



**Michael Giltz, Contributor** BookFilter creator

## DVDs: "Transformers" Running Out Of Road? Bee Gees Imploding? Classic TV and More

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On and on they come, TV, movies, TV movies, new seasons, complete series. If you think you're overwhelmed, imagine the nightmarish existence of people in the future. We wistfully wondered what it would be like to have the chance to watch, say, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* in order. They will have every episode of every show ever made on tap...and more coming out every single day! God help them.

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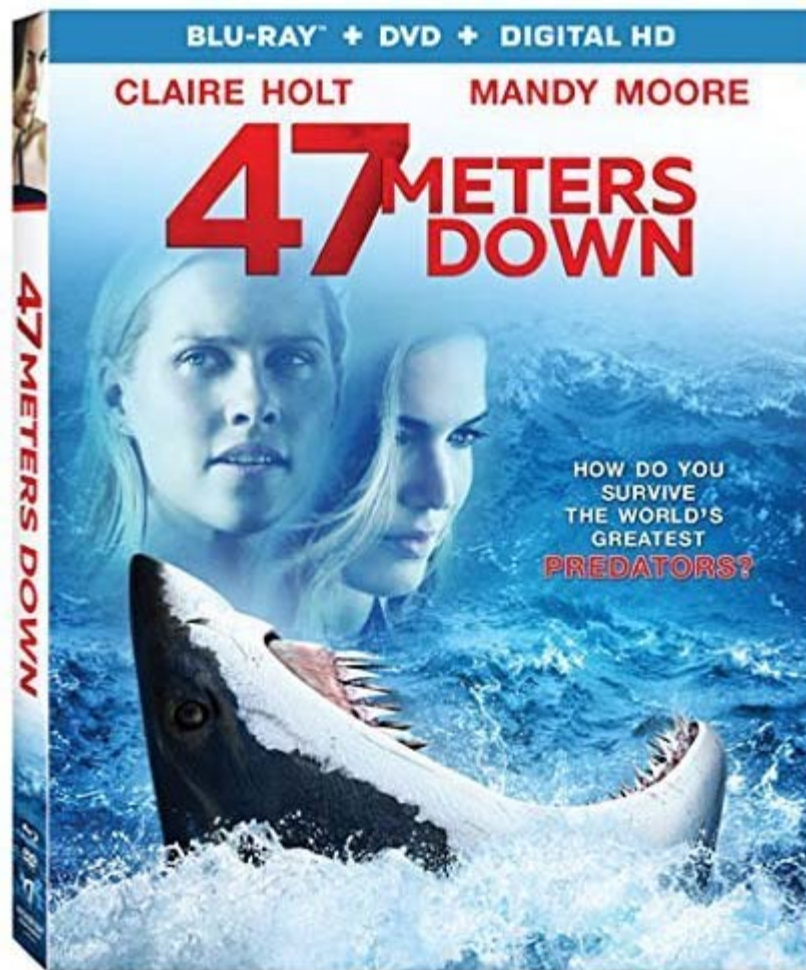


BLU-RAY • DVD



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**TRANSFORMERS: THE LAST KNIGHT** (\$39.99 BluRay; Paramount)

**PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: DEAD MEN TELL NO TALES** (\$39.99 BluRay; Buena Vista Home Entertainment)

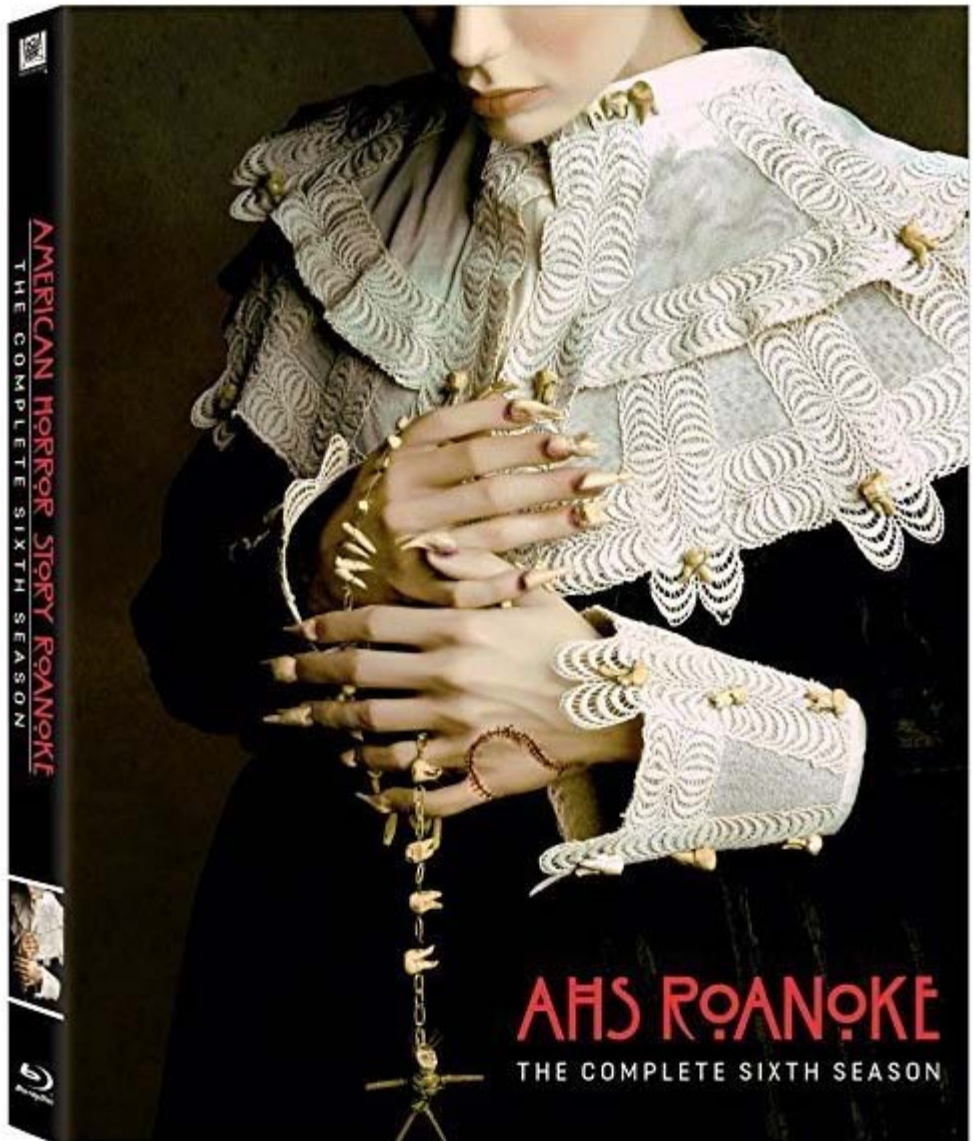
**47 METERS DOWN** (\$39.99 BluRay; Lionsgate)

Old franchises end, new ones begin and others trudge along zombie-like without even realizing they're already dead. Transformers: The Last Knight is a zombie franchise: for some reason, they swapped out Shia LaBeouf for Mark Wahlberg. It hardly made any sense but then the entire Transformers franchise has been almost incomprehensible from the start: only fanatics could tell the good mechanical creatures from the bad mechanical creatures, the films were a riot of noise and "action" and despite being awful they made a lot of money. This house of cards came crashing down with The Last Knight, as if fans suddenly, "Oh wait, this isn't actually any good." They're right but it's no worse than the first four films. It fell hard at the box office but the franchise won't die: you can expect another one and a spin-off featuring Bumblebee because isn't that what we've been waiting for?

That may not be the case for *Pirates of the Caribbean*. Despite an amusing turn from Johnny Depp in the first

film, this too has also been a very poor franchise from day one. But hey, pirates! The wind went out of the sails on *Dead Men Tell No Tales*, though again it would take a wiser man than I to know why this was the one to falter and not *Pirates 2* or *3* or *4*. They hint at a sequel in the end credits natch, but wiser heads might prevail and call it a day (for now). They dodged a financial bullet this time and should be glad to get five films out of this run. Reboot in 20 years time and deliver a grimmer, more “realistic” adventure film and maybe the prospect of a new *Pirates* will excite rather than exhaust. Both films are of course huge endeavors so the copious extras about the making of the films have every possibility of being more enjoyable than the movies themselves.

And yes the unlikeliest of films can become a franchise. *47 Meters Down* was a British scare-fest about two women who go deep under water (47 meters to be exact) to get a glimpse of sharks up close. When their cage is stranded, they must battle their way to the surface as the oxygen tanks slowly run out. It’s no *The Shallows*, which benefitted greatly from having its heroine be stranded mostly above water (and thus be able to act without masks and such hiding her face) and having its heroine played by Blake Lively. However, *47 Meters Down* made money so of course they’ll do it again. As I looked up details, I jokingly thought to myself, *50 Meters Down* would be a good title. Close! It’s called *48 Meters Down* and involves women in danger when exploring underwater ruins in Brazil. This time around, I hope the sharks hold out for first dollar gross.



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AS RUTH MADOFF

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# LONGMIRE





**AMERICAN HORROR STORY ROANOKE COMPLETE SIXTH SEASON** (\$49.99 BluRay; 20th Century Fox)

**THE WIZARD OF LIES** (\$24.98 BluRay; HBO)

**SHAMELESS SEASON 7** (\$39.99 BluRay; Warner Bros)

**THE SON SEASON 1** (\$29.98 DVD; Lionsgate)

**LONGMIRE SEASON FIVE** (\$39.99 BluRay; Warner Bros)

**LINE OF DUTY SEASON 4** (\$39.99 DVD; Acorn)

As these things go, I feel the most recent season of *American Horror Story* was a bust. The mysterious campaign was the best thing about it. Perhaps nothing could match the mystery of exactly what Roanoke might be about but the actual drama didn't come close. That's probably why they dropped the mystery when launching season seven. Happily for this franchise, they get to start fresh every time out.

Not so for *The Wizard Of Lies*, the HBO movie about the Ponzi scheme con man Bernie Madoff. It faced pressure of a different sort with Richard Dreyfuss making it to air first with his own take on the same high powered villain, a mini-series called *Madoff*. Turns out it wasn't the tortoise or the hare that won this race: both films drew a shrug from audiences.

*Shameless* has also seemed to exist outside the buzz machine that turns other shows into a hit. But something must be working for this Showtime series based on the raucous UK comic drama. It's hit seven seasons and season eight starts November 5. William H. Macy has been shamelessly mining the drunken exploits of Frank Gallagher and his poorer-than-poor clan for years now. Emmy Rossum is the show's secret weapon as the real anchor of the family and Joan Cusack has the role of her life (and an Emmy to boot) as the kind, clueless (and deadly with a pillow) widow Sheila Jackson. It's like *Roseanne* with more bitter laughs. Or *All In The Family* without the lovable undercurrent. Or really like nothing else on TV...except the UK original which ran for eleven seasons.

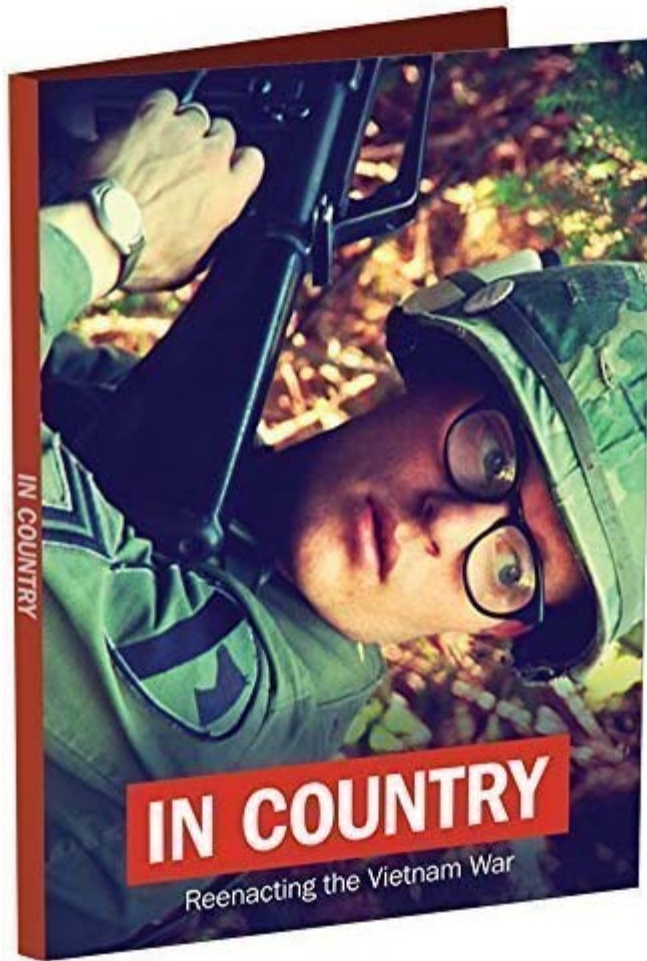
What TV needs more of these days are westerns. (So do the movies!) *The Son* is sort of a western version of *This Is Us*. Half of season one takes place in the "current" era of 1915 and the other half takes place in the mid-1800s when our hero is a captive/member of the Comanches. Pierce Brosnan plays Eli in the 1915s while Jacob Lofland is a lot of fun as Eli amongst the Comanche, who call him "Pathetic White Boy." The novel by Phillip Meyer is excellent but the show hasn't remotely matched it yet. Maybe they'll find their footing now that the split narrative can be dispensed with in season two.

Native Americans also play a significant role on *Longmire*, the mysteries about a Wyoming sheriff (Robert Taylor), his Cheyenne friend Henry Standing Bear (Lou Diamond Phillips) and a deputy played by Katee Sackhoff of *Battlestar Galactica*. It ran for three years on A&E, got cancelled and was then picked up by Netflix for three more seasons. That will end with season six airing later this year. It's a familiar show but fine of its sort and season five is no different. And while the show may end, the novels by Craig Johnson will go on.

Add *Line Of Duty* to the many TV shows I want to catch up on. This UK crime is already onto its 4th series. Spotting the strong number of reviews for it online, I checked it out and discovered quite a few interesting facts. This procedural has already been optioned for a fifth and sixth season and in some polls is thought to be the best UK cop show currently on the air. It involves an anti-crime unit based in an unnamed city (but probably Birmingham). The police wouldn't cooperate with the show on authenticity, perhaps because it involves an anti-corruption unit, what we might call internal affairs. Each season — I think — we see AC-12 take on some of the police's brightest. This year it's Thandie Newton as an excellent officer under intense pressure to find the guilty party in serial murders. She does but did she cut corners and is the guy even guilty?

I get the sense that each season is self-contained (though our team at AC-12 carries over from each year) so all the more reason to consider this BBC Two offering well worth tackling.





IN COUNTRY

# IN COUNTRY

Reenacting the Vietnam War



**HAROLD AND LILLIAN: A HOLLYWOOD LOVE STORY** (\$34.95 BluRay; Zeitgeist Films)

**IN COUNTRY** (\$24.95 DVD; Film Movement/Bond360)

**A GHOST STORY** (\$24.99 BluRay; Lionsgate)

In the art house section of our column we have two documentaries and a film for hardcore cineastes only. Pause for a moment and think how remarkable it is that documentaries are widely seen in theaters, sold on DVD and BluRay and screened on TV and streaming sites. Sure, most of the time it's the topic that carries the day, not the filmmaking. But it's a very welcome development that is a permanent part of the movie-going landscape. Prior to oh *Roger & Me* or *An Inconvenient Truth* or name your commercial landmark flick, documentaries were admired and respected and given Oscars but rarely seen. Now fans don't think twice about watching a documentary — it's like reality tv, but better!

Here's another dagger in the heart of the auteur theory — *Harold and Lillian: A Hollywood Love Story*. Harold Michelson is a famed storyboard artist and his wife Lillian was a tremendous film researcher. When you start to appreciate the distinctive, defining careers of film composers and cinematographers and set designers and casting directors and even more obscure categories like storyboarding and research, the idea of the director

as the ironclad visionary that creates a film becomes more and more absurd. This documentary gives full weight to their careers, from the brilliant work he did crafting key visual images for everything from *The Graduate* to *The Birds* to the 1956 *Ten Commandments* to her key but subtler contributions by doing research for *Fiddler On The Roof* and the like, once she accepted that being a wife and mother was not enough. it's a primer on storyboarding, a peek into research and a portrait of a loving marriage — in Hollywood no less! Fun stuff.

*In Country* is an odder duck. This looks at the guys who devote their off-time to reenacting war. But instead of the perhaps easily mockable guys devoted to the Civil War, these guys tackle Vietnam. And in this film at least, many of the guys taking part have actually served in Iraq and Afghanistan and even Vietnam (one guy even fought in Vietnam...on the other side!). That gives this film a much more complex target, from the difficulty of adjusting to civilian life to how soldiers view combat and our own knee-jerk desire to dismiss it all as silly. Coming close but never quite slipping into satire or comedy or something, this is a movie that benefits greatly from the world it discovered.

*A Ghost Story*, however, is pure art house fare. While it's noble for Casey Affleck and Rooney Mara to appear in what surely seemed a strange proposition even on paper, it simply doesn't work as a film. Affleck is a "ghost," who appears and walks around with a sheet over his head and it goes downhill (very modestly, not much happens) from there. A misfire to me though many critics embraced it — not me, not even if it was from Thailand and had subtitles.



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THE MOVIE: EXTENDED CUT

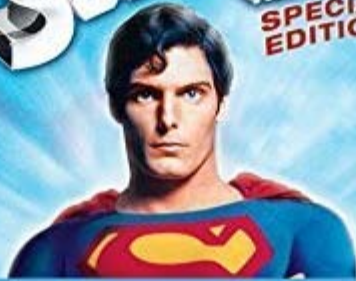


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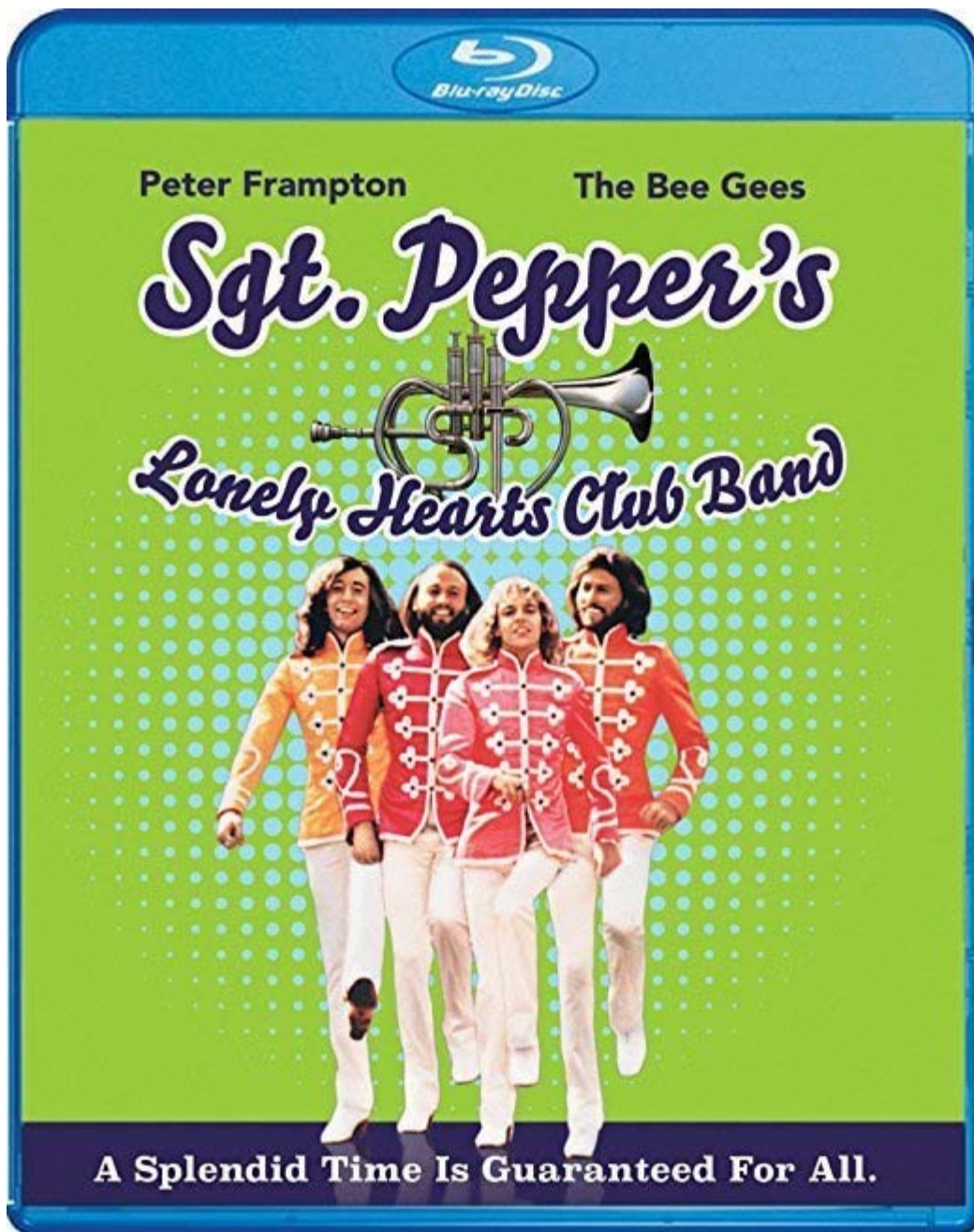
MICHAEL  
PALIN

# A FISH CALLED WANDA



*A tale of murder, greed, lust, revenge and seafood.*





**SUPERMAN THE MOVIE EXTENDED CUT/SPECIAL EDITION** (\$21.99 BluRay; Warner Bros.)

**VINCENT PRICE COLLECTION: 5 FRIGHTENING FEATURES** (\$14.98 DVD; Mill Creek Entertainment)

**A FISH CALLED WANDA SPECIAL EDITION** (\$39.95 BluRay; Arrow Video)

**SGT. PEPPER'S LONELY HEARTS CLUB BAND** (\$26.99 BluRay; Shout! Factory)

Oh how I got on my high horse about this new *Superman: The Movie* release from Warner Bros. A friend was dying to see it because it contained the first official release of the two-night TV version of Christopher Reeve's *Superman: The Movie*. Now the film itself is a landmark, arguably the greatest superhero film of all time and my pick for my favorite/most important movie of 1978. But director Richard Donner had nothing to do with the

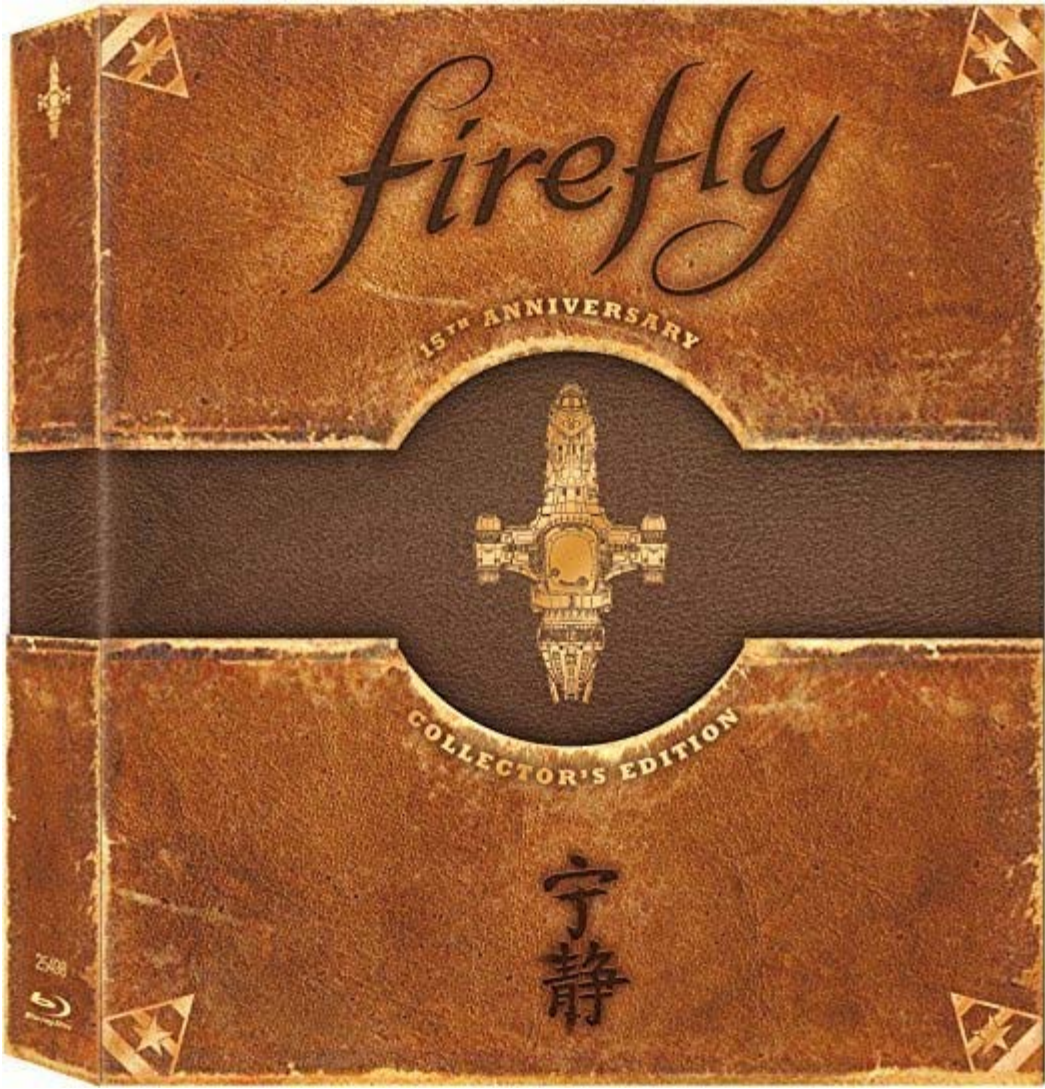
grossly expanded version created for TV by the money-grabbing producers. (And full credit to the Salkinds: they made this huge gamble happen, as they did with the terrific *Three Musketeers* from a few years earlier.) Essentially, they grabbed every scrap of footage and padded out what was already a very long movie so it could play over two nights...and include even more commercials. (The Salkinds got paid for every new minute of footage so needless to say, it all went in, about 40 minutes in all. Now *Superman: The Movie* was *already* a leisurely two hours and 23 minutes, telling its story of the Man of Steel at epic, Biblical length, complete with Christ-like parallels. It needed to be that long to tell its story but it sure as heck wasn't improved by adding in *another* 40 minutes of stuff. Complicating the story even further, Donner had been shooting two movies worth of footage to begin with (much of going into *Superman II*), another cost-saving effort by the Salkinds. So it's a really long movie, Donner had absolutely nothing to do with the TV cut and I was offended on his behalf that anyone would want to see it. It's like begging for a BluRay release of an "airplane cut" or network broadcast family friendly version of *Scarface*. Why? And yet, it aired and tens of millions of people saw it. Only a film as significant as *Superman: The Movie* could have enough fans to warrant its release. And as long as it's never the MAIN version of the film available to fans, I guess there's no harm. Happily, this set also contains the Donner-approved Special Edition version of the film. Ideally, we'd also have the original theatrical version but this release is purely for the diehards. As long as the original film is the one that dominates the boxed sets and is readily available, they can release as many different variations as they want. If only George Lucas would recognize the rightness of this.

You know it's Halloween season when old Vincent Price movies start popping up in the new release section. This compilation contains five of his films which have virtually nothing in common. *House On Haunted Hill* is the best, an actual horror film classic circa William Castle. *The Last Man On Earth* has problems, with Price as the vampire hunter later played by Charlton Heston and Will Smith. But it has an oddball appeal. *The Bat* is a nutty mystery film, *Shock* is a noirish story of a sort-of-evil psychiatrist and *The Jackals* is about gold prospectors for Pete's sake. It doesn't get much grab-baggier than that. Still, it's dirt cheap and two and a half of the films are quite good.

What can you say about *A Fish Called Wanda*? It's one of the great comic delights, a late career triumph for director Charles Crichton (*very* late; it was his last film), a peak for Kevin Kline as a comic actor and the third leg in the Stool of Comedy Greatness on which John Cleese proudly sits. (No, I have no idea where that came from, but the other two legs on the stool are obviously Monty Python on tv and film and *Fawlty Towers*.) Any excuse to watch this daffiness is welcome indeed.

Pity the Bee Gees, one of the greatest bands of all time. Despite a varied career musically that started long before and continued long after the disco era, they became inextricably linked with white suits and the blockbuster film *Saturday Night Fever*. John Travolta moved on to *Grease*, but the Bee Gees? They suffered and they blamed disco and *SNF* for their burden. Better to blame *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, a fiasco that gave them a much blacker eye. I think this misbegotten film did far more to torpedo their careers than the massive success of *Fever* or the backlash by some to dance music aka disco. Woefully conceived, horribly made and painful to watch, *Sgt. Pepper* also brought a complete halt to the meteoric career of Peter Frampton, who was riding high on the smash hit live album that made him a heartthrob. Many pop stars have

been convinced they could act. Some could (Elvis, The Beatles, Barbra Streisand). Some couldn't but faked it well (Prince). Some couldn't and didn't (The Bee Gees and Peter Frampton). While the film is weirdly, almost entertainingly bad (almost), the one awful decision to do new versions of the songs on The Official Greatest Album Of All Time was in fact not a bad idea at all. It's probably better just to dip into the soundtrack and find the ones that appeal. But the movie is there to gawk out anyway.

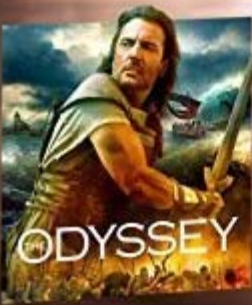




TIN MAN



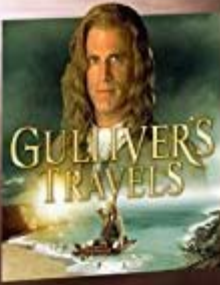
The 10th Kingdom



ODYSSEY



MERLIN



GULLIVER'S TRAVELS

5 MINI-SERIES GIFT SET

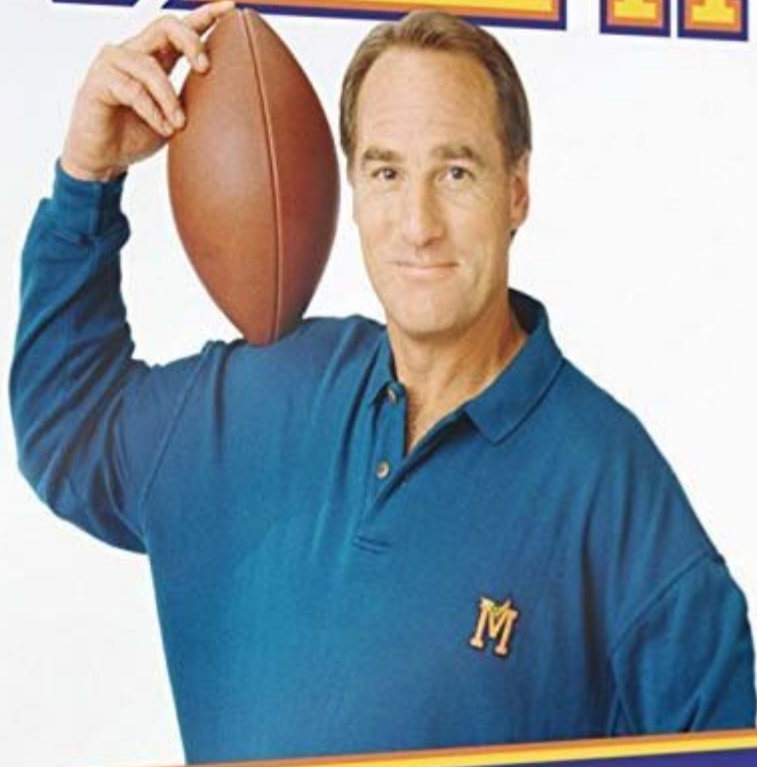




THE  
COMPLETE  
SERIES

# COACH

COACH



THE COMPLETE SERIES

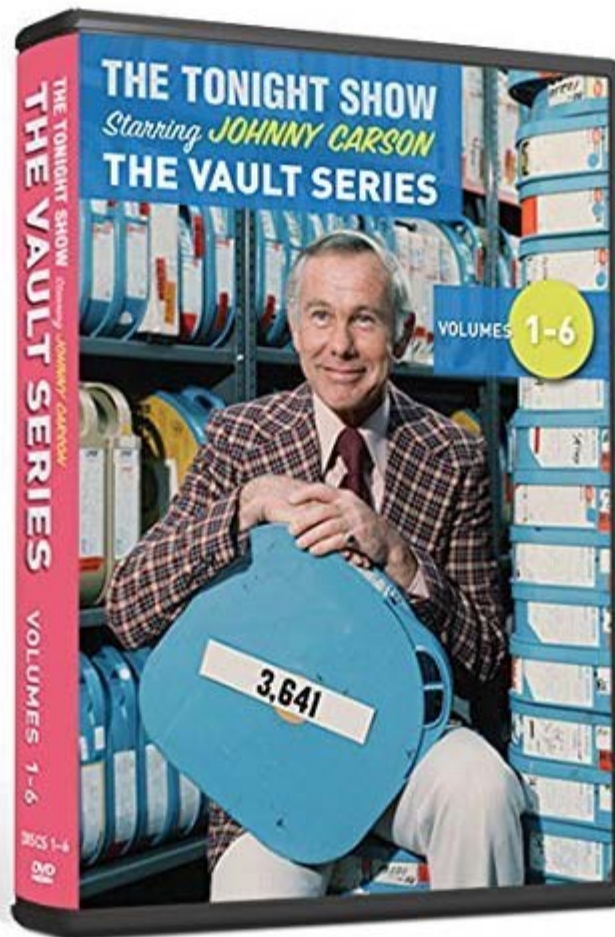
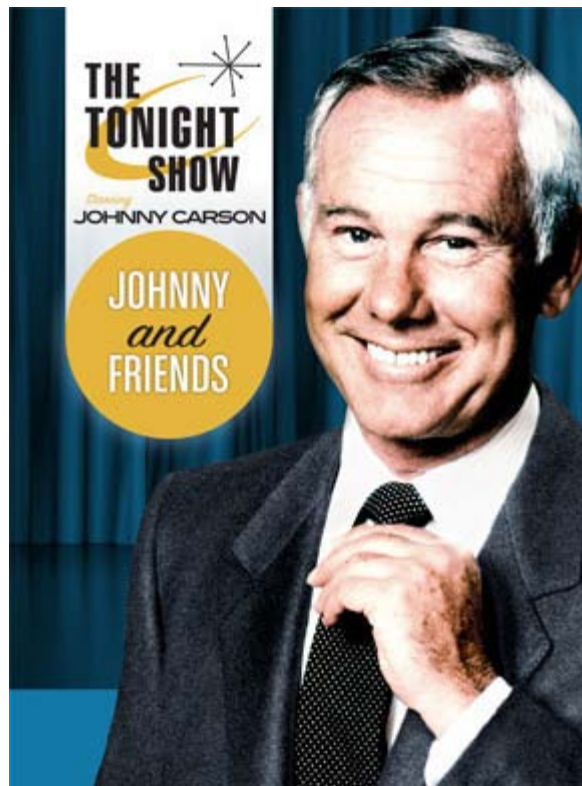
MUST SEE TELEVISION

THOMAS HADEN CHURCH DEBRA MESSING

# NED AND STACEY

THE COMPLETE SERIES





**FIREFLY COMPLETE SERIES 15TH ANNIVERSARY** (\$29.99 BluRay; 20th Century Fox)

**EPIC FANTASY MINISERIES GIFT SET** (\$49.98 DVD; Mill Creek Entertainment)

**FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS COMPLETE SERIES** (\$41.97 BluRay; Mill Creek Entertainment)

**COACH COMPLETE SERIES** (\$69.98 DVD; Mill Creek Entertainment)

**NED & STACEY THE COMPLETE SERIES** (\$44.99 DVD; Shout! Factory)

**JOHNNY AND FRIENDS** (\$99.95 DVD; TimeLife)

**THE TONIGHT SHOW STARRING JOHNNY CARSON VAULT SERIES 1-6** (\$59.95 DVD; TimeLife)

*Firefly* is beloved because it ran so briefly on TV that it breaks your heart, much of the team went on to bigger things (Nathan Fillion and *Castle*, Joss Whedon and everything), great TV sci-fi westerns are a category of one (unless you count *Star Trek* and they rarely had horses) and above all because it's so damn good. Like a few other blessed TV shows (*Freaks & Geeks*, *My So-Called Life*) it ran a brief 14 episodes but feels complete, ending on just the right note. Remarkably, it went on to a feature film many years later and damned if I don't keep hoping for more. But this boxed set contains every episode, the modest extras that were created and the time and no, does not include the feature film. The packaging is modest but this is an excellent low price and the quality of the actual episodes in terms of picture and audio is strong. The show itself is an appealing mix of stand-alone episodes, evolving characters, a dash of romance and an over-arching arc that satisfies without being overly complicated. Unlike most tv shows of today, you don't feel like you have to start taking notes. And what a cast. Fillion is a star, Alan Tudyk is appealing, Ron Glass adds gravitas, Gina Torres is a great foil and on and on. It's not a cult classic, just a full-on classic.

Epic Fantasy Collection yokes together five different TV miniseries that aired over four decades. They don't really belong together and their quality is all over the map but most were successful (or hugely successful) in their days and hold interest. *Gulliver's Travels* starring Ted Danson is the cream of the crop, a sterling 1996 miniseries adaptation of the novel and well worth your time. *The Odyssey* starring Armand Assante came one year later and thanks to being written and directed by Andrei Konchalovsky it actually feels purposeful and more distinctive than one might expect. It has limitations, but isn't bad. Neither is *The 10th Kingdom*, which came from writer Simon Moore who went from the UK miniseries *Traffik* to *Gulliver's Travels* to *The 10th Kingdom* and finally *Dinotopia*. All big commercial successes though it was downhill creatively after *Gulliver*. Still, it holds the attention. So does *Merlin*, which stars Sam Neill and was popular enough to lead to a sequel. You can thank Neill for holding it together (and where the heck is his classic miniseries *Amerika*?) Then there's *Tin Star*, starring Zooey Deschanel and just begging to be labeled a cult classic. It's a dour spin on *The Wizard of Oz* and has some interesting songs but it's a curio a la *Return To Oz*, more interesting as a response to *Oz* than something that stands on its own. Still, that's a lot of "pretty good" and one really great miniseries in this set, it's all family friendly and low-priced to boot.

I'm happy for any reason to mention the TV series *Friday Night Lights*. This high school football drama (and believe me, I don't give a hoot about football) is brilliantly cast and fitfully great. It has a perfect first season you can watch on its own and enjoy just as is. It has the worst second season of a great show, ever. Then it spends the next three seasons clawing its way back to respectability, and succeeding thanks to the marvelous actors led by Kyle Chandler and Connie Britton. Recently I saw a headline saying Connie Britton had snagged a role in an upcoming Ryan Murphy drama. I thought, no, they snagged *her* (meaning they're the lucky ones). This is very modest packaging but it's a show worth watching and owning.

If you're really a sports nut, you probably care about the sitcom *Coach*, starring Craig T. Nelson and Jerry Van Dyke. Another no-frills set, it contains all 200 episodes. It's not the sort of show that needs to be watched in any particular order but if you love it, this is an inexpensive way to have the whole shebang in one spot. And if you're buying it as a gift, it will keep a dad or an uncle or a grandpa quiet and happy for days.

*Ned & Stacey* had a much briefer run, just two seasons and 46 episodes. (God, remember the days when tv shows had to turn out 23 episodes a season? Yikes!) It's given a classy presentation by Shout! because the two stars proved their casting here was no accident. Thomas Haden Church and Debra Messing enjoyed bigger successes, but it was here as two people thrown together by a marriage of convenience that they first proved their worth.

And can you ever tire of Johnny Carson? Seeing clips on TCM of Johnny interviewing this or that guest makes you marvel — at the time, it was glib, fast-paced entertainment. Today, the questioning is so thoughtful and the pacing so relatively gentle that it seems the height of decency and class. (Of course that in turn elevates Dick Cavett to Socrates I suppose or at least the Algonquin Circle.) See Carson interview Burt Reynolds and you immediately want to watch an entire episode. That's what these two boxed sets include, mostly. Johnny and Friends has three different sets on ten discs: complete episodes featuring favorites like David Letterman and Steve Martin and Jerry Seinfeld on six discs, highlight shows and specials on three discs and three complete Christmas shows on one final disc. *The Vault Series* has six more discs packed with complete episodes from various eras as well. They've been made available before but here they are again, with the first set combining three different collections and the second one a more affordable spin on a 12 disc set that was even more comprehensive. I'll take Johnny any way I can get him. Now where's a smartly edited collection for David Letterman? They can start with the morning show, please.

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