

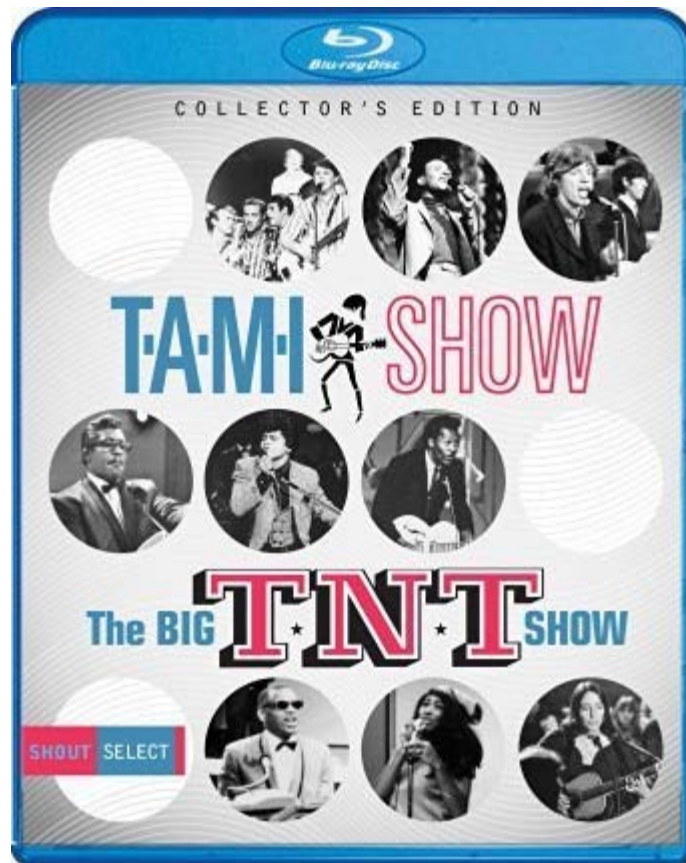
DVDs: The T.A.M.I. Show Rocks, Classic Samurai, Brand New Classic Samurai And More

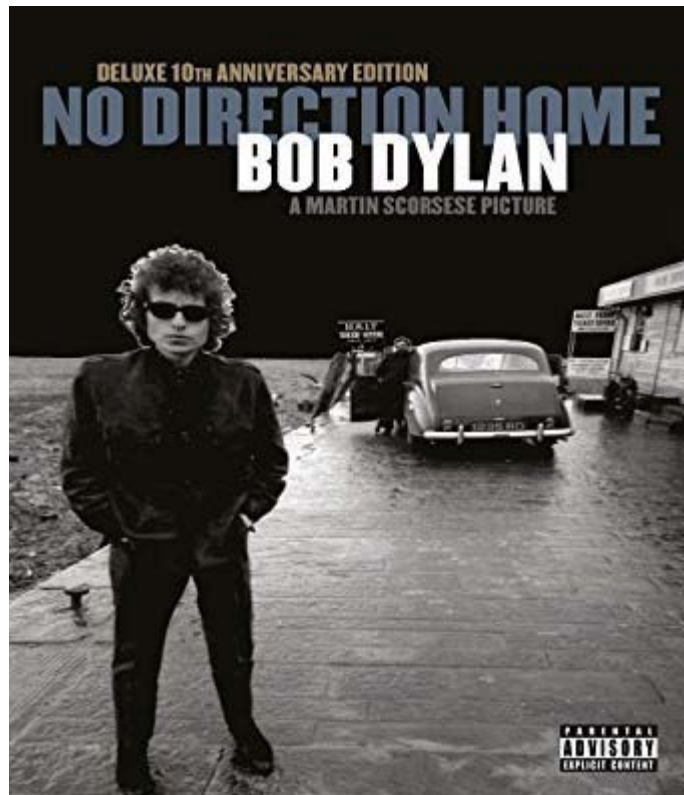
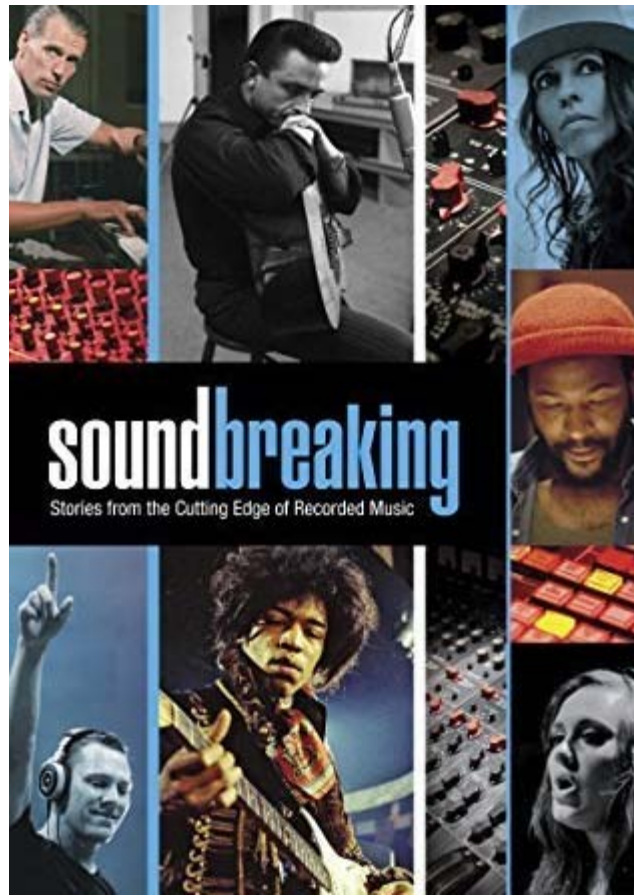


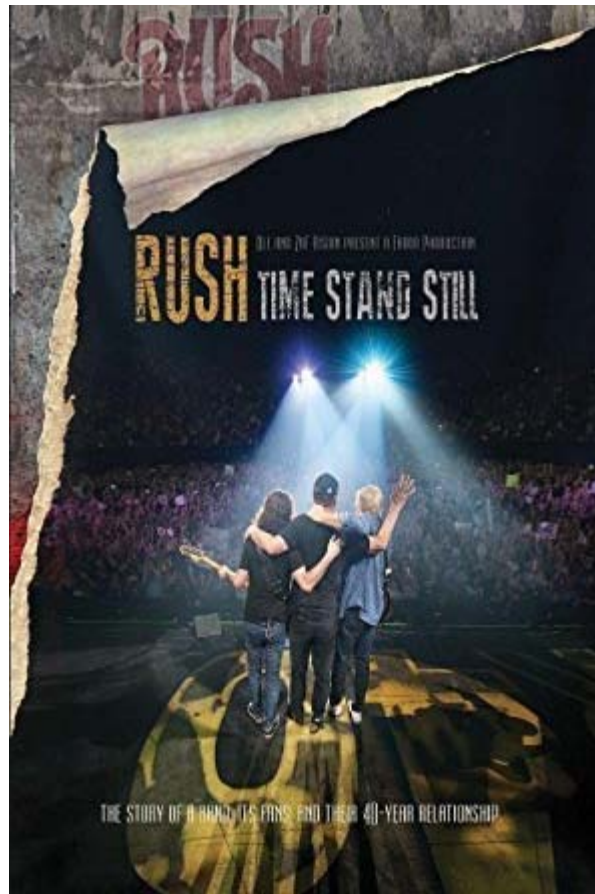
Michael Giltz, ContributorBookFilter creator

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T.A.M.I. SHOW/THE BIG T.N.T. SHOW (\$29.98 BluRay; Shout! Factory)

SOUNDBREAKING (\$49.99 DVD; Acorn)

NO DIRECTION HOME: TENTH ANNIVERSARY EDITION (\$24.98 BluRay; Capitol)

RUSH: TIME STAND STILL (\$16.98 DVD; Rounder)

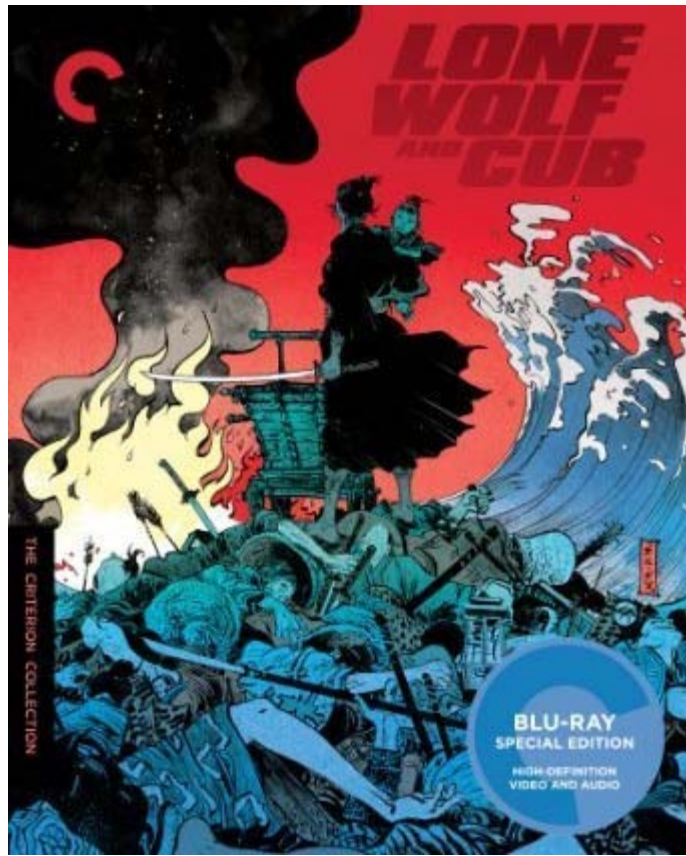
A legendary rock show and a not-so-legendary rock show are out on BluRay looking and sounding better than ever. *T.A.M.I.* captured a specific moment just as the Beatles upended everything, a moment when the music young people listened to was revolutionary in its scope. It would take the free-flowing AM radio of the Seventies to equal the early days of pop music when anything goes. The first movie was a huge sensation; the second an afterthought that disappeared out of sight almost before it was launched. But today they're a pretty awesome smorgasbord of everyone...almost *literally* everyone, including the Rolling Stones, James Brown, Ike & Tina Turner, the Beach Boys (one of Brian Wilson's last performance with the band for many many years), the Supremes, Ray Charles, the Ronettes and Phil Spector lurking in the background for the second concert film. Pure pop joy.

If you recognize the name Phil Spector (and surely you do), then you know how producers and engineers and other behind-the-scene folk can be unsung heroes of recorded music. The eight part documentary series *Soundbreaking* brings to life the production of music from the beginning to today. With George Martin on

board, they are able to draw upon a who's who of music to tell the story of how classic songs and albums are created and the studios that made it happen. Sure you hear from artists like Paul McCartney and Joni Mitchell to geniuses like Brian Eno who innovated with music and brought out the best in so many other acts. But it's not the stars but the focus on technical innovations and the evolving way musicians bring their ideas to life that give this series its punch.

It's been a heck of a year for Bob Dylan, what with the Nobel Prize and a clutch of new Grammy nominations to enjoy. Super fans have already seen *No Direction Home*, the film Martin Scorsese directed about his early career. You would have thought everything had been said but Scorsese did a superior job in telling the story anew and digging up fresh insights. The 2006 film is an essential for any Dylan fan and now on BluRay it looks and sounds terrific.

Dylan has always enjoyed intense critical adulation almost from the moment he arrived on the scene in Greenwich Village. In contrast, it took Rush decades to enjoy anything more than grudging respect. First critics might slag the band but admit the group had serious technical skills. Then they mocked the concept album and Rush's libertarian tendencies (as they saw them) and ended up mocking the fans. Of course anyone who hangs around long enough gets a little admiration just for that. But Rush has risen in prominence over the years, proving that lumping them in with the dead-end of prog-rock or concept albums or heavy metal was lazy and limiting. Now they're in the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame and enjoying a slew of elaborate reissues for their major albums. And here comes *Time Stands Still*, the de rigueur documentary film that capture their final major tour, which sort of celebrated their 40th anniversary. This will thrill long-time fans and is rather poignant since you see the physical strain of what they do and how it's taken a toll on their aging bodies. It's perhaps too nostalgic and backwards looking for newcomers — the movie reasonably assumes you already love Rush. But for those who care, it's an intelligent and generous goodbye.

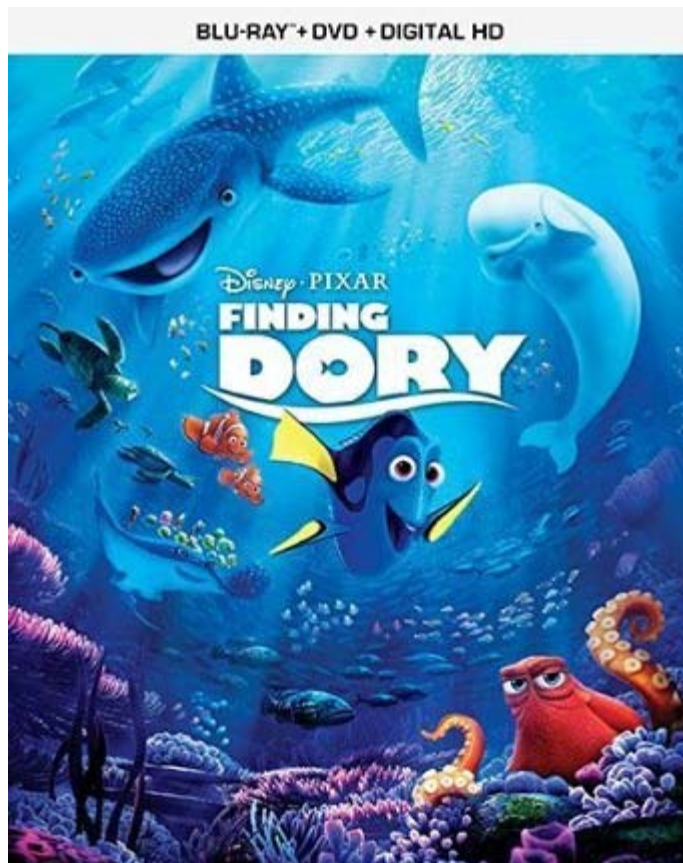
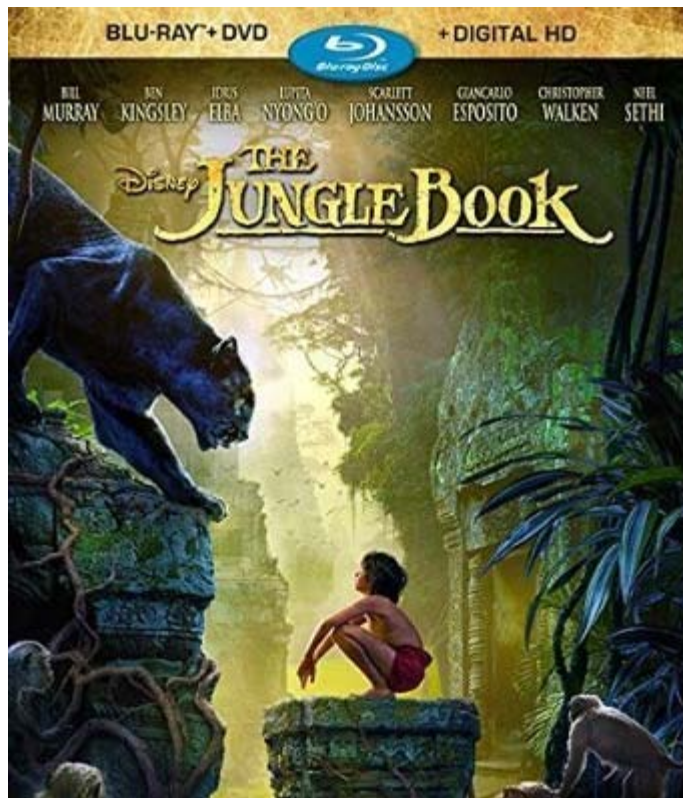


LONE WOLF AND CUB (\$99.95 BluRay; Criterion)

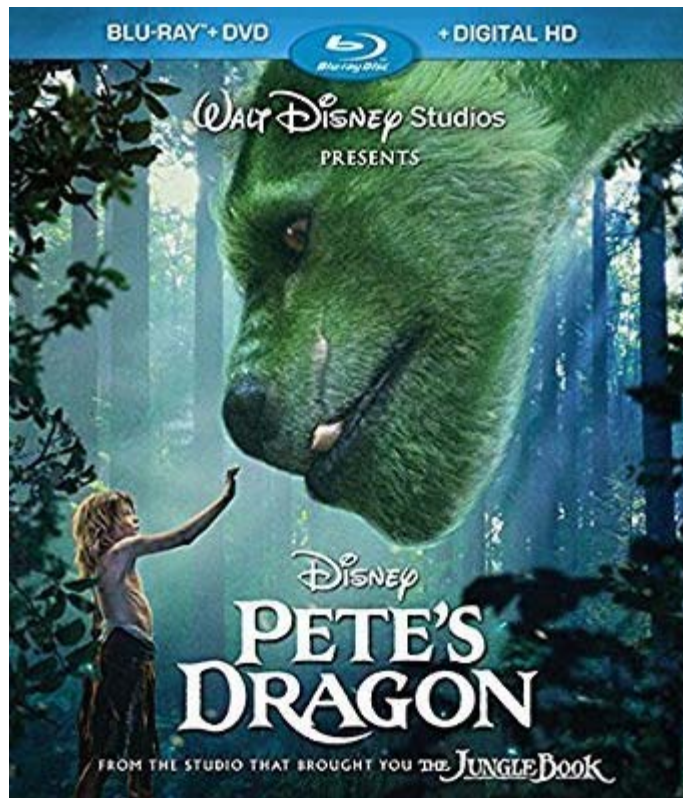
MACBETH (\$39.95 BluRay; Olive Signature)

Soon, I'll be compiling a list of the best DVD/BluRay releases of the year. You can assume pretty much anything and everything from Criterion deserves to be on the list. Right up there is one of my long-awaited favorites — or should I say anticipated favorites. I've loved the best-selling, influential 1970s manga *Lone Wolf & Cub* ever since it got a classy English-language release in 2000. It was in fact the first manga I ever tackled and I sure started at the top, with the series teaching me to read "backwards," learn about the code of the samurai and be rather astonished and the gorgeous violence and ample nudity in the tale of a man of honor who is dishonored and must survive as an assassin, striding across the countryside upholding honor and protecting his little boy in the process. It's been turned into movies and a TV series and spawned numerous sequels right up to the present. I've been dying to see the six film series adapted from it for many years, not knowing if it was just a schlocky series that didn't do the books justice but intrigued to see it come to life anyway. Well, it's stylish and hyper-violent and you know Tarantino just ate it up back in the day. The movies star Tomisaburo Wakayama and the excellent booklet with this boxed set tells how he convinces the creator of the manga that while seeming less than physically imposing he was indeed ready to tackle the lead role. (His younger brother starred in the longer-running *Zatoichi* movies!) As usual, Criterion delivers impeccable masters along with substantial extras. I've only watched the first film but it's a blast and the set as a whole is a treat simply to hold. Worth the wait.

Is it right to say there is lesser Orson Welles? People keep elevating his once-minor works (or rather, works seen as minor) to higher and higher status. Still, I think *Macbeth* as a movie may be an exception. It was such a stunning stage success earlier in his career (the famed *Voodoo Macbeth*) that I think Welles felt the need to toy around with it. It doesn't help that this newer film version was also a newly staged theatrical production and the result is neither fish nor fowl, with Welles not deciding if he was going to create something filmic or capture what he was trying to do onstage. As a result, he did neither one very satisfyingly. Nonetheless, every scrap he fiddled with is worth preserving and certainly this is more than scraps. It's presented with two audio tracks (one was outrageously Scottish, in a way) and is about as good as one can hope given the cheap source material. It's no *Chimes At Midnight* (which I value less than most others) but it's worth a look. Now where's *The Other Side Of The Wind*?







THE JUNGLE BOOK (\$39.99 BluRay; Walt Disney Studios)

FINDING DORY (\$39.99 BluRay; Walt Disney Studios)

THE DEPATIE/FRELENG COLLECTION VOL 1 (\$79.95 BluRay; Kino Lorber)

THE BFG (\$39.99 BluRay; Walt Disney Studios)

PETE'S DRAGON (\$39.99 BluRay; Walt Disney Studios)

KUBO AND THE TWO STRINGS (\$44.99 BluRay; Universal)

Here we have four family films from Disney (all noble attempts to create new classics), a collection of old TV cartoons and a new animated film that out-Disney's Disney this time around.

The Jungle Book was a smash success at the box office but just like the last time Disney did a live-action remake of *The Jungle Book*, they seem to have entirely misunderstood the point of the stories. Indeed, the ending is the exact opposite of what Rudyard Kipling created in every way, both literally and thematically. And no, their softer, kinder ending is not an improvement. Plus the lead character of Mowgli is way too contemporary in his demeanor and the modest nods to the music of Disney's delightful animated version prove distracting. The visual effects however are pretty amazing in the sense that you're not amazed by seeing a kid talk with and act beside various wild creatures but accept it as a matter of fact.

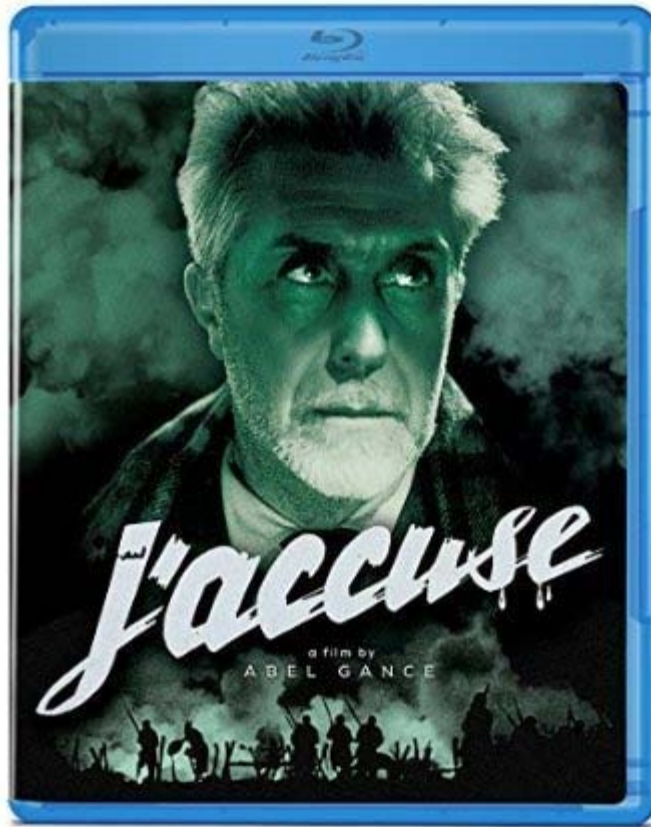
At least *The Jungle Book* pushed the envelope in terms of special effects. *Finding Dory* has almost no reason for being and it shows, offering up a slim premise that never really grows into anything essential. The animation is exquisite, proving the advances in technology since *Finding Nemo*. But Pixar's once noble refusal to automatically do spin-offs and sequels to their original films is now dead, dead, dead. Here's proof they were right in the first place.

Disney almost abandoned animation in the dark days of the 1970s. And Warner Bros. literally did, despite being the home of Looney Tunes and other iconic properties. When they did, David DePatie and Fritz Freleng put out their shingle and — in a gesture that would never happen in today's corporate world — they actually leased the very space on the Warner Bros lot where the animation unit worked for a few bucks a year. Almost immediately, they hit paydirt by creating the Pink Panther for director Blake Edwards. That led to movie shorts, TV shows and even a revival of Merrie Melodies and Looney Tunes. Suddenly they could employ their old friends and no one even needed to find a new parking space. When The Pink Panther hit Saturday morning TV, it was paired with numerous other characters and *The DePatie/Freleng Collection Vol. 1* gathers a bunch of them. You get Inspector Clouseau (shorts done for the movies), The Ant And The Aardvark, Roland and Rattfink and Tijuana Toads. (The guys loved pairing off characters, obviously.) The set is packed with often clever shorts that look back towards classic silent movies rather than looking forward to the endless pop cultural references and frenzy of so many kiddie cartoons that would follow. You also get a documentary about the duo that made it happen and more.

I'm one of the few who is not enamored with author Roald Dahl. I find his worldview too nasty somehow, always feeling an undercurrent of genuine distaste for humanity underlying his stories. Many others disagree and they cherish *The BFG* as one of his best. I'm certainly a big fan of actor Mark Rylance but the motion capture technology used by director Steven Spielberg to allow Rylance to inhabit this big, friendly giant remains creepy rather than magical. That's surely problem number one for the movie, which never comes to life, but I'd point a finger at the thin source material.

I think the source material for the remake of *Pete's Dragon* was a wiser choice for someone trying to make a good family film. Not because the original Disney movie *Pete's Dragon* was any good. In fact, even as a kid I thought it was pretty godawful. And that's the point — they weren't messing with a classic but using a very simple idea — a kid and his dragon — to reimagine the entire thing. The result is not quite a home run but it's a solid movie and far more interesting and fresh than anyone might have expected. And if it's one of the last movies to feature Robert Redford, well it's a rather nice nod to his lifelong passion for conservation. Good job and a movie that is sure to be an even bigger success as people discover it on BluRay and cable tv for years to come.

But the efforts of everyone else above are put to shame by *Kubo And The Two Strings*. This is a genuinely original animated film about a boy on a quest to defeat evil and restore his family's honor (and frankly, just stay alive). Many critics feel it's one of the best movies of the year. I'm not that enamored with it, but this is a positively gorgeous looking movie with some really vivid, striking animation that impresses to no end. The quest hits some familiar beats but they are the classic beats of all quest stories. It's blessedly restrained, mature and never talks down to its audience. Little kids might have the bejesus scared out of them once or twice, just like Disney did with aplomb back in the day. Laika is an animate studio that has created four films so far: *Coraline* (a masterpiece), *ParaNorman*, *The Boxtrolls* and now *Kubo*. Three of the four have enjoyed excellent reviews and all have done pretty well at the box office. That's one hell of a track record and they're just getting started.





J'ACCUSE (\$29.95 BluRay; Olive Films)

PIMPERNEL SMITH (\$29.95 BluRay; Olive Films)

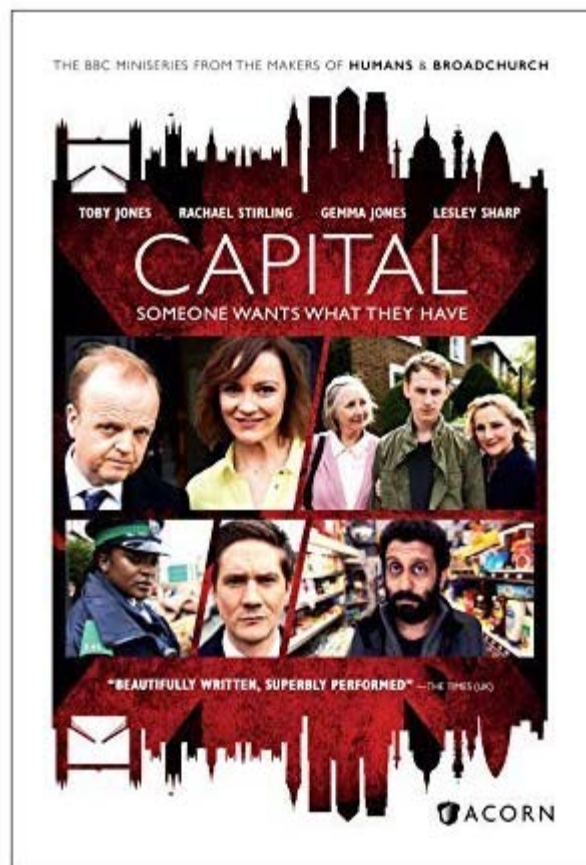
ONE OF OUR AIRCRAFT IS MISSING (\$29.95 BluRay; Olive Films)

You can almost chart World War II by watching these three films. *J'Accuse* is director Abel Gance's 1938 remake of his silent classic. The remake is set just after WWI but it's no great insight to echo the liner notes and say the movie is looking with dread towards the threat of another world war on the horizon. The first movie said, "Never again" while this remake says "Not again?!" It's not his best and it's a pity they didn't package both together but this is a marked improvement over the shoddy earlier release of this movie on DVD, so it's a treat for film buffs. It'll do until I FINALLY get a chance to see *Napoleon* with a live orchestra someday.

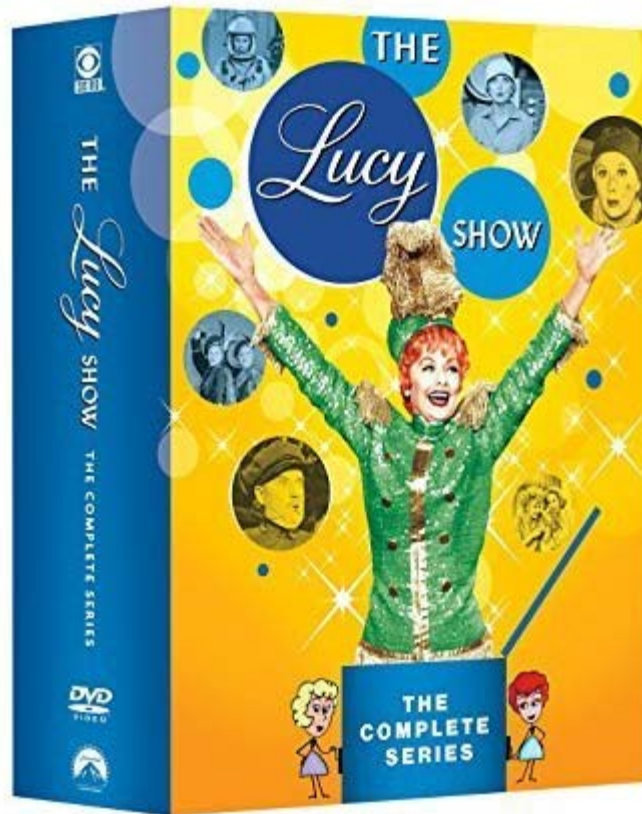
Leslie Howard was never a favorite actor of mine, perhaps because his Ashley from *Gone With The Wind* stamped Howard as wimpy in my young impressionable mind. Too bad I didn't see him in his more dashing turn as *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. This is a remake of that story, released in 1941 and set in that contemporary era with an anti-Nazi slant. Howard also directed and this flag-waver deserves to be better known. It's not a classic by any stretch but it is of interest and points to the interesting path Howard might have trod. Unfortunately, he died in 1943 when a plane he was traveling in as a passenger was shot down by the very enemy he had targeted in his film.

I'm a huge fan of the team of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, one of the greatest partnerships in film history. *One Of Our Aircraft Is Missing* is in fact the very first Powell-Pressburger release under The Archers label they created. This movie is another patriotic effort, but these guys are too defiantly individual to create something literally by the numbers. It tells the stirring story of an RAF bomber crew trapped behind enemy lines and working their way to freedom with the help of villagers in Holland. With behind the scenes talent like David Lean as their editor and Ronald Neame as their cinematographer, Powell and Pressburger delivered propaganda with passion.









GAME OF THRONES SEASON SIX (\$59.99 BluRay; HBO)

THE IT CROWD: THE COMPLETE SERIES (\$59.99 DVD: MPI Home Video)

CAPITAL (\$24.99 DVD; Acorn Media)

BETTER CALL SAUL SEASON TWO (\$55.99 BluRay; Sony Pictures Home Entertainment)

POLDARK COMPLETE SECOND SEASON (\$54.99 BluRay; PBS)

THE LUCY SHOW THE COMPLETE SERIES (\$63.99 DVD; Paramount)

Let's be clear: season six of *Game Of Thrones* was the most dangerous of all. It moved into unknown territory by tackling storylines from a book that creator George R. R. Martin hasn't even finished yet. (Along with material from previous books that fit in here.) To add to the complexity, they've deviated in ways small and large and every time they did, that has a ripple effect throughout the series. So this might well have been the season they went dramatically off the rails. The fan consensus is that in fact they sort of righted themselves and now look poised to barrel their way right to the end. God knows (or rather Martin knows) if they'll end things like Martin will. Just as long as they don't kill Arya. And if nothing else, they've raised the bar for a long-running series with battle scenes and fantasy sequences that would hold their own with most movies. Here's a secret: creativity and good characters are far more important than big special effects and Martin provided that right from the start.

Dramatically different from the widescreen epic *Game Of Thrones* is the UK's quiet little comedy *The IT Crowd*. It takes the poor slob you call for help when your computer freezes up and makes them the center of attention. They got endless mileage out of answering the phone and repeating over and over "Is it plugged in?" or telling people to power their device off and let it reboot. The show ran for four seasons on Channel 4 but in the UK that meant just 24 episodes and a one-off finale. Heck, a fifth season was commissioned but the creators said no. Who does that? It's the sort of the show the gang on *The Big Bang Theory* would love and the sort of show that fans of *The Big Bang Theory* won't. And that's my snobby comment of the day.

I don't quite know how it happened but I'm pleased: veteran actor Toby Jones seems to have become a TV star somehow. He's scored recently on the comedy *The Detectives* and the drama *Marvelous* and not one but two miniseries. One was an adaptation of Joseph Conrad's evergreen tale of domestic terrorism *The Secret Agent*. The other is *Capital*, based on the novel by John Lanchester about street in London whose homes have exploded in value. Some residents are newly wealthy while others have lived there for years but they all get a postcard in the mail that rather ominously says only "We want what you have." Jones plays a banker and as always his performance has been acclaimed.

Better Call Saul seemed like the dumbest idea ever. (Strike that — the dumbest idea ever was doing an American remake of the British sitcom *The Office*.) Ok, so it's the second dumbest idea ever — a spin-off of *Breaking Bad*? Focusing on the sleazy lawyer played by Bob Odenkirk? Well, the reviews of season one almost uniformly said, "Well, actually..." Now they've delivered season two and those like me who are still shaking our heads warily and asking, "Really? Are you sure...?" have to accept that this isn't just not a flop but one of the better reviewed shows of the year. We're in the midst of Peak TV but anyone hoping *Better Call Saul* would stumble and they could strike it off their must-see list will have to wait until season three or just dive in.

Poldark is another case in point of a show folks of a certain age might have resisted. My mom is still besotted with the original series that was so successful it helped solidify PBS's *Masterpiece Theatre* as must-see TV for those who like their telly with an accent. *Poldark* returns home after fighting against the rebels in the Americas and finds his entire world turned upside down. He sets it to right with brio. This remake doubles down on the soapiness of the original, which unlike *Upstairs Downstairs* now plays more like a cut-rate soap opera than classic TV. Aidan Turner is the handsome *Poldark* this time around and the BBC knows exactly what they're doing with this one: in classic daytime soap style, the buff Turner is shirtless with regularity and the cliff-hangers come with relentless precision. Season three will come in early 2017 (at least in the UK) so this *Poldark* will roughly match the episode count of the original.

Everyone loves Lucy but not everyone loves her refusal to go gently into that good night. Lucille Ball quite reasonably wasn't done with television after her classic series *I Love Lucy* ended its blockbuster run. She followed it with *The Lucy Show* (and followed that with *Here's Lucy* and more). You get the entire series with complete episodes (not the shortened versions for syndication) and the image quality is very good. It's unapologetically more of the same, but less so. So what? She can still pratfall and double take with the best of

them. It's a bit like catching a vaudeville star past their prime still touring the provinces and doing the old jokes to an aging but still quietly appreciative audience that offers up a smattering of applause when they've got the energy. Sure the comic ain't what they used to be, but who is? The Lucy Show ran for six years and a staggering 156 episodes. The first three seasons co-starred Vivian Vance and the second three rebooted the premise once Vance quit for good. No matter. Ball knew Vance's value but audiences loved Lucy. She won two Emmys as Best Actress in a Comedy and the final season the show ranked higher than every before at #2. The show was over but Ball would be back.

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