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## Michael Giltz

Freelance writer and raconteur

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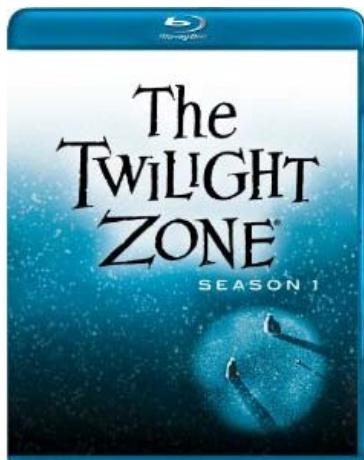
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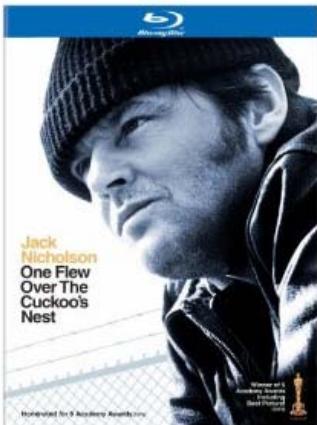
THE TWILIGHT ZONE SEASON 1 (\$99.98 on BluRay; Image/CBS) -- You don't need me to tell you

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about this show, do you? It's landmark television, one of the rare dramas from before the 1980s that actually holds up, thanks to great writing, cinematography, casting and a willingness to leave an audience uneasy. Of course, like any anthology, it's uneven week to week, but Rod Serling's masterpiece has a good batting average, even though watching an entire season reminds you that not every episode was a gem about a guy who wanted to live forever, aliens hiding out in a diner and so on. What gets me really excited here is the BluRay. Image put out a great boxed set of regular DVDs which even included a paperback book episode guide. It seemed like the pinnacle of compactness. This BluRay makes it look like a regular customer at McDonald's. No, it doesn't contain that book as a bonus. But this very slim volume contains a mountain of fresh extras (like 19 new commentaries, 18 radio dramas, interviews, and a rare unofficial pilot) and best of all 36 episodes that have never looked better. It all fits snugly on a shelf, taking up no more space than any ole regular movie DVD. You owe it to your family to make certain this is waiting quietly in the TV room when one of your 12 or 13 year old kids can casually pull it down and unsuspectingly put in a disc and then flip out in the best way possible.



**ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST COLLECTOR'S EDITION** (\$49.99 BluRay and \$39.99 regular; Warner Bros.) -- Okay, first thing's first. It's a great movie and a huge improvement on the rather heavy-handed symbolism of the book. Jack Nicholson isn't going to be anyone's Christ-like figure, thank you very much. He's too alive, too ornery, too rambunctious for that. If you love the movie or have never seen it, these are great editions with loads of extras. And I sympathize with the studios: outlets like Wal-Mart simply won't stock a library of DVDs; once a movie sells out, they often don't reorder it. So if WB wants to see them sell *Cuckoo's Nest*, they have to put out a new edition every year or so. The problem however is that every new edition seems to cost more than the one before. In 1997 it came out on DVD and cost \$15. In 2002, a two-disc special edition cost about \$27. In 2008, it came out on BluRay and cost more. And now today, 35 years after it was released in theaters, *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* lists for \$40 or \$50. At this rate, in 20 years you'll have to take out a small loan to buy the movie. And this is symbolic of the entire DVD industry, not a rare or strange occurrence. Plus, the box it comes in is about two and a half times thicker than the *Twilight Zone* set. Half of that space is taken up with a cardboard filler holding a deck of *Cuckoo's Nest* cards, which is cute but hardly worth all that. It also contains a booklet filled with glossy photos which is lovely and yes, the movie is worth the hoopla. But are people really desperate for gimmicky little extras and ever increasing prices? This is not the answer to the natural slowdown in DVD sales that occurred after people built up a library of DVDs and then settled into a less hectic buying pattern. Again, if you love *Cuckoo's Nest*, it's never looked better and the edition is smashing. But even on sale it costs five times as much as the version that came out 13 years ago. Shouldn't these prices be going down?

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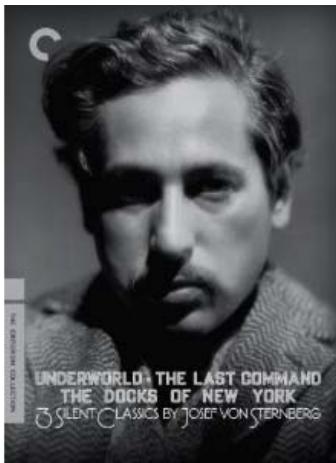


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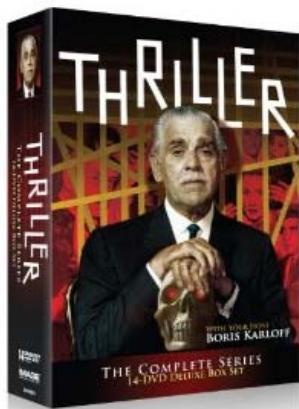


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**3 SILENT CLASSICS BY JOSEF VON STERNBERG** (\$79.95; Criterion) -- And then there are the boxed sets that are worth every penny. That's true of virtually everything Criterion puts out. But this collection is exceptional even by their standards. Thanks to [Roger Ebert's film festival](#), I had the chance to see two of the movies contained here in a gorgeous cinema (the Virginia Theatre) with live musical accompaniment by the Alloy Orchestra. All three are gems. *The Docks Of New York* (1928) is a gorgeous look at a working class romance filmed in stunning black and white with remarkable sets. (Is that enough adjectives in one sentence for you?) *Underworld* (1927) is an entertaining tale that served as the model for every gangster flick that came in its wake. But it's *The Last Command* (1928) that really blew me away. Emil Jannings is a broken down man in Hollywood looking for work, any work and humiliates himself by going on cattle calls for movies. Unexpectedly, this immigrant is cast to play a Russian general and flashbacks soon prove he really WAS a Russian general once upon a time. Cutting back and forth between a Russian tale of spies, intrigue and romance with the current story of Hollywood, it moves to a remarkable, stunning finale in which our hero loses his mind and truly believes he is back on the field of battle, commanding troops. Wonderfully subtle and very moving, thanks to supporting actors like William Powell and above all Jannings. A masterpiece. All three films boast two scores, as well as interviews/essays. The set includes a thoughtful, well-written booklet with multiple essays, a piece by Sternberg about Jannings and even the Ben Hecht short story that inspired *Underworld*.



**THRILLER THE COMPLETE SERIES** (\$149.98; Image) -- Stephen King calls the anthology show *Thriller* "the best horror series ever put on TV." But that's not saying much, since TV rarely tackled straight-on horror and even less rarely did it well. It's main competition would be *Night Gallery* or *Tales From the Crypt*, I suppose. But not at first. At the beginning, even *Thriller* wasn't certain about its role and the first few episodes jump back and forth from crime sagas (or thrillers) to horror tales (thrillers with chillers). That's where its sweet spot lay and the show soon shined there. A raft of guest stars like Richard Chamberlain, Mary Tyler Moore, William Shatner et al filled the episodes, stories of down on their luck artists pawning their soul for success, a suit from a tailor with a twisted imagination and so on. Boris Karloff served as the host and pitched in once in a while. Image has restored the episodes with care, though ironically one of the most famous episodes -- "Pigeons From Hell" -- has one of the weaker transfers, presumably because no better source material was available. (It's still quite acceptable, just not up to the standards of the best-looking ones here.) The set contains all 67 episodes from the two season run, as well as 27 new audio commentary tracks, stills and show promos. I'm not a huge horror buff and the series wasn't well-served by being an hour long. (Even Rod Serling had trouble stretching out tales to

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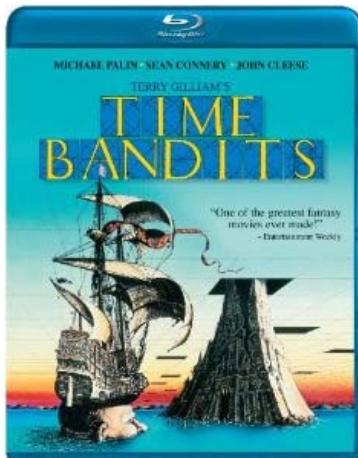
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an hour. The half hour episode is a short story. The hour-long episode is a novella and novellas are tricky.) That said, it's a notable series presented with care that fans will appreciate, just not as thrilling for the newcomer as you might hope.



**GEORGE HARRISON'S HANDMADE FILMS** -- As if being a Beatle and fine solo artist weren't enough, George Harrison also "dabbled" in film. I put "dabbled" in quotes because his label -- Handmade Films -- was for a time a sure sign of quality and quirkiness. Four of his best are now out on BluRay and look wonderful. *The Long Good Friday* was the breakthrough, a brutal British gangster film that turned Bob Hoskins into a movie star in the UK. I first became aware of Handmade when I saw *Time Bandits*, the delightful fantasy film that proved Terry Gilliam was more than just one of the Monty Python gang. It's a playful, dizzy tale of a child careening through one fantasy world after another with pre-digital special effects that are -- wait for it -- hand-made and all the more captivating because of it. I'm still waiting for the sequel. *Mona Lisa* was the drama that put Hoskins in the first rank of actors by letting his mug of a guy fall for a beautiful call girl. But *Withnail And I* is the final masterpiece, a genuine cult classic. When I worked at Premiere, one of the editors chided me mightily for not having seen it yet. Boy was she right. It's an odd, discursive sort of movie but you'll be quoting it -- "I mean to have you even if it must be burglary!" -- for weeks and months and years to come. It's a career peak for all involved and a bitterly funny shambling tale about two dissolute actors in 1960s London. It's a good thing the movies only list for \$18 from Image, because they don't seem to be remastered. You get a decent quality print and minimal or no extras. That's fine by me; you can't ask for a huge outlay on remastering and then moan about the increased cost. So no need to upgrade if you already have them, but if you don't own these films you most certainly should.

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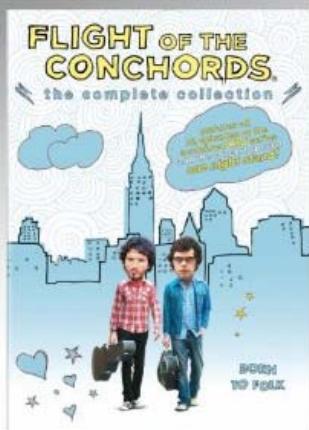
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**THE FLIGHT OF THE CONCHORDS COMPLETE COLLECTION** (\$49.98; HBO) -- I'm sure some of the fanatically devoted fans (call them "mels") of this sitcom one invariably calls "quirky" are sad to see it over after just two seasons. They're wrong. This slight but charming tale of two New Zealand musicians sort of making it in New York made the most of its 22 episodes and was very smart to call it a day. Now it can settle into cult comedy classic, get name-checked by every rock star stuck on the road, and be watched over and over until the funniest bits are sunk into your brain and refuse to leave. This set duplicates another "complete" collection but that one contained a CD of their delightfully daffy songs while this one contains instead their US debut on HBO's *One Night Stand*.

\*\*\*\*\*

Thanks for reading. Michael Giltz is 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 free on [iTunes](#). Visit [Michael Giltz at his website](#) and his [daily blog](#). Download his podcast of celebrity interviews and his radio show, also called *Popsurfing* and also available for free on [iTunes](#). Link to him on [Netflix](#) and gain access to thousands of ratings and reviews.

*NOTE: Michael Giltz is provided with free copies of DVDs to consider for review. He typically does not guarantee coverage and invariably receives far more screeners and DVDs than he can cover each week. Also, Michael Giltz freelances as a writer of DVD copy (the text that appears on the back of DVDs) for some titles released by IFC and other subsidiaries of MPI. It helps pay the rent, but does not obligate him in any way to speak positively or negatively of their titles.*

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