



DVDs: Trolling "Pinocchio," "Edge Of Seventeen," "Arrival" & More

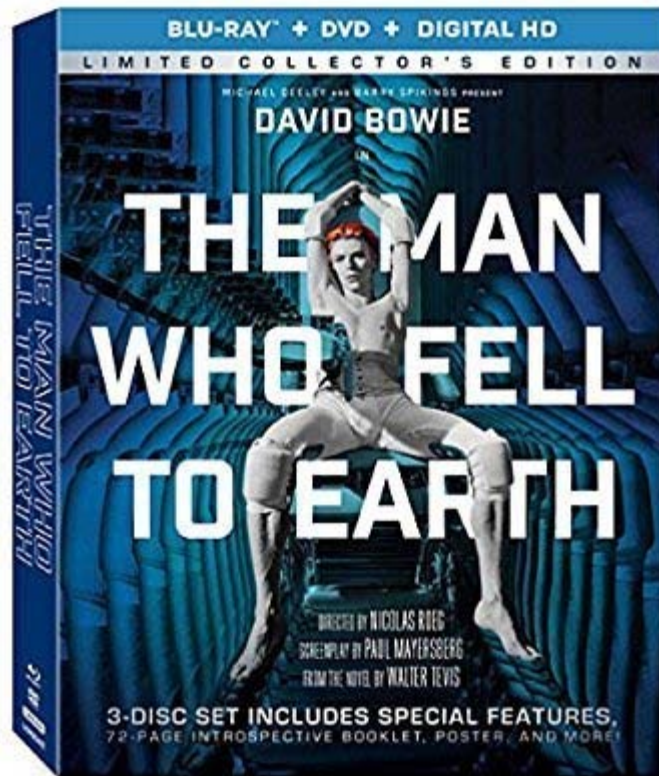


Michael Giltz, ContributorBookFilter creator

DVDs: Trolling "Pinocchio," "Edge Of Seventeen," "Arrival" & More

02/16/2017 11:31 pm ET | Updated Feb 17, 2017



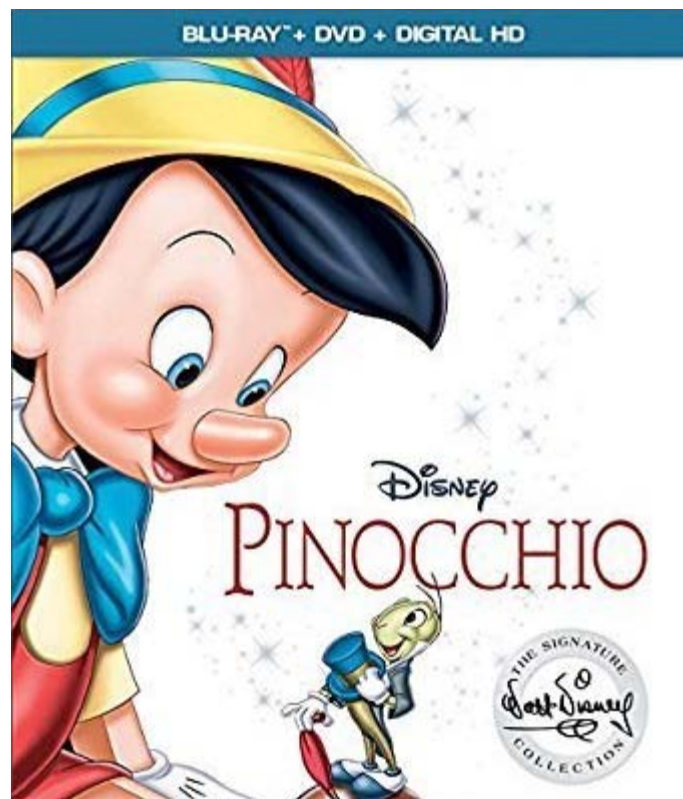


ARRIVAL (\$39.99 BluRay; Paramount)

THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH (\$34.99 BluRay; Lionsgate)

The aliens are coming! The aliens are coming! Even AFTER we've met lifeforms from another planet and exchanged recipes, it's likely stories of close encounters will remain perennially fascinating. *Arrival* is the class act of the year, an interesting and mature attempt to bring a little zip to this familiar tale. Amy Ryan is a linguist brought in by the government to try and communicate with the aliens which have suddenly appeared at key locations all over the globe. It's low-key, pretty smart, features a great score by Johann Johannsson (so of course it's great), the tech elements are superior (including what deserves to win an Oscar for Best Depiction of An Alien Visual Language)...and then they blow it with a really dumb finale that might have cut mustard in a sci-fi short story in the 1940s but no more. Still, it's not bad.

Fans of David Bowie still in mourning can dive deep into this elaborate boxed set celebrating his film debut. Among Bowie's many talents is the fact that he's a hell of an actor. He's pretty much the only reason to see Nicolas Roeg's oddball tale about an alien navigating our strange society. *The Man Who Fell To Earth* didn't work as a film or a stage musical. But my god, Bowie walks into a room and seems so singularly odd that you don't doubt for a second that he's from another planet. (Maybe he was?) Recent overseas editions and the Criterion are probably better over all. But if you don't own it yet and those are unavailable or this is cheaper, you'll be fine with it.

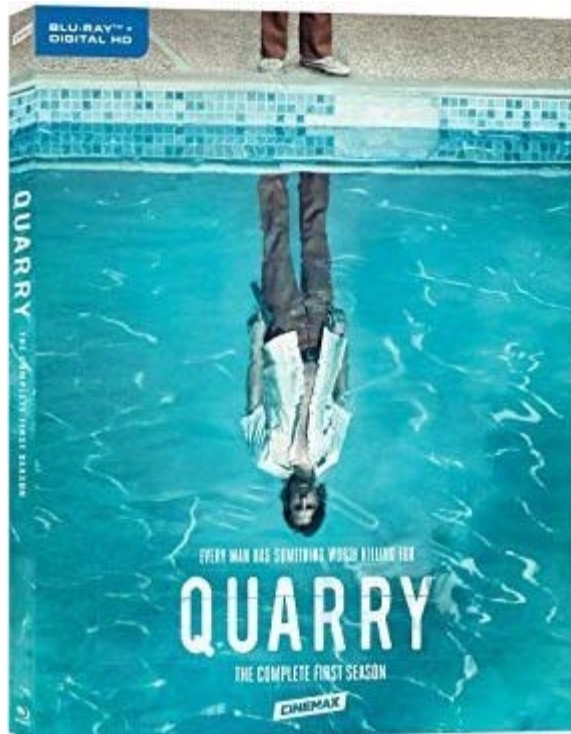


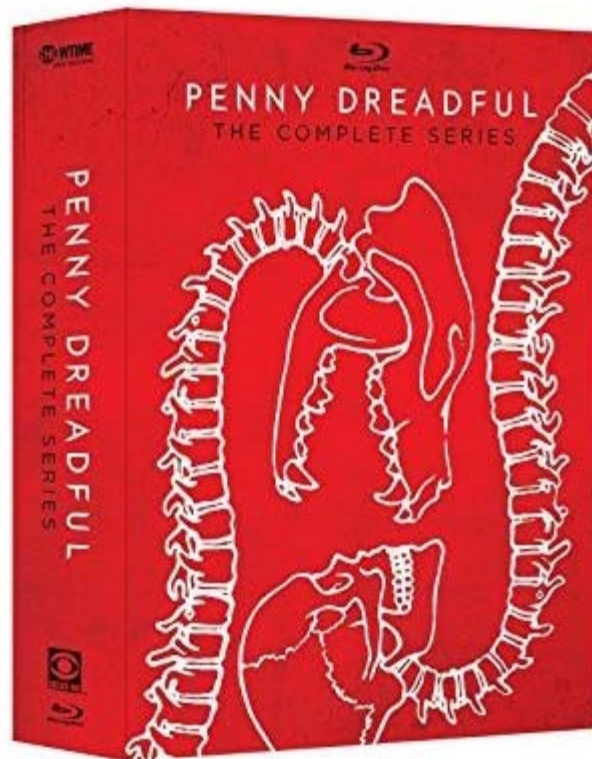
TROLLS (\$36.99 BluRay; 20th Century Fox)

PINOCCHIO SIGNATURE COLLECTION (\$39.99 BluRay; Disney)

I was feeling in a generous mood. *Trolls* is nothing special in terms of story or song or voice work. But it does have a VERY trippy vibe and that's saying something. I can imagine college students enjoying the visual and the super positive world view as amusingly sweet. But then I dipped again into the masterpiece *Pinocchio*. It's one of the most visually stunning films of all time but it also has heartfelt, enduring songs that push the story forward; great characters brought to life by great voice actors; a richness in terms of childhood and the dangers of growing up too fast and what it means to be human and so much more. It's just so darn good that you aren't willing to accept "ok" as being acceptable. Not when movies can be this good. Maybe that's why critics sometimes seem curmudgeonly or out of touch with some movies that casual viewers think are just fine. We know what movies those "ok" films are palely imitating, we know how great movies can be and we aren't willing to settle for less. Have you seen *Pinocchio* since you were a child? Ever? What are you waiting for?







VICTORIA SEASON ONE (\$59.99 BluRay; PBS)

QUARRY SEASON ONE (\$34.98 BluRay; HBO)

MERCY STREET SEASON TWO (\$49.99 BluRay; PBS)

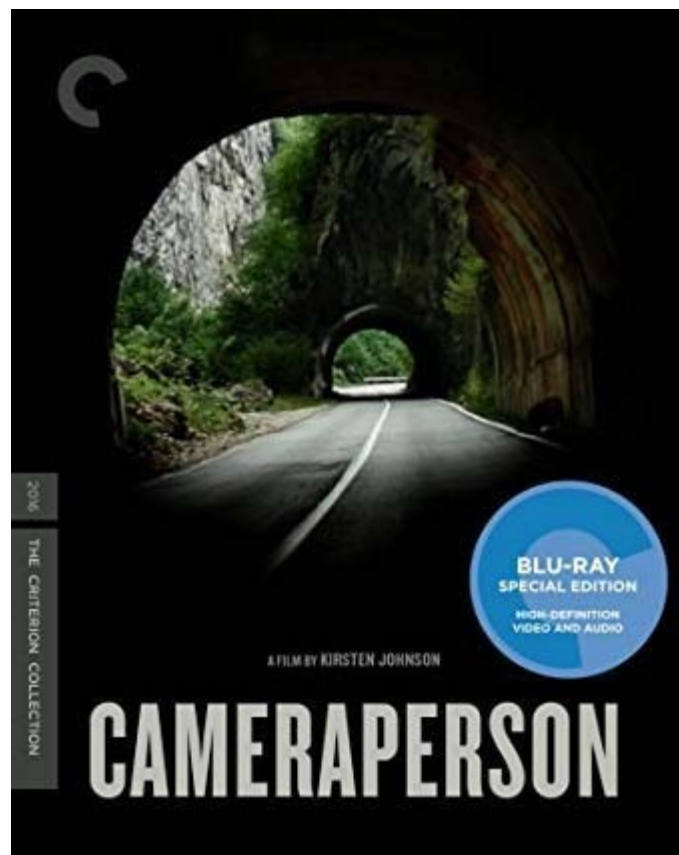
PENNY DREADFUL THE COMPLETE SERIES (\$79.99 BluRay; Paramount)

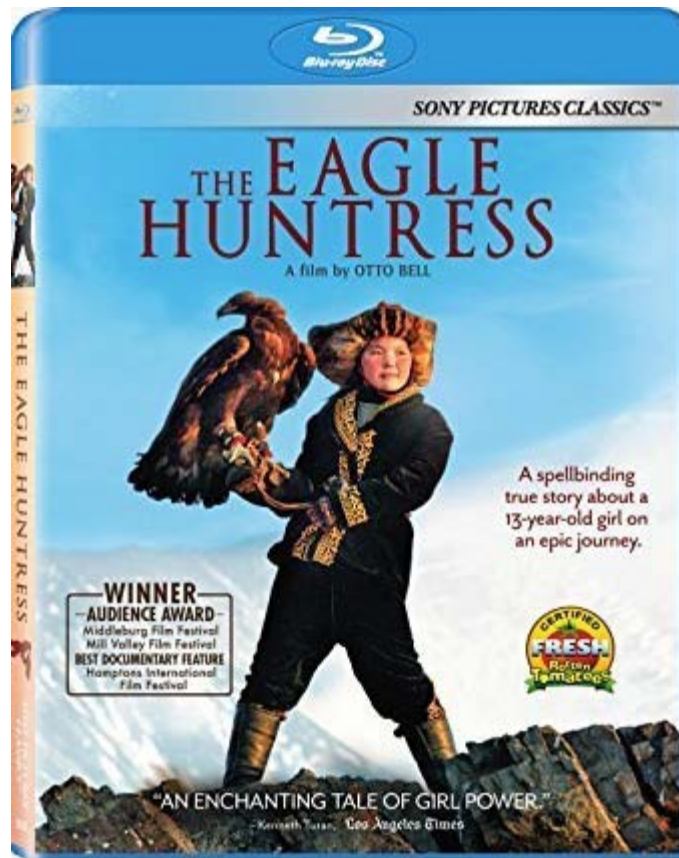
Hmm, all the people fighting off withdrawal symptoms over *Downton Abbey* are bickering over *The Crown* (a series about the early years of Queen Elizabeth II) and *Victoria* (a series about the early years of Victoria). One thing is clear: neither show is the pure heroin costume drama they desperately crave. But which is the better methadone substitute, the drug that'll do until the real thing comes along? I have to give the edge to *The Crown*, perhaps because the early years of E II are not well-trod territory the way Victoria's have been. Still, every *Downton* fan I know is watching both.

I don't know anyone talking about the Cinemax series *Quarry*. Blame peak tv. Any other time, a period drama about a Vietnam vet who returns home in 1972 and falls into a life of crime would have drawn attention just for its premise. Me, I was drawn because it stars Logan Marshall-Green of *The OC* as its anti-hero. Like many good-looking actors, Marshall-Green seems determined to prove his worth by dirtying up his looks as much as possible. The show is doing the same to the early 1970s. But if we're lucky his redemption will prove interesting enough (if it happens) to make this more a *Breaking Good* than a *Breaking Bad*. For the moment, our hero just seems broke.

Two seasons in and *Mercy Street's* most appealing aspect remains the setting : a hospital during the Civil War. Nurses on opposite sides must work together etc etc. The cast is solid, though Josh Radnor is one of those actors who simply doesn't work in a period piece. Still, I wouldn't hold my breath for a season three quite yet.

Penny Dreadful certainly got its cultish share of attention during the show's run, thanks first and foremost to the magnetic work of Eva Green in a career-best performance as a woman battling all sorts of supernatural threats in the 1800s. She's surrounded by strong actors in iconic parts from British fiction such as Dorian Gray and Frankenstein's monster and Van Helsing. But Green just stole the show and the series very wisely realized once they'd finished her journey in three seasons that it was time to call it a day. That makes this boxed set with a clear beginning and middle and end more satisfying than one might have expected seeing the series while it aired. Suddenly it all makes sense. *Penny Dreadful* probably surprised even itself when all is said and done.





CAMERAPERSON (\$39.95 BluRay; Criterion)

THE EAGLE HUNTRESS (\$26.99 BluRay; Sony Pictures Classics)

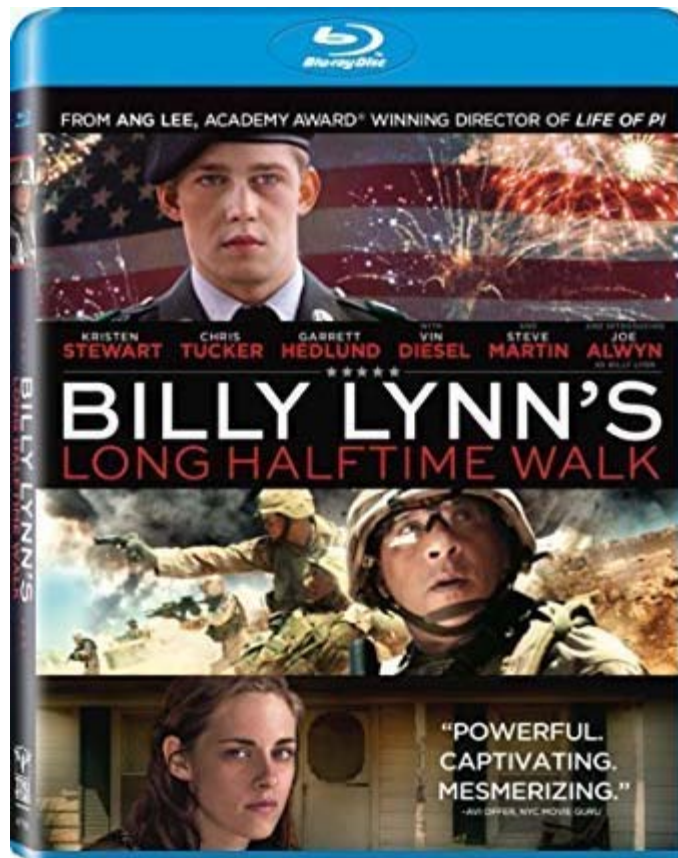
I'm so devoted to the Criterion label that it's almost a relief when I can suggest I am NOT crazy about one of their releases. It proves that when I rave about the other 99% of their output that I'm rooted in reality. What we have with *Cameraperson* is a home movie/essay by cinematographer and documentary filmmaker Kirsten Johnson. She's worked on many good films and here she looked at outtakes and her own home movie footage and wondered if perhaps she could use it to describe what it is she does and indeed *who* she is. (There's little difference between the two, if any.) So we see Johnson working on films, interviewing people and even profiling her own family because grabbing a camera is what she does, whether it's documenting human rights abuses in hotspots around the world or seeing her kids deal with the reality of a dead animal in their backyard. It's meandering and shapeless and pretty unsuccessful...and yet, it also has enough compelling fragments to make anyone with a pulse seek out her work, which they should. I saw it at MOMA where Johnson proved a particularly engaging and smart person, easily able to illuminate her art, deflect praise and comment intelligently on her career. Since she chose to not narrate the film, it's no surprise she doesn't do an audio commentary. But the extras will prove more compelling to most viewers, including roundtables, a making-of and one of her shorts. She's a real talent.

More accessible to most viewers, *The Eagle Huntress* is a crowd-pleaser of a documentary about a little girl breaking down barriers while preserving the vanishing art of hunting by eagle. It was a nail-biter of a

movie to shoot and you'll be quickly caught up in our young heroine's daring. It's nominated for Best Documentary and in the old days of the Oscars when everyone who voted on that category had to literally go and see them, I would have picked this as a wild card to win. As it is, I expect the superior *OJ: Made In America* to win. But you never know: this is awfully appealing.







THE EDGE OF SEVENTEEN (\$34.98 BluRay; Universal Studios Home Entertainment)

AKRON (\$26.95 DVD; Wolfe Video)

AMERICAN PASTORAL (\$24.99 BluRay; Lionsgate)

BILLY LYNN'S LONG HALFTIME WALK (\$30.99 BluRay; Sony Pictures Home Entertainment)

THE HANDMAIDEN (\$30.99 BluRay; Sony Pictures Home Entertainment)

Let's face it: it's not easy to make a good movie, even with the best of intentions. With a clear nod to John Hughes, *The Edge Of Seventeen* hoped to make a modern teen drama that did justice to kids today and the work of Hughes. Few people took high school as seriously as he did. Edge certainly does that, with a story about a sort-of loner high school gal who's super cool but somehow has very few friends. She feels betrayed when her best friend starts dating her super-hot brother, all the while ignoring the geeky but super cute guy in class who clearly has a crush on her. Woody Harrelson is the best thing here, playing a droll but supportive teacher. Hailee Steinfeld is immediately appealing as our star...but eventually the fact that the character she's playing is a pill catches up with the film. Enough already, you want to say. Her brother is fine, her BF is fine and please wake up to the guy who clearly wouldn't mind going on a date. Clueless is one thing; annoyingly indifferent to everyone around you is quite another.

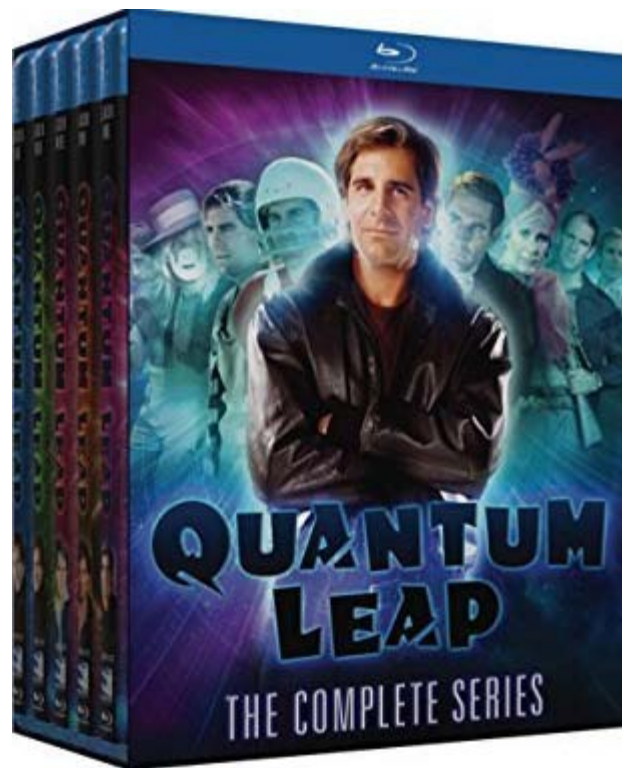
Akron approaches things from the opposite direction. It's entire purpose is to make the two lead characters in love very appealing indeed. They live in Akron, they're two young guys in love and that doesn't seem to make a bit of difference to them at all. It's post-gay in the sense that it's not about them being gay. Though of course the fact that it's so resolutely not about them being gay or "dealing" with that means it's sneakily very much about being gay. It doesn't accomplish much more than amiability but John Hughes would surely have been proud.

Ewan McGregor tackled a great deal when he made a Philip Roth novel his directorial debut. He falls short but you can't fault the man for ambition. After all, no one has done a really successful adaptation of Roth since *Portnoy's Complaint*. Why this great author remains so firmly resistant to being filmed remains a mystery to me. But puzzling over that doesn't make watching *American Pastoral* any more interesting. By all means, read the novel. If you do, I doubt you'll turn to the movie; you'll simply want to read more Philip Roth novels. Since Dylan just won the Nobel, he'll have to wait another five years or so for the brass ring but you don't have to wait to dive in. I'm sure McGregor would cheer you on.

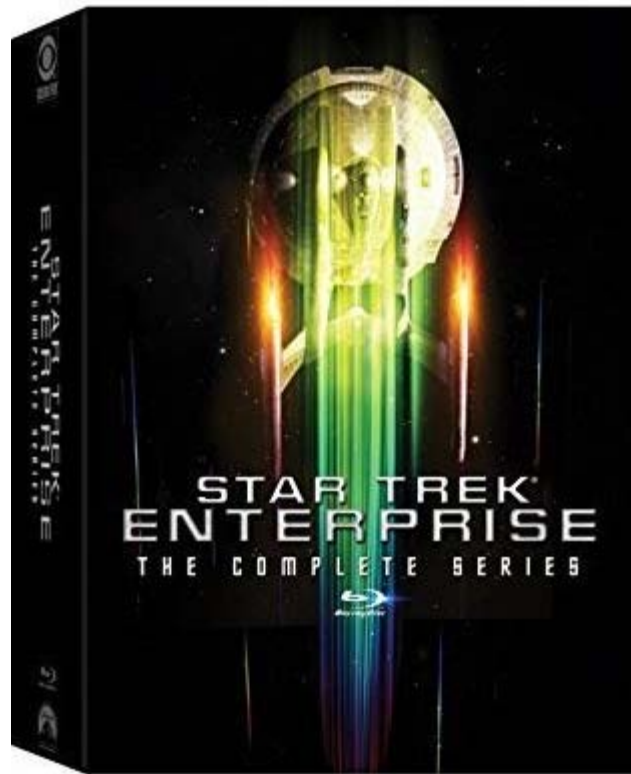
Director Ang Lee was one of the most empathetic directors around, finely attuned to the humanity in all his characters. But somehow he's become the George Lucas of drama, seemingly more interested in pushing technological boundaries than telling stories. He adapted the best-selling novel *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*, a simple story about a war hero reflecting on his experiences in battle while appearing as the centerpiece of a flashy football game's halftime show. For some reason, this intimate drama inspired Lee

to go whole hog on all sorts of innovations, including a super-high frame rate and other tech toys. It's all so cutting edge that only two screens in the entire country could show the film the way it was truly meant to be seen. (I unfortunately wasn't in New York City at the time.) It's hard not to feel that you're missing out and makes you wary of saying something doesn't work in this presentation — maybe it does work in that ideal viewing experience. I will say Kristen Stewart is better than expected and Joe Alwyn is a compelling presence. The movie? I...just don't know what to say except to say that it's unsatisfying here.

But then sometimes you tackle a crazy ambitious project and it works. Korean director Park Chan-wook is best known for the super violent flick *Oldboy*. But for some reason he decided to adapt the acclaimed novel *Fingersmith* by Sarah Waters and move the setting from Victorian England to Korea during its occupation by Japan. Of course! And it worked, with *The Handmaiden* garnering acclaim and substantial box office and a slot on many end of the year lists. The fact that some dudes know the director from *Oldboy* and unwittingly checked this out is just icing on the cake.







QUANTUM LEAP: THE COMPLETE SERIES (\$99.98 BluRay; Mill Creek Entertainment)

STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE — THE COMPLETE SERIES (\$144.99 DVD; Paramount)

DIRK GENTLY'S HOLISTIC DETECTIVE AGENCY SEASON ONE (\$34.98 BluRay; BBC)

STAR TREK ENTERPRISE: THE COMPLETE SERIES (\$117.99 BluRay; Paramount)

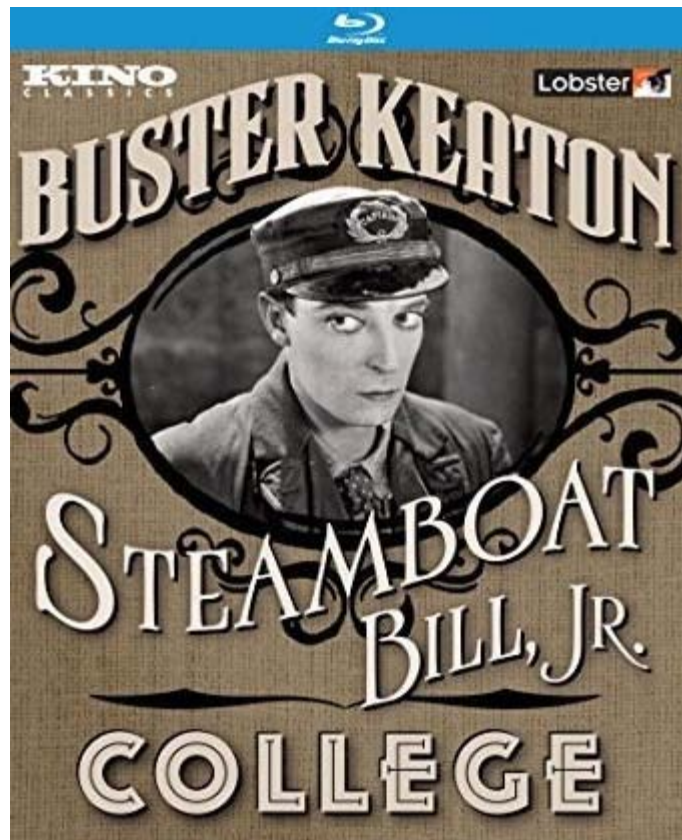
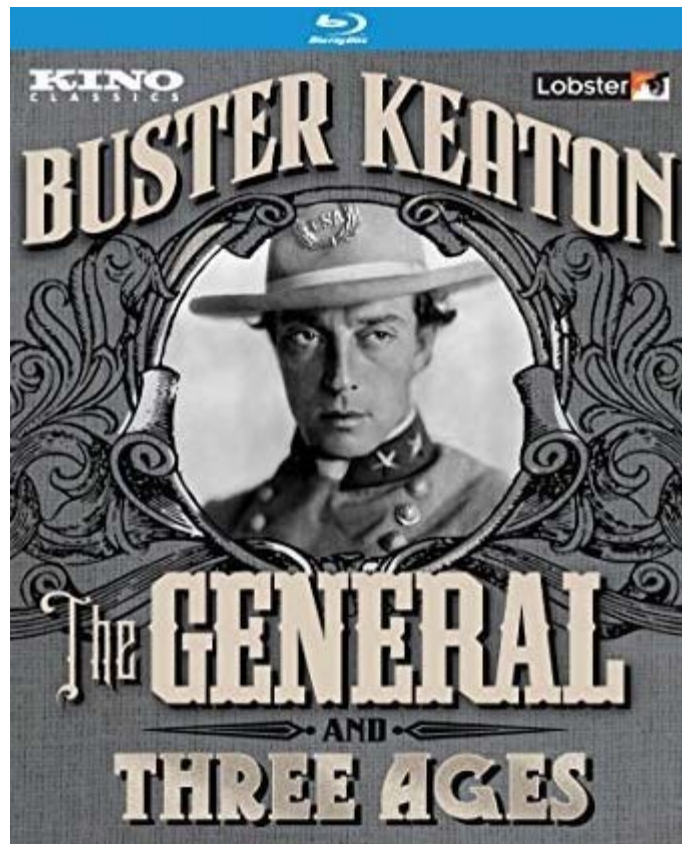
Scott Bakula is the TV star bookends for these collections of sci-fi series boxed sets. Up first is his claim to fame *Quantum Leap*. It's never quite as good as one wished. But for innovation and silly "let's give it a try" loopiness, the show about a guy who could leap about in time (and leap into other people's bodies) is just plain fun. Bonus points for giving Dean Stockwell new juice as our time-traveling pal's hologram best pal. They did it all here and Bakula anchored it with seeming ease. Bakula never even being nominated for Best Actor is one of the clearer examples of Emmy's prejudice against sci-fi/fantasy.

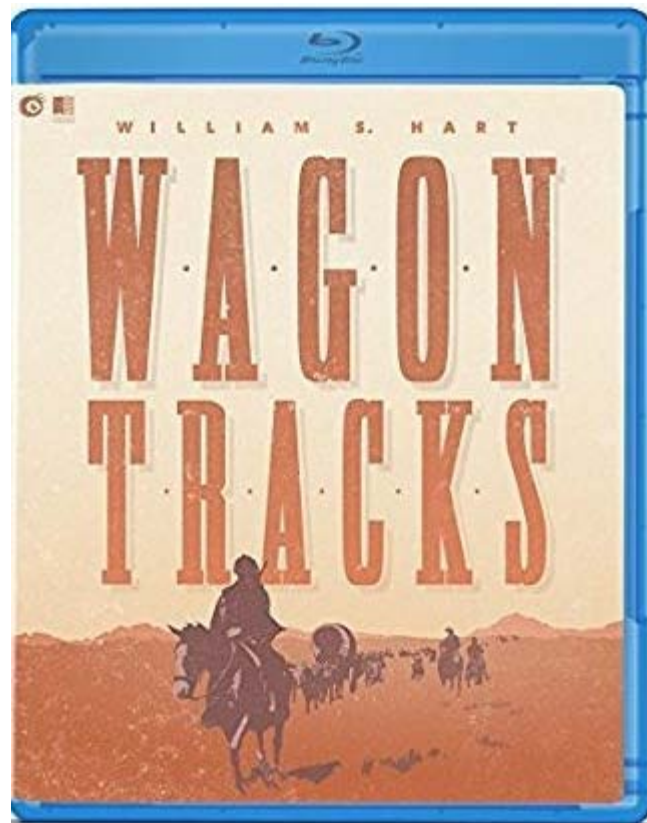
The ever-growing *Star Trek* franchise doubled down on the success of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* by breaking all the rules. *Deep Space Nine* was set on a space station, rather than a ship, so *it's completely different!* Not really, but that simple change allowed the universe they were exploring to feel fresh and different from what came before and what would come after. I remain a little puzzled as to how it ran for seven seasons (just two episodes fewer than *ST:TNG*) and why some fans insist it's the best series of all. I think I'm always resistant to depicting an entire race/species as having a particular characteristic, whether it's violent Klingons or coldly logical Vulcans. But I'm especially wary of greedy Ferengi as toying with ugly stereotypes. But hey Tolkien did that too with some races, like goblins and Orcs. Nonetheless, this boxed

set is big and handsome and you can watch it all and argue over how it fits into *Star Trek* to your heart's content.

Oh Douglas Adams, we miss you still. That explains my eagerness to watch Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency, even though I didn't really enjoy *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* even when Adams was writing them. Nonetheless it is a Douglas Adams property and thus one step away from *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy* and thus sacred. As a serious bonus, it stars Elijah Wood and Samuel Barnett, two actors I find immensely appealing. In a way, it works better in this medium because the fact that seemingly disparate storylines happen to link up on some quantum level actually mocks both the predilections of many mystery novels and the plotting of many TV shows to delicious effect. It's very, very offbeat and not everyone's cup of tea by a long stretch. But it has its own weird pull and if you are intrigued by eccentricity, go for it. 42!

Finally, back to Bakula and his stint on the starship Enterprise. The series *Star Trek Enterprise* had a lot of ups and downs in just four seasons. But just as it found its footing it was ended. Every other *Star Trek* series outstayed their welcome creatively but not this one, more's the pity. It's already out on DVD so this is the oddly delayed BluRay debut for the complete series. (You'd think they'd do them the other way around or just the BluRay but in fact, DVD is remaining the format of choice for elaborate sets while BluRay is falling by the wayside.) Can't say that I see any picture improvement in the BluRay set compared to the DVD but I can't speak to any audio upgrade. It's certainly not worse than the DVD set overall so if you want BluRay for some reason and the price is the same, go for it. Otherwise, stick with the DVD.





THE GENERAL/THE THREE AGES (\$29.99 BluRay; Kino Lorber)

STEAMBOAT BILL JR./COLLEGE (\$29.99 BluRay; Kino Lorber)

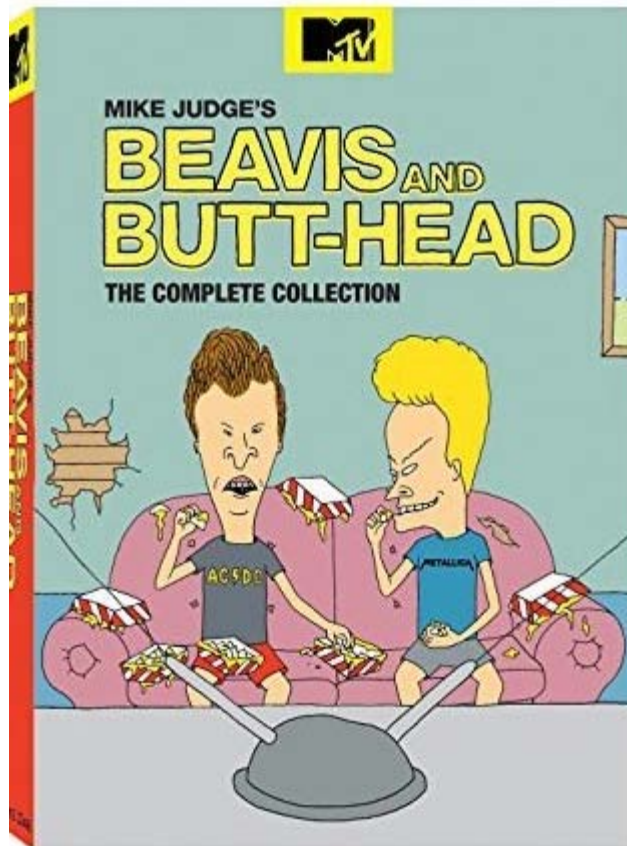
NO HIGHWAY IN THE SKY (\$29.95 BluRay; Kino Lorber)

WAGON TRACKS (\$24.95 BluRay; Olive Films)

You can't get tired of saying it: Buster Keaton is a film god. It's hard to believe at one point he slipped into obscurity. Not because great artists don't slip from view from time to time. But because his particular films are so damn entertaining. It's not like I wonder what took people so long to get about Ozu or Kiezlowski. But Keaton? It's like not enjoying the Beatles. *The General* is easy to tout as his masterpiece...until you watch again and again *Steamboat Bill Jr.* and *Sherlock Jr.* and countless shorts that are a delight. (As are Chaplin's, whose shorts are probably better than his features for trim and perfect joy.) These new editions aren't color tinted and don't seem any improvement one way or another over other recent editions. But they're such fun you'd love them even in scratchy prints with bad sound.

No Highway In The Sky is about a scientist (Jimmy Stewart) traveling on a new type of plane. Somehow, he's determined that this make and model will fall apart after a certain number of hours in the air and he's horrified to realize he's on one of those planes and it's going to hit that magic number during this flight. Increasingly panicked, he enlists fellow passenger Marlene Dietrich and others to help him convince the pilot to ground this sucker immediately. It's the sort of adult melodrama you might say Hollywood doesn't make any more. Except it does, with *Sully* being the most likely recent example. It's malarkey but a game cast makes it sort of fun.

Wagon Tracks on the other hand is a Western, the sort of movie that Hollywood really doesn't make anymore. Oh of course they do on occasion make Westerns, but they're always westerns with quotation marks — "westerns," as in westerns with a post-modern spin (*Django Unchained*) or westerns with a feminist spin (*The Ballad Of Little Jo*) or westerns that subvert the western tropes. Back in the early days of Hollywood, westerns were creating those tropes and William S. Hart was one of the iconic actors putting his stamp on them. This 1919 western was completely unknown to me but it's like manna from heaven for a real western fan. Hart absolutely defined the genre, making a series of hugely popular shorts, naming his signature horse Fritz (and turning steeds into sidekicks as popular as their rider in the process), directing and more. He was the biggest star around by some accounts for a few years. When he was down making Westerns, by god he started writing them. *Wagon Tracks* has great visuals, a great score and was hugely praised in its day. It's a fine place to start when appreciating one of silent cinema's unjustly forgotten pioneers.



BEAVIS AND BUTT-HEAD: THE COMPLETE COLLECTION (\$45.98 DVD; Paramount)

I aggressively avoided *Beavis and Butt-Head* when they were on MTV. Sure, lots of videos could be mocked; I did it too. I just didn't see the point of watching some nimrods do the mocking for me. Somehow that seemed like laziness of an entirely new level or just way too meta for me. Then I saw the movie *Beavis and Butt-Head Do America* and I laughed. A lot. I'm as shocked as you are to confess it. So I was happy when they returned for a new season of silly comments, the first of which would surely be "Does MTV still show music videos?" Yeah, they watched *Jersey Show* too, but that's sort of mock-proof since it's so dumb to begin with. Here you get the "complete" *Beavis and Butt-Head*. And by complete you get the original three compilations that creator Mike Judge approved, the fourth new season and the movie (which is the only part I really care about). Most of the show remains unavailable because Judge found the early stuff too weak, they can't get approval for the music video clips without breaking the bank on licensing fees and so on. So it's a very incomplete complete collection but it's the best you're gonna get for now.

REGISTER TO VOTE!!

It's easy, it's fun, it's empowering.

Here's a nonpartisan site that will allow you to easily access your state's voter registration site.

Are you in New York? You can register online right here.

If you don't register and vote, you don't get to complain.

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.