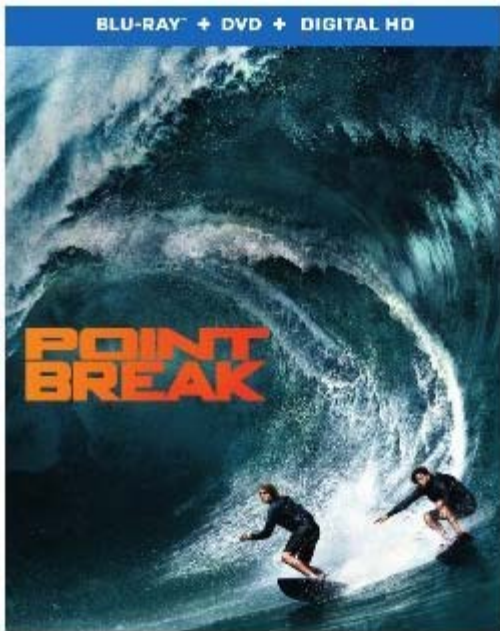
"HILARIOUS AND HEARTWARMING"

© 2015 Universal Pictures



WILL SMITH
CONCUSSION
BASED ON A TRUE STORY

EVEN LEGENDS NEED A HERO



DADDY'S HOME (\$39.99 BluRay; Paramount)

CONCUSSION (\$34.99 BluRay; Sony Pictures)

POINT BREAK (\$35.99 BluRay; Warner Bros.)

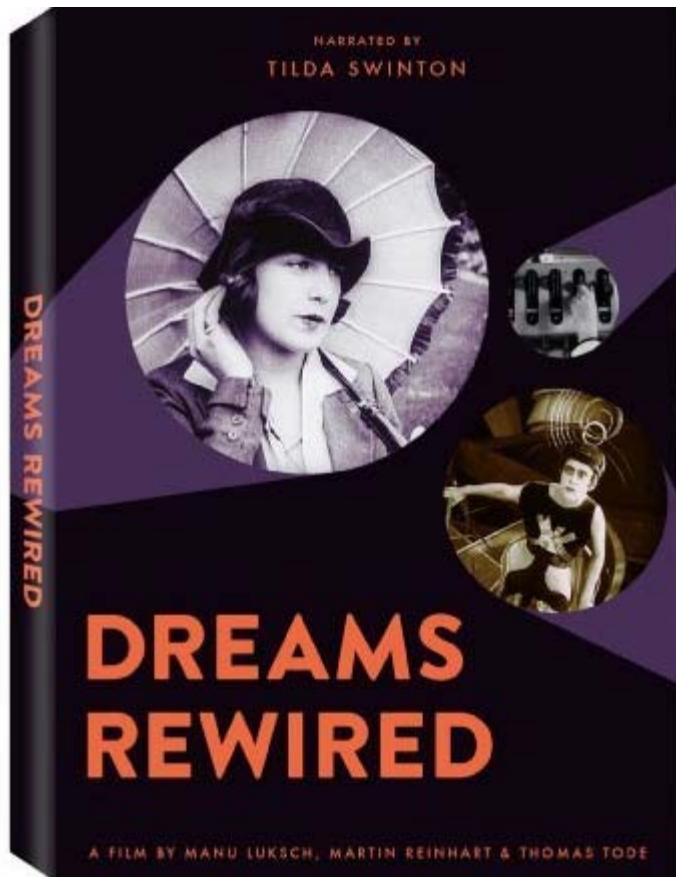
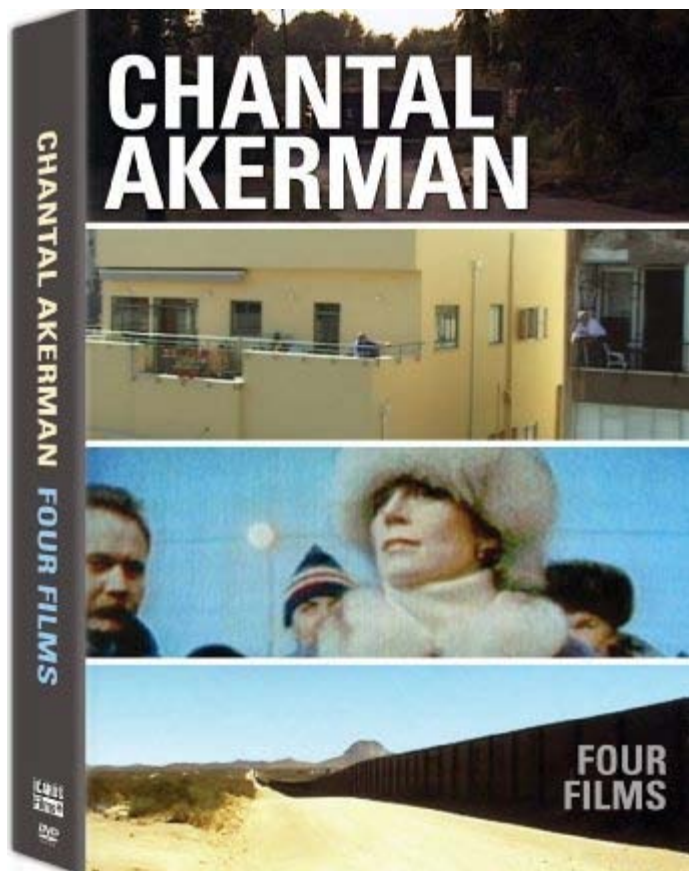
THE HUNGER GAMES: COMPLETE 4 FILM COLLECTION (\$64.97 BluRay; Lionsgate)

Four not very good films, but two of them are hits! Because what do I know. I love the premise of *Daddy's Home*, a comedy about a step-dad (Will Ferrell) who has to compete with a much cooler dad (Mark Wahlberg) who gets to have all the fun with the kids and never clean up the mess if things go wrong. It's such a relatable premise (and fun to see Wahlberg playing against his nice guy persona) that it's a pity the movie is so trite. Still, those two have great chemistry.

Will Smith usually has great instincts with his more serious dramas. (*The Pursuit Of Happyness* remains a favorite of mine from his career.) Yet this tale of a forensic pathologist going up against the NFL is so noble that Smith echoes the tiresome earnestness of Sidney Poitier at his worst. However, the fake controversy that the film *Concussion* soft-pedaled the NFL's cover-up ended once the movie was actually seen. (That was the entire point of the film, after all.) And the NFL continues to cave as the facts emerge more clearly every day about what it knew and when.

Like *Daddy's Home*, *Point Break* has nothing on its mind but to entertain. That's not true. It also had in mind the idea of launching a franchise. The original action heist movie starring Keanu Reeves and Patrick Swayze is not a good film, precisely, but it's so loopy with the unexpected philosophical musings amidst the rad stunts that it has a certain offbeat charm. Not so the remake which feels mechanical and obvious, dumping everything that made the original a cult favorite (of sorts) and sticking to X-Games like stunts. Why, Hollywood, why? Not "why would you ruin *Point Break*?" But why would you even BOTHER to remake *Point Break*, a weird, one-off, not very good but somehow amusingly compelling oddity (sort of) that was clearly so sui generis you didn't even try?

Point Break couldn't start a franchise but *The Hunger Games* sure knew how to end one. Let's be clear: the controversial and artistically unsatisfying decision to split the final book in a trilogy into two films worked on a pure box office level. They made more money turning one film into two than they would have if they'd only made one. But it made the last two films pretty joyless affairs and left a bad taste in the mouth for fans. This boxed set contains all four films but all it will do is remind them how the OK first film proved to be the peak. The second film was so-so, but you thought, well it's the second film. The finale will have more punch. Only to find out the finale would be dragged out ad infinitum. They might have made a little less money but if the last two movies had been rolled into one movie and it had actually been decent, everyone would have been happier. Then the rather insane idea of a theme park attraction based on *The Hunger Games* might actually appeal. And the less insane idea of a prequel trilogy showing how the Hunger Games began would also be welcome. As it is, the entire franchise is tainted by the way the movies crawled to the finish line. And for what it's worth, OBVIOUSLY Team Peeta is the right team to be on.

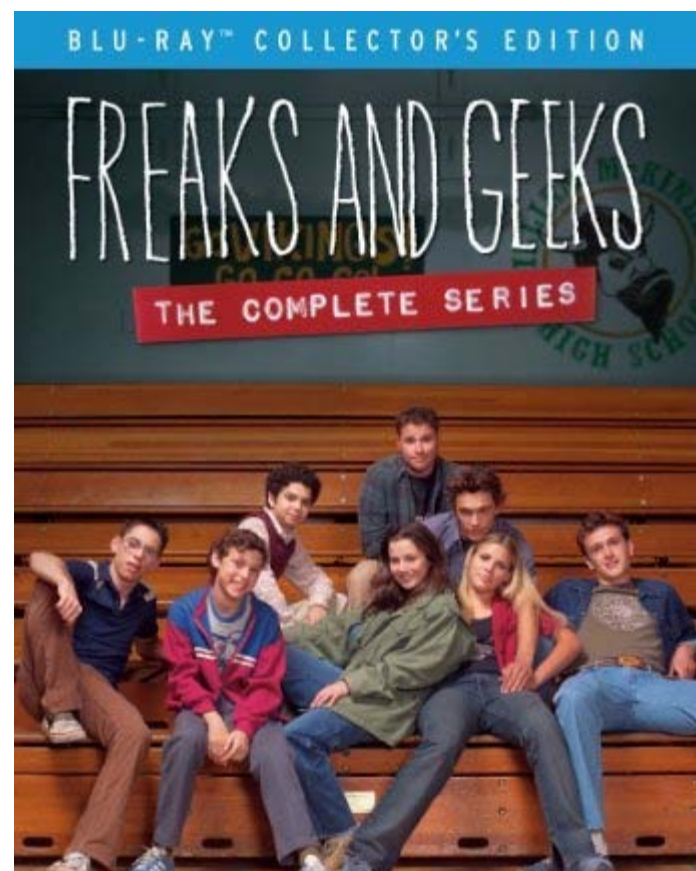


CHANTAL AKERMAN: FOUR FILMS (\$49.98 DVD; Icarus Films)

DREAMS REWIRED (\$29.98 DVD; Icarus Films)

The death of artist Chantal Akerman at 65 (due to depression leading to suicide) is a terrible blow to cinema. Her masterpiece *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* is simply one of the greatest films of all time. Calling it a great "feminist film" is an insult to a work so important and influential, just as Akerman herself rejected labels and refused to have any of her movies shown at gay film festivals. You simply must start with *Jeanne Dielman*. But she has much more to her credit, including a string of provocative documentaries. In the four films included in this set, Akerman compellingly examines Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the brutal murder of James Byrd Jr. in Texas, illegal immigration and -- most satisfyingly -- herself, by making a film from the perspective of her apartment in Tel Aviv while she muses on this and that. A bonus disc features an hour long interview with Akerman about her body of work.

If they met, I'm certain Akerman and actress Tilda Swinton would have got on like gangbusters. Swinton is similarly iconoclastic and always pushing boundaries. Here she is the narrator of an offbeat essay that uses found footage from old movies and documentaries and the like to muse on technology, the loss of privacy, our dreams and more. Swinton is the ideal coolly intelligent presence to make this work and the film has a certain *Decasia*-like power to conjure dreams of its own. If only for its weird uniqueness, I'm sure Akerman would have loved it.



FREAKS AND GEEKS: THE COMPLETE SERIES ON BLURAY (\$119; Shout! Factory)

I haven't had a chance to re-watch all 18 episodes of this series yet. But 16 years after it went off the air in 2000, *Freaks And Geeks* looms large. It has one of the all-time great casts (Alison Jones, kudos!) and the murderer's row talent behind the scenes is just as impressive. It's blessed with an arc that makes those all-too-few 18 episodes play beautifully, as if the show was meant to end in precisely that way from the start. Is it the greatest drama of all time? It's certainly in the running with *The Wire* and *Upstairs Downstairs* and whatever

other shows you'd consider with a fighting chance for the crown. This set duplicates the deluxe editions available before on BluRay. The main upgrade is picture quality and it's notable and welcome. The most intriguing addition is a widescreen option since the show was shot on film and they suddenly realized there was more image. I really can't decide yet how I feel about that since obviously the show was shot with the intention of framing it in the boxy way we know. It would take side by side comparisons and substantial viewing to see how the new widescreen look impacts the comedy and drama of the series. My instinct is that it's fun to see but the original aspect ratio is preferred; still, no harm no foul. Yes, this set is very expensive. I wish it were so cheap that every home in America had a copy. But it barely made it on the air, barely made it onto DVD, barely kept the music cues so essential to the drama and barely got the deluxe edition it deserved. So quality-wise, it's a bargain. Should you binge-watch it this weekend? Sure. But you'd be better off watching one episode a week (or at least with a few days break in between). Its bittersweet joy is best appreciated over time. Save your binging for the junk food.

Thanks for reading. Michael Giltz is the founder of BookFilter, a book lover's best friend. Looking for the next great book to read? Head to BookFilter! Need a smart and easy gift? Head to BookFilter! Wondering what new titles just hit the store in your favorite categories, like cookbooks and mystery and more? Head to BookFilter! It's a website that lets you browse for books online the way you do in a physical bookstore, provides comprehensive info on new releases every week in every category and offers passionate personal recommendations every step of the way. It's like a fall book preview or holiday gift guide -- but every week in every category. He's also 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.

Note: *Michael Giltz is provided with free copies of DVDs and Blu-rays 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; the exception are elaborate boxed sets, which are usually sent with the understanding that they will be reviewed. All titles are available in various formats at varied price points. Typically, the price listed is merely the suggested retail price and you'll find it discounted, not to mention available on demand, via streaming, physical rentals and more.*