



Michael Giltz, ContributorBookFilter creator

## DVDs: We're Thinking John Wick Is Back (Sort of); So Is Lego Batman, Criterion and More!

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Our column is labeled DVDs just for convenience sake. You'll know which actual format we reviewed in because that's the one listed along with the price. (Usually, it's BluRay.) Most titles come in a combo pack of some sort, including BluRay or DVD and a digital copy or BluRay and DVD AND a digital copy. Plus movies are available to purchase digitally often before they come out on DVD and so on. So by the time we cover it most titles are available most ways you imagine for home entertainment purposes, so just go to whatever platform you fancy. Enjoy!



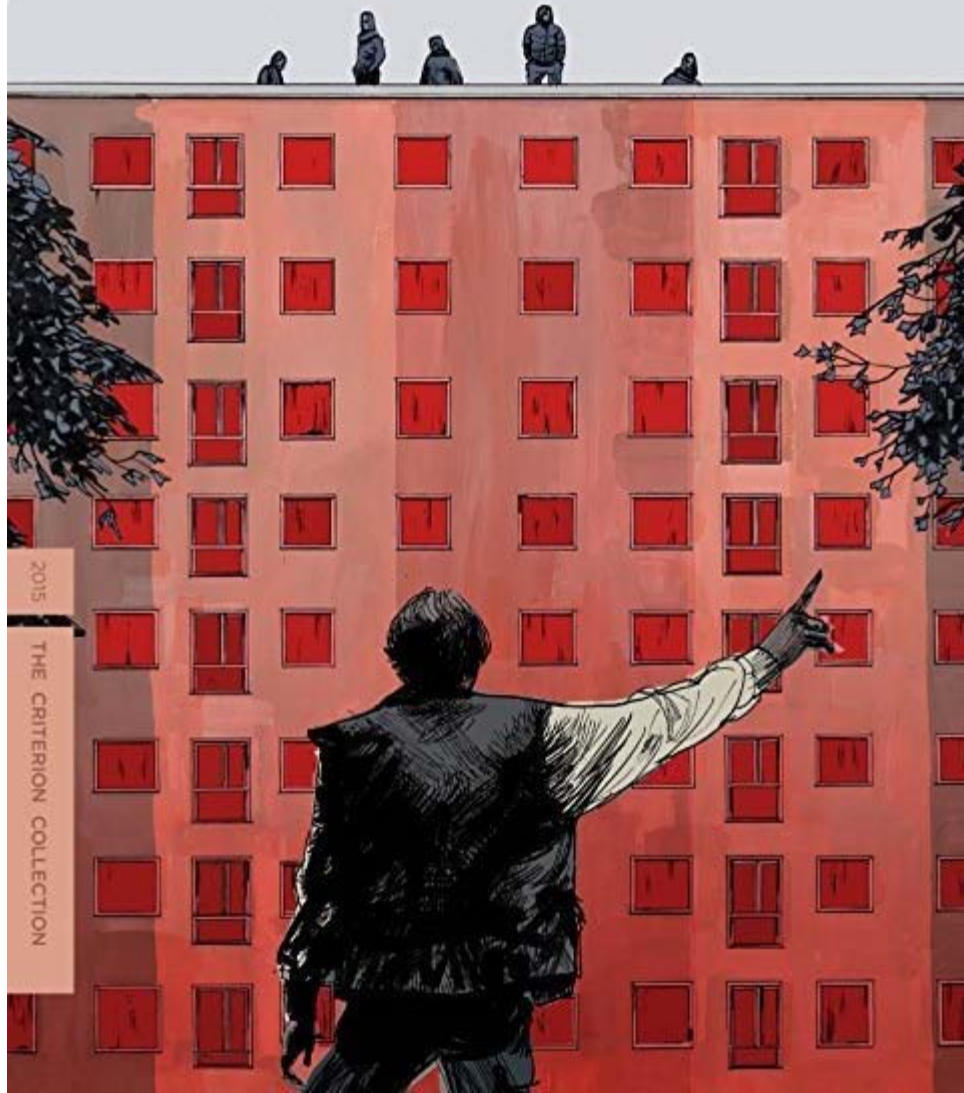
## **JOHN WICK CHAPTER 2** (\$39.99 BluRay; Summit/Lionsgate)

The first *John Wick* film was such an unexpected, dirty little treat that the sequel is inevitably a letdown. How can you top a movie where our assassin hero is offing villains and ALWAYS kills people with a head shot, a gratuitously violent and needlessly show off-ish way of killing people that it set an absurd, video game tone that was precisely what the film strove for. Plus the plot was powered by the fact that the bad guys killed John Wick's adorable dog. What could they do next? Kill his cat? All the things one might have longed for are missing here. But they did try. Wick makes Clint Eastwood of spaghetti western fame seem verbose in the original. Here he speaks terse dialogue...but in about a dozen languages. It's a funny conceit made funnier by the fact that Keanu Reeve's accent is hilariously bad in every single one. You felt the film was giving every country its own little chuckle at how badly he mangled their mother tongue from France to Russia on down. He and Common as a rival professional assassin/bodyguard have a great rapport. It's a pity they didn't make the natural choice of letting them team up against other bad guys before having to have a final mano a mano battle. Or at least ride off into the sunset together. It's fine if you want some ultra-violence, but it's no *John Wick, Chapter 1*.



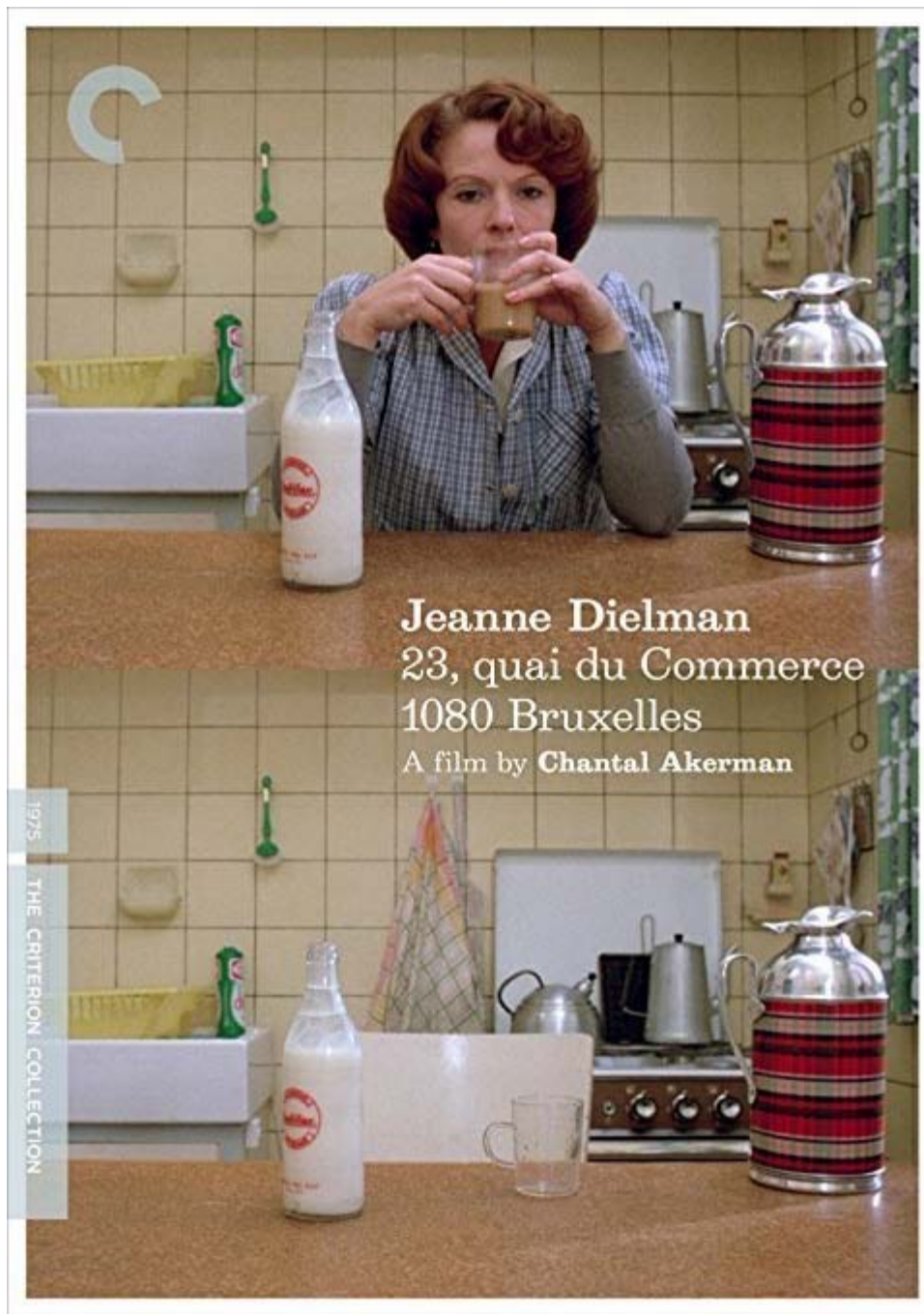
# DHEEPAN

A FILM BY JACQUES AUDIARD



2015

THE CRITERION COLLECTION

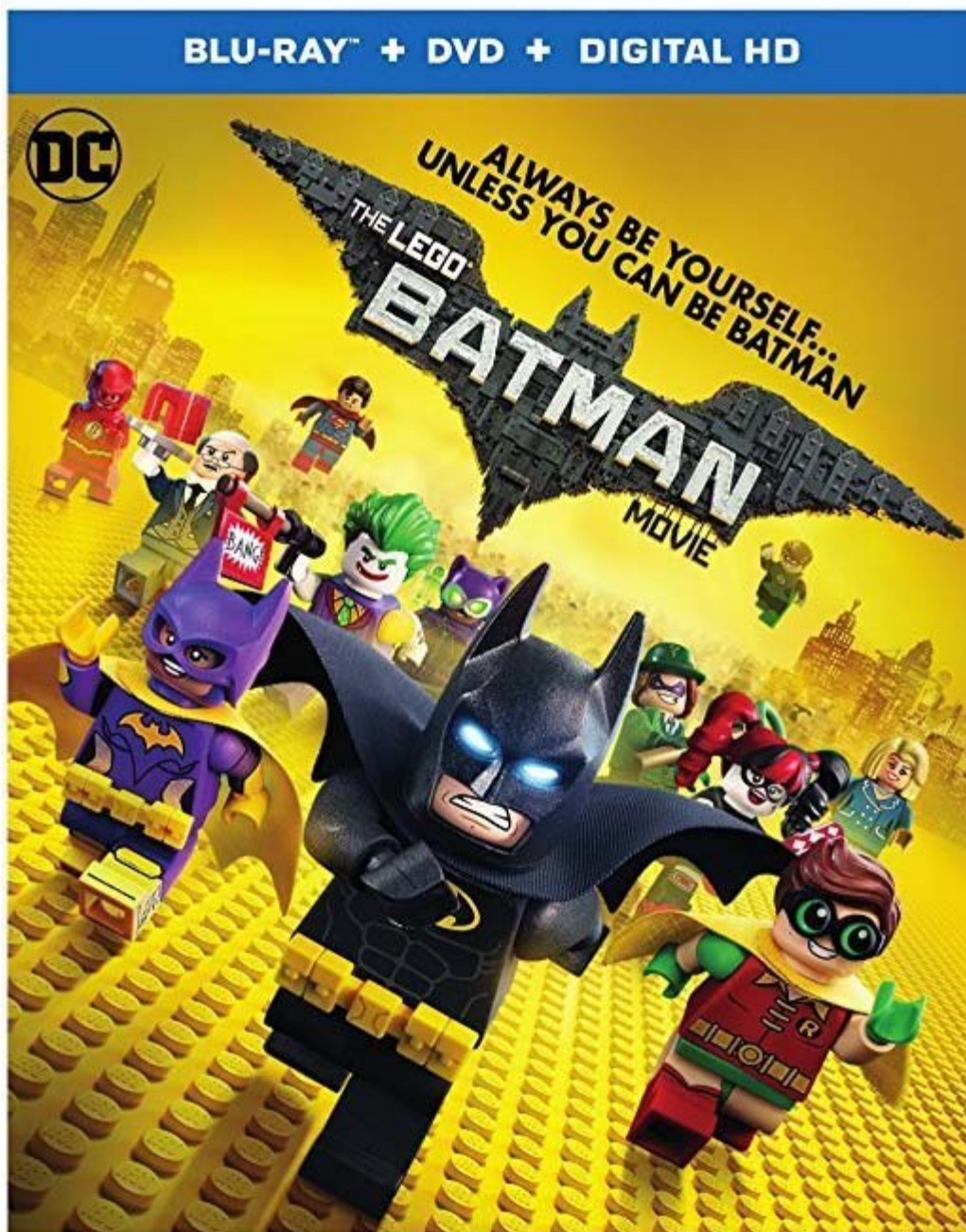


**DHEEPAN** (\$29.95 DVD; Criterion)

**JEANNE DIELMAN 23, QUAI DU COMMERCE 1080 BRUXELLES** (\$29.99 DVD; Criterion)

Criterion remains the gold standard by which every other specialty label is judged. Other than their brief, unadvised (and financially profitable) foray into the films of Michael Bay, Criterion has maintained the highest standards. When a new filmmaker gets their work added to their roster, I imagine they feel pride akin to becoming a member of the DGA or the Academy and that it means more than many awards. Combined with their excellent curation of classic cinema, Criterion becomes the de facto baseline for considering the best of movies around the world. Working your way through their films is as good an education (and pleasure) as any

film lover could ask for. Case in point, the two films featured here. Director Jacques Audiard is one of the bright lights of world cinema right now, starting with his brilliant gangster flick *A Prophet*. Since then he's confounded me with his forays into all sorts of areas, including *Dheepan*. This mashes up several genres as it tells the story of a Tamil fighter who yearns to start fresh in a suburb of Paris. Unfortunately, it's rife with drug gangs and his skill set is sadly still in demand. It won the Palme d'Or at Cannes, as much a makeup for not winning sooner as for this film. The extras are modest by Criterion standards (audio commentary, new interviews, etc.) but it's presented with care and that's what matters. In contrast, *Jeanne Dielman* is a stone cold masterpiece. It's a confounding movie to describe and like *My Dinner With Andre* casual movie fans can't believe you'd actually watch it. What? It's almost three and a half hours long and you dispassionately watch a woman going about her day in the apartment, making meals and doing chores and so on? Really? The fact that at some point she's actually turning a trick doesn't add to the naughty factor; it's as dispassionate and matter of course as everything else in the film. The miracle is how riveting it is. Often on critics' lists of the greatest films of all time, it's a must see for how spare and yet compelling actually watching can be. Since director Chantal Ackerman recently died, revisiting this towering work is all the more welcome and it comes with Criterion's usual copious extras.



**THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE** (\$35.99 BluRay; Warner Bros.)

Like *John Wick*, I just assumed *The Lego Movie* was a lucky fluke. How could they maintain that larky, tightrope walk of a tone for any sequels. Nonetheless, Lego and Warner Bros. greedily insisted this wasn't a one-off but the launch of — god help us — a Lego cinematic universe. Well, damned if the first spin-off isn't a success after all. Don't ask me how since Batman's droll self-spoofery seemed the perfect spice to *The Lego Movie*. Will Arnett was very funny but giving him his own movie seemed about as smart as giving Abe Vigoda's Fish his own spin-off from the TV show *Barney Miller*. (Gosh, I'm old!) And yet, with a clever script and a desire to not JUST mock itself but mock itself sweetly and with heart and tell a pretty good story, they've pulled it off. I've gone from warily looking forward to *The Lego Movie 2* to *actually* looking forward to it...and even some of the other spin-offs.

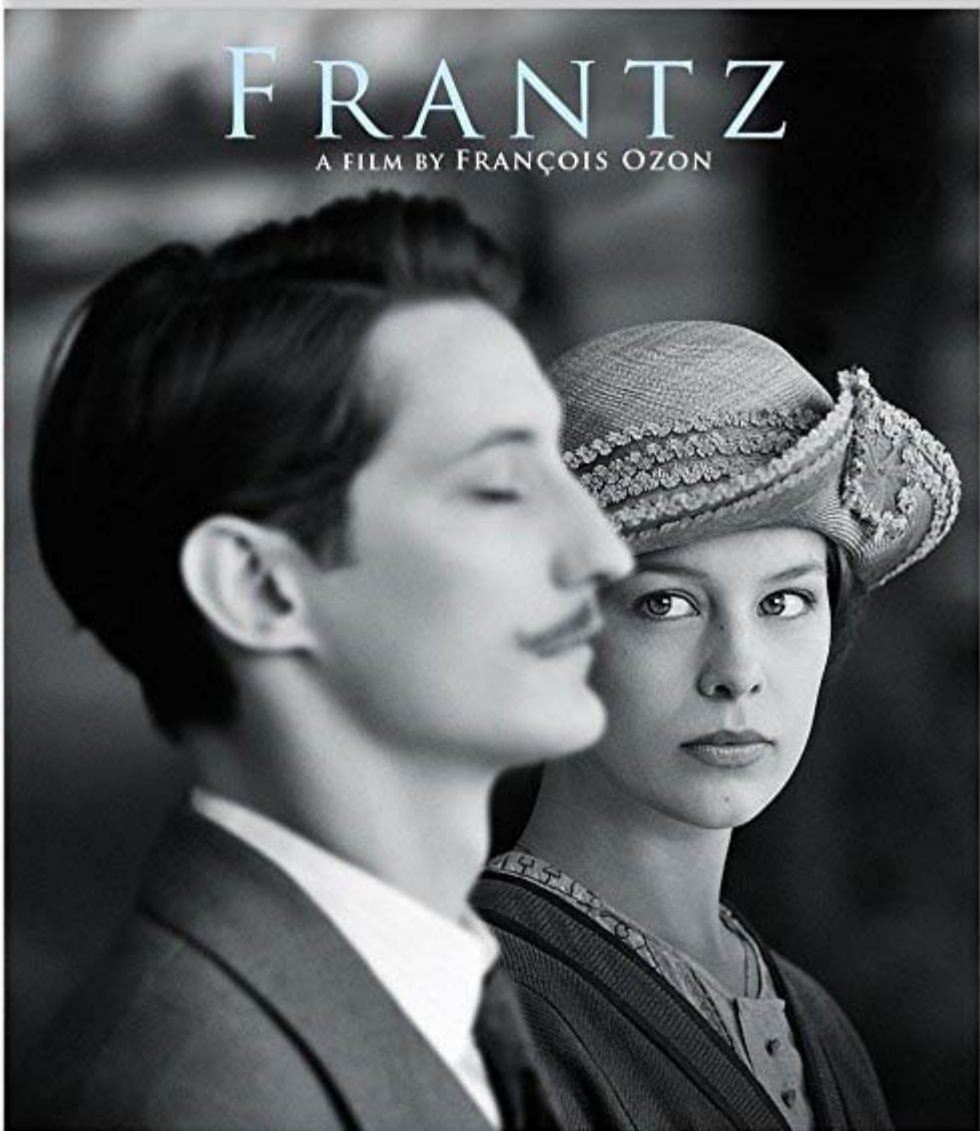
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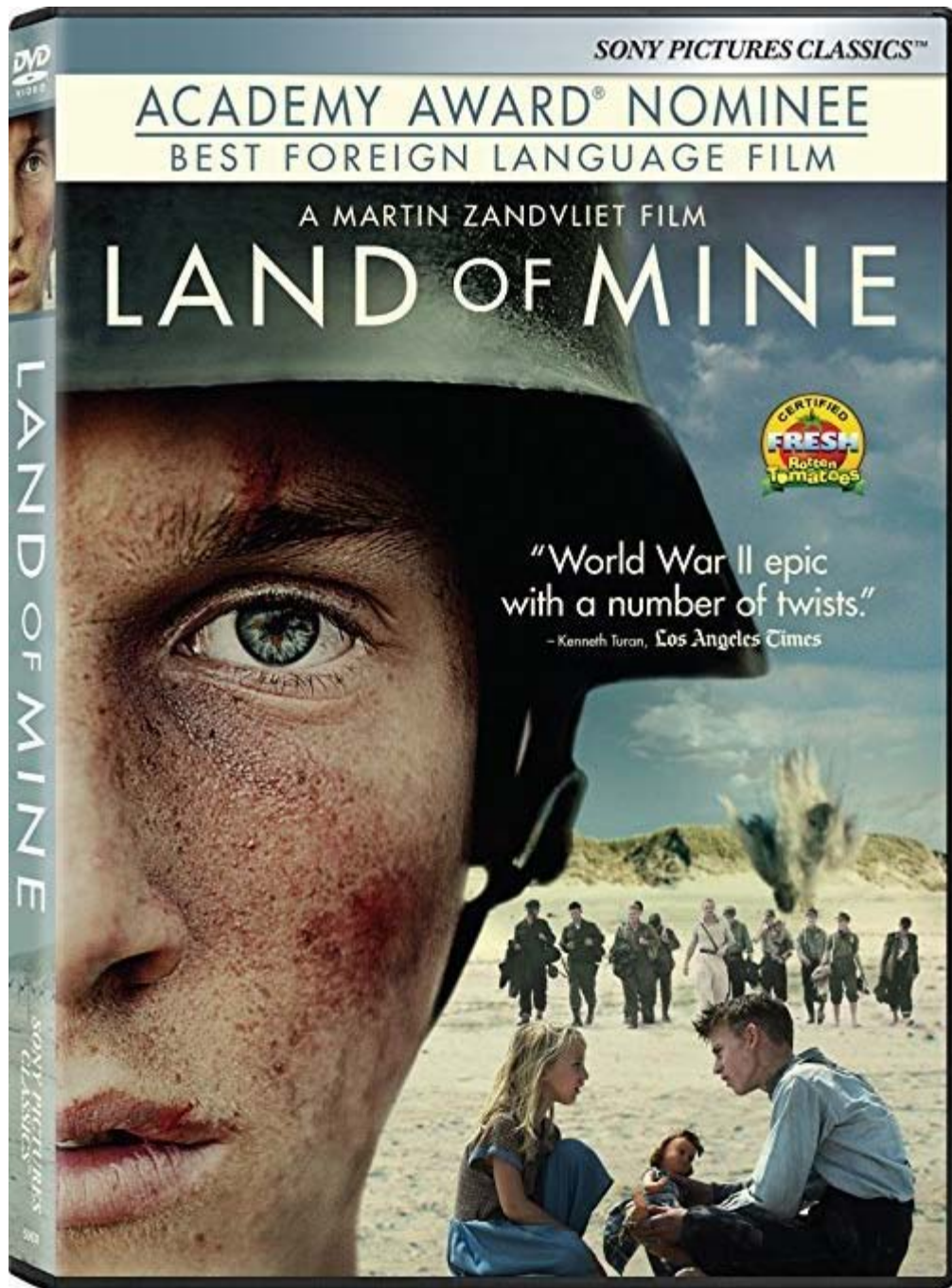
# FRANTZ

A FILM BY FRANÇOIS OZON

FRANTZ

FRANTZ





**FRANTZ** (\$34.95 BluRay; Music Box Films)

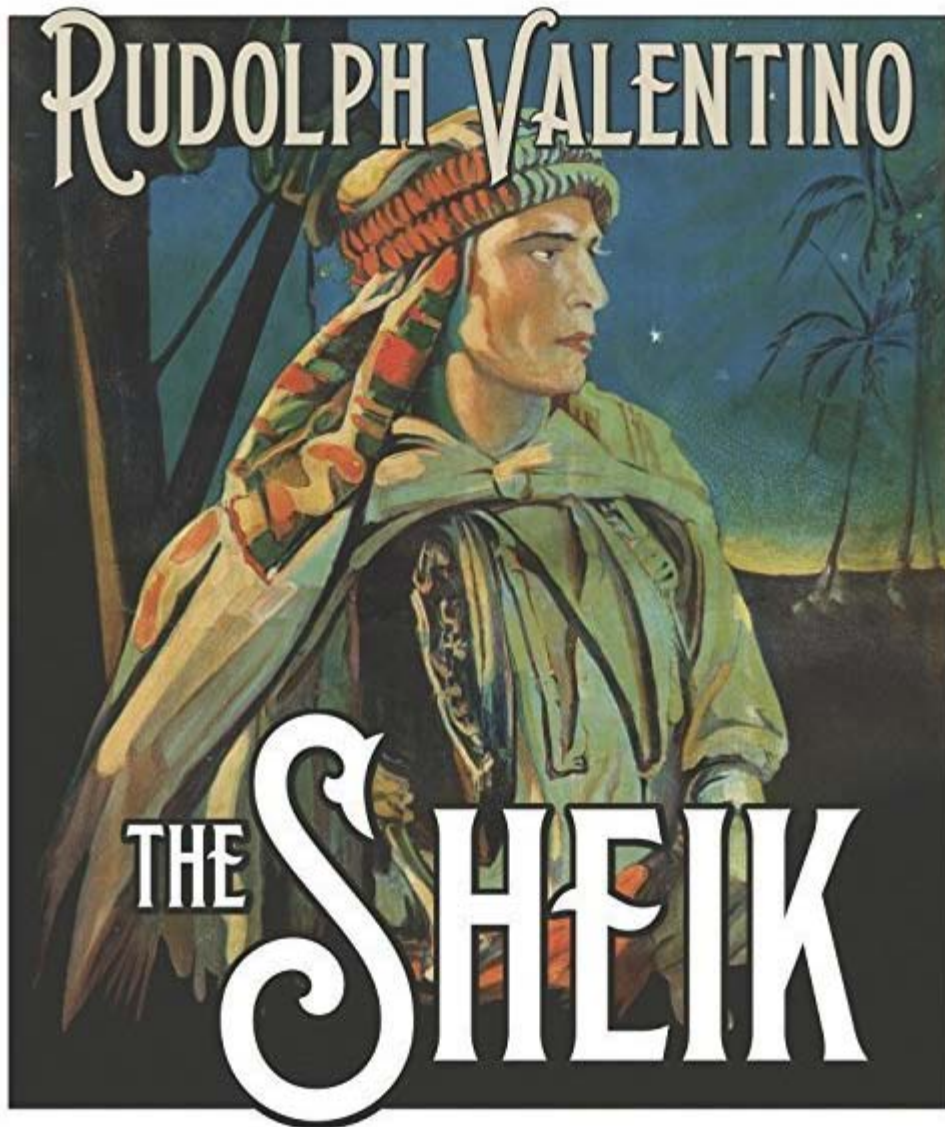
**LAND OF MINE** (\$26.99 DVD; Sony Pictures Home Entertainment)

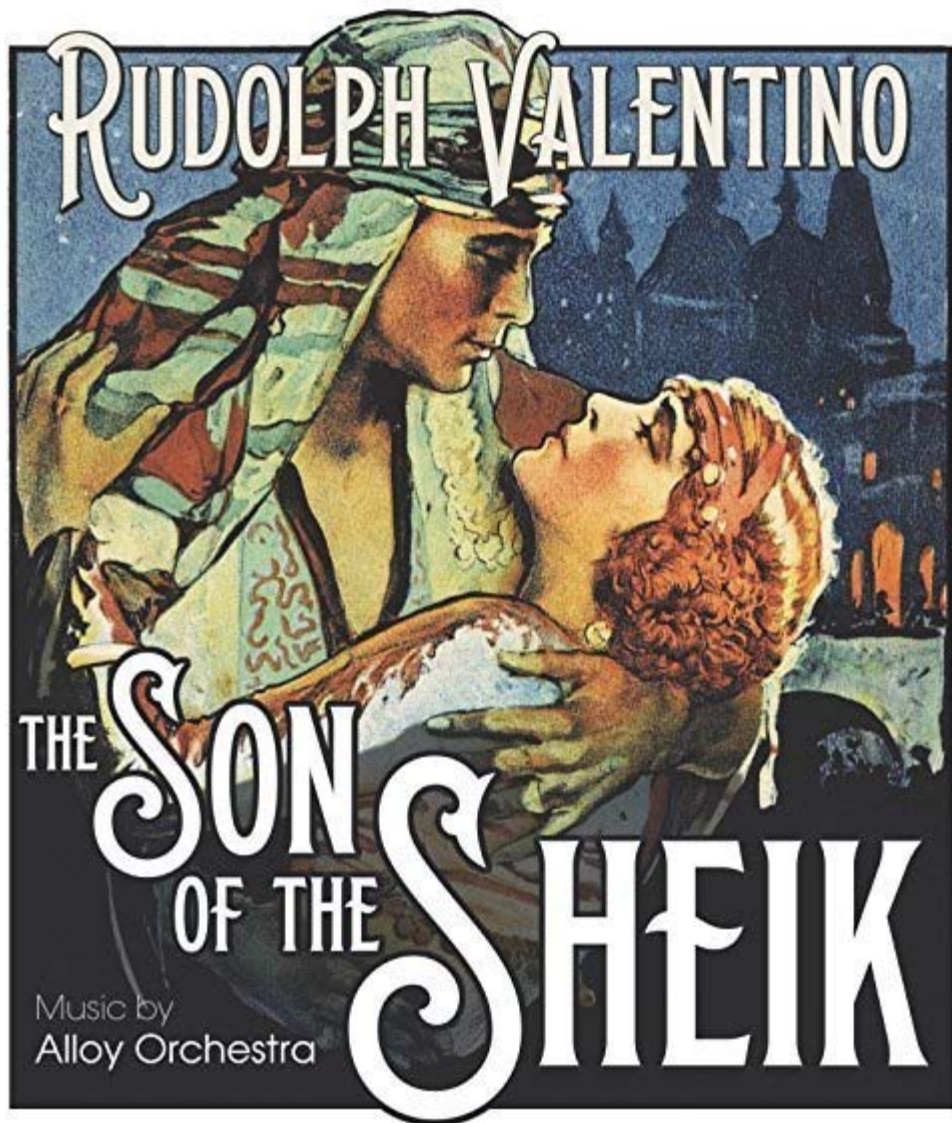
Director Francois Ozon has been making movies at a breakneck speed, and not always with the quality control one would hope for. Still, he's not in decline so much as inconsistent, or rather bi-curious when it comes to genres and styles. He's pretty much up for anything and rather than worrying about whether it will work he worries about remaining stale and timid. No chance of that. Suddenly, I think Ozon is best compared to German director Rainer Werner Fassbinder, who also made movies at a breakneck speed before dying far too young. It's an apt comparison since Ozon's latest is set in a small German village after WW I where the young



widow (acclaimed Paula Beer) of Frantz is upset and then intrigued when a very handsome young French soldier shows up to leave flowers on Frantz's grave. They were quite good friends, somehow. Hmm.

Jump to World War II and you'll find the setting for *Land Of Mine*, a story about young German soldiers captured by the Dutch before war's end. They're put to work, disabling thousands of land mines littering fields. With little or no training, it's frightening, soul-crushing work that makes the Western front somehow rather appealing. An Oscar nominee for Best Foreign Film (I wish they'd change that to Best International Film), *Land Of Mine* got some fine reviews but little attention at the US box office, which is precisely why God invented the DVD.





**THE SHEIK** (\$29.95 BluRay; Kino Lorber)

**THE SON OF THE SHEIK** (\$29.95 BluRay; Kino Lorber)

Almost a century later, the Orientalism of the novel and film *The Sheik* combined with the pretty boy allure of star Rudolph Valentino remain powerful lures. The story is of a woman sexually drawn to a dark, desert sheik who rapes her (though in the film it's hinted at so subtly you might think it was more like consent rather than a violent assault). Nonetheless, the real allure was the romance of the Middle East and the unmistakable allure of Valentino, who became an instant sensation a la Leonardo DiCaprio in *Titanic*. And as with *Star Wars*, the movie was somehow an instant success, inspiring lines around the block before anyone behind the film had a clue as to what was happening. It became one of the first films to gain a "wide release" when its stunning success led producers to play the film on 250 screens nationwide in the same week. Women swooned, men questioned whether Valentino was a "real" man (despite being so pretty, he was indeed heterosexual by all

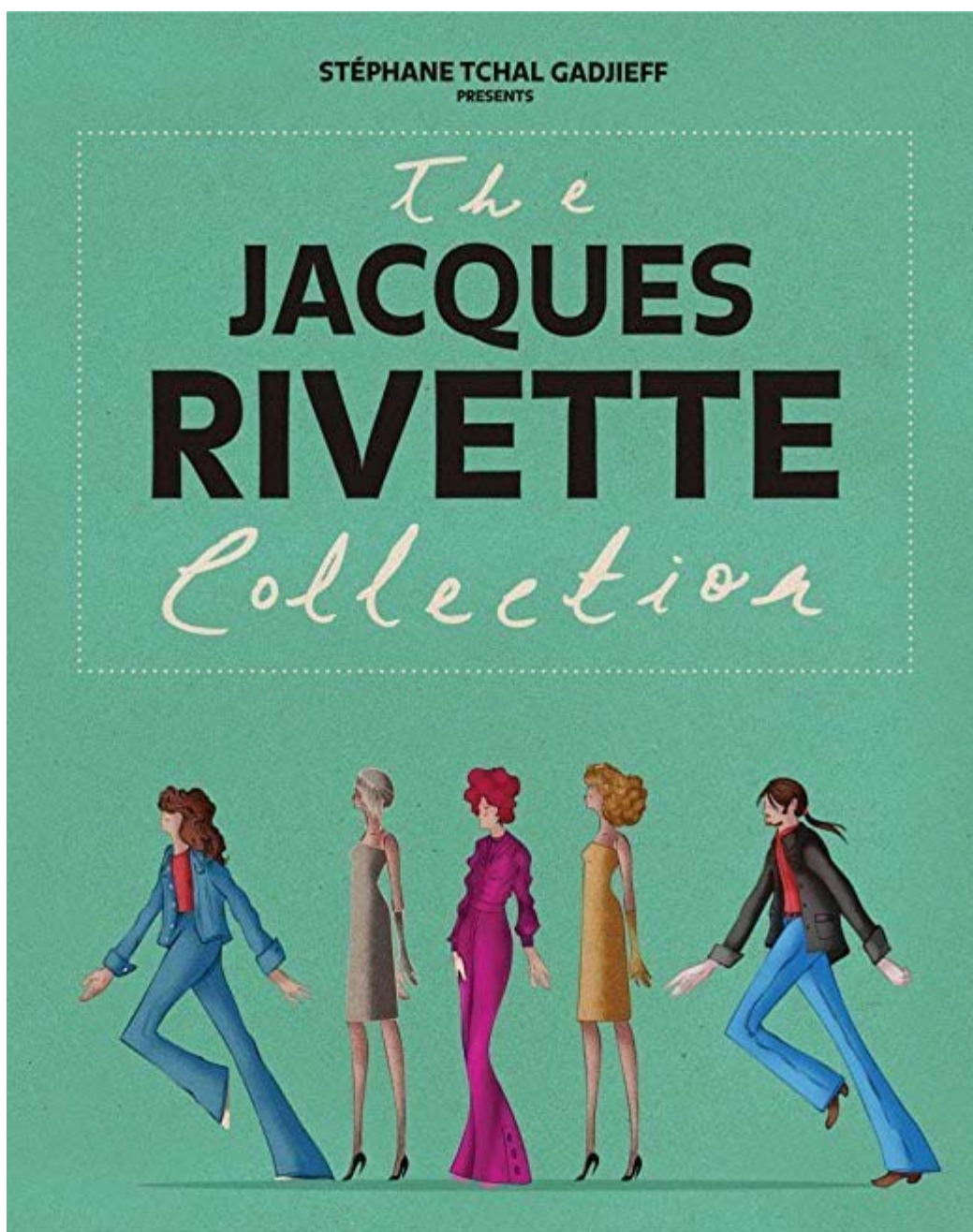
accounts) and the actor himself fought against the stereotype of his romantic beauty. Playing against type didn't quite work so he bowed to the inevitable by playing both The Sheik and his own son in the sequel five years later, though Valentino died before it was released in 1926. Both films are presented in fine form with an excellent score by Alloy Orchestra. It's not silent movie making at its best, but its exoticism and Valentino's appeal come through strongly. It's a pity they're not just paired together but creating good prints of these near one hundred year old movies is expensive!

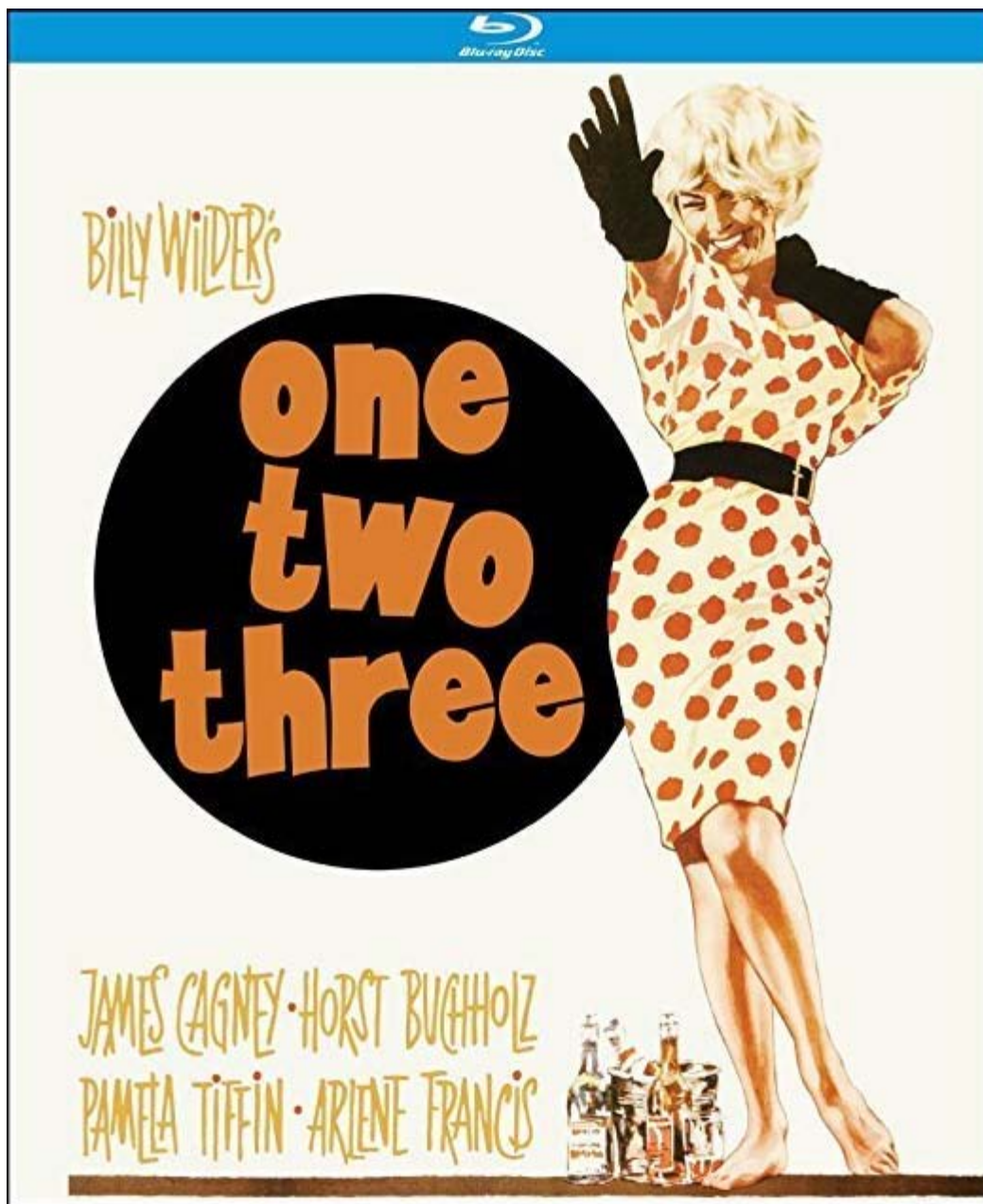


**BEAUTY AND THE BEAST** (2017) (\$39.99 BluRay; Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment)

Don't be scandalized! The fairy tale of Beauty and the Beast has been told and retold countless times in

books, film, stage, puppetry, TV and for all I know in virtual reality. Still, Disney took a real gamble when it turned its modern crown jewel of the animated *Beauty and the Beast* into a live action film. Done poorly, it might well have damaged the reputation of one the best original movie musicals and animated films of all time. They didn't exactly exceed expectations artistically in this effort from director Bill Condon. But they certainly avoided any failure. Combining Emily Watson of *Harry Potter* fame with the animated *Beauty and the Beast* property was like seeing two beloved worlds collide for kids of a certain age and no small reason for its remarkable box office success of \$1.2 billion worldwide. Creatively, it feels a little unnecessary; they didn't quite justify this remake though the live action "Be Our Guest" certainly comes close to matching the dizzying heights of the original. (The gay subtext of Gaston's sidekick barely counts as subliminal.) But view it with a kid who already loves the original and *Harry Potter* and you can watch their heads explode with glee.





**THE JACQUES RIVETTE COLLECTION** (\$99.99 BluRay; Arrow Video)

**ONE TWO THREE** (\$29.99 BluRay; Kino Lorber)

As I said earlier, Criterion is the gold standard for specialty labels. Arrow Video clearly wants to meet or exceed those standards with a bevy of solid releases covering esoteric, b-movie fare that deserves more attention and high brow stuff like this boxed set devoted to one of the Don Quixote-like quests of director Jacques Rivette. His original plan was to make four movies in four genres. He turned out two, collapsed on the set of the third and returned later with a new cast and new ideas. The result is gathered in this six disc set offering all three extant films in BluRay and DVD. The films are about...well, one is a fantasy, one is a pirate film and both of them are nutty but can't hold a candle to the third film (starring Warhol protege Joe Dallesandro of *Trash*), which gets really surreal. They are simply unclassifiable, much like his recently

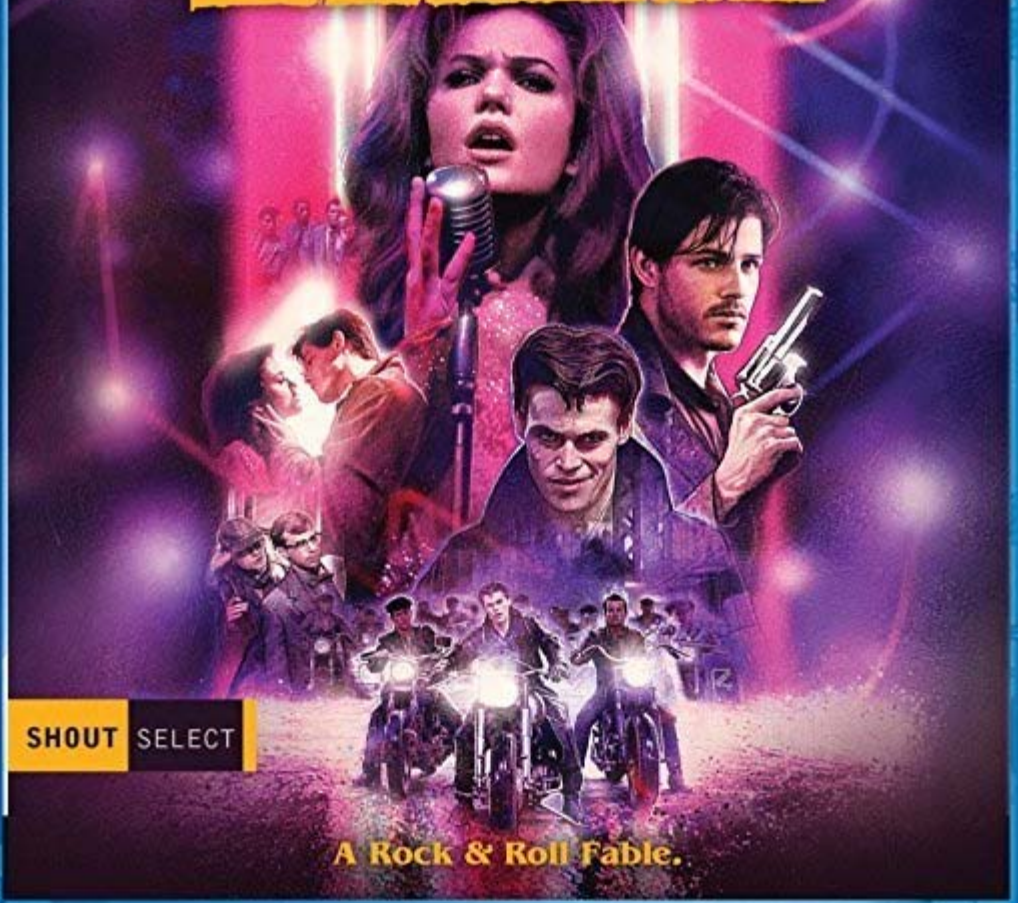
unearthed epic *Out1*. You simply have to let these works flow over you without too much insistence on sense or sensibility. The copious extras in this handsome set include period and newer documentaries, and a very nice booklet with essays on the film and best of all newly commissioned English language subtitles. Those new subtitles don't clear up all the mystery of what's going on, but unlike the original subtitles at least they don't add to them.

Kino Lorber has long established itself as a label worthy of trust alongside Criterion and a handful of others. Here they present *One Two Three*, one of director Billy Wilder's long-overlooked caustic gems. It's a black comedy (natch) in which James Cagney stars as a soda executive based in West Germany at the height of the Cold War. He has to keep an eye on the boss's daughter for the weekend, making his wife even more suspicious than usual, since the daughter is comely Pamela Tiffin. Then the boss's daughter marries a card-carrying communist and Cagney must somehow win over this kid to the joys of capitalism to save his job, his marriage and avoid an international incident. In a way, it feels sort of like a socialist spin on the later film *La Cage Aux Folles*. Mind you, this one isn't sentimental or sweet for a moment and Cagney spits out his dialogue with machine gun-like fervor. Unjustly overlooked, its extras include a scholarly audio commentary about nine minutes of Wilder holding forth on the film and its politics.



COLLECTOR'S EDITION

# STREETS OF FIRE



SHOUT SELECT

A Rock & Roll Fable.



**STREETS OF FIRE COLLECTOR'S EDITION** (\$34.95 BluRay; Shout! Factory)

**VISION QUEST** (\$21.99 BluRay; Warner Archives)

I have a great big soft spot for the nonsense that is *Street of Fire*, a Walter Hill film that plays like an extended music video (not in a good way), makes about as much sense as most 1980s music videos and yet is delivered with the passion of people making the best damn movie they could, believing it might just be great. Michael Pare stars in the silly plot about rival gangs and such, but it's all an excuse for the music. And here's where my soft spot comes in, since the music is either by Jim Steinman or Meat Loaf or written in that gloriously overwrought style. Really, I can enjoy the soundtrack and not need the movie. Anything with songs by a band as anonymously named as Fire Incorporated is fine by me. But for cartoonish nonsense, the movie is very much of its era and interesting in what was seen as perfectly reasonable editing and production design at the time...if you were trapped in MTV and thought it was the real world. Hill has made many better films but it's no surprise this one is a cult favorite, though I mean cult flop not overlooked cult success. You get not one but two feature length documentaries about the madness behind the scenes, all of it inevitably more watchable and coherent than the movie itself. But yeah, the soundtrack is pretty great, from the Steinman numbers to Dan Hartman's hit "I Can Dream About You" to the old-school charmer "Countdown To Love" by



Greg Phillinganes and not one but two solid tracks by the Blasters.

Actor Matthew Modine has had a quietly remarkable career, working with the directors Robert Altman, Stanley Kubrick, Gillian Armstrong, John Sayles, Alan Parker, Jonathan Demme and Christopher Nolan, not to mention Emmy nominated work in the HBO miniseries ...*And The Band Played On*, as well as shows like *The West Wing* and most recently the red-hot *Stranger Things*. Pretty damn impressive, huh? You can see why he was destined for good work in *Vision Quest*. In this early leading role, he's a high school wrestler falling in love with older woman Linda Fiorentino (who wouldn't?) while dangerously cutting his weight to move down two weight classes and challenge the scariest wrestler around. For all the flashy button pushing of that description, it's a quiet, thoughtful little movie and Modine holds the screen commandingly. It's also one of the best films about wrestling ever made, which isn't saying much. So let's say it's one of the best films ever made about the competitive drive of amateur athletes. And it's early proof that Modine had the goods, with or without the over-under hip toss he needed at the finale. It's mostly a trivia question for Madonna's early film appearance singing "Crazy For You" in a nightclub scene and it deserves to be remembered for much more. (The Terry Davis novel it's based on is good too.)

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