

DVDs: Zac Efron -- Superstar; Bob Hope -- Innovator; X-Men -- Overlooked; Tom Selleck -- T

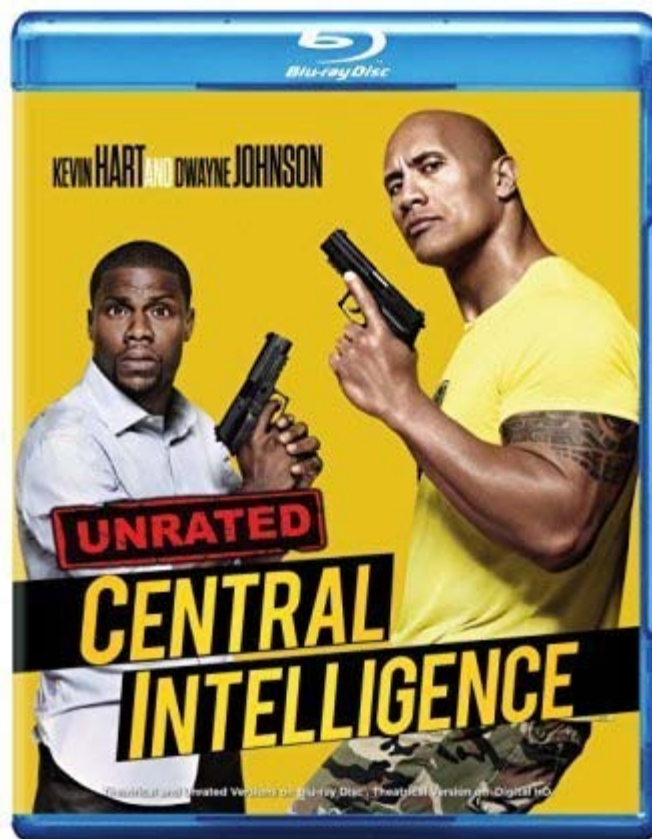


Michael Giltz, ContributorBookFilter creator

DVDs: Zac Efron -- Superstar; Bob Hope -- Innovator;
X-Men -- Overlooked; Tom Selleck -- TV Rock

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NEIGHBORS (\$34.99 BluRay; Universal Studios Home Entertainment)

FREE STATE OF JONES (\$34.99 BluRay; Universal Studios Home Entertainment)

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE (\$29.98 BluRay; Warner Bros. Video)

WILD OATS (\$19.98 DVD; Starz/Anchor Bay)

SWISS ARMY MAN (\$19.94 BluRay; A24)

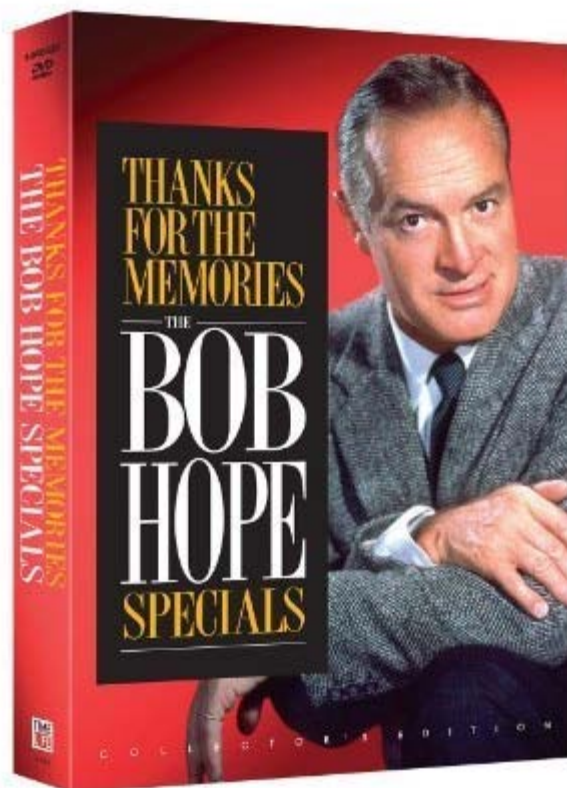
Did you realize Zac Efron has become one of the most bankable stars around right now? He knows the goofy but likable raunchy comedies fans like to see him in and he keeps making them. If they can be good, all the better. *Neighbors* was a fluke hit that did better than anyone expected. It was also kind of good. Rowdy frat boys move next door to dad and drive him nuts. Well, the sequel involving rowdy sorority girls frankly wrote itself — and might as well have since *Neighbors 2* is definitely a case of diminishing returns. Now where is Dirty Grandma?

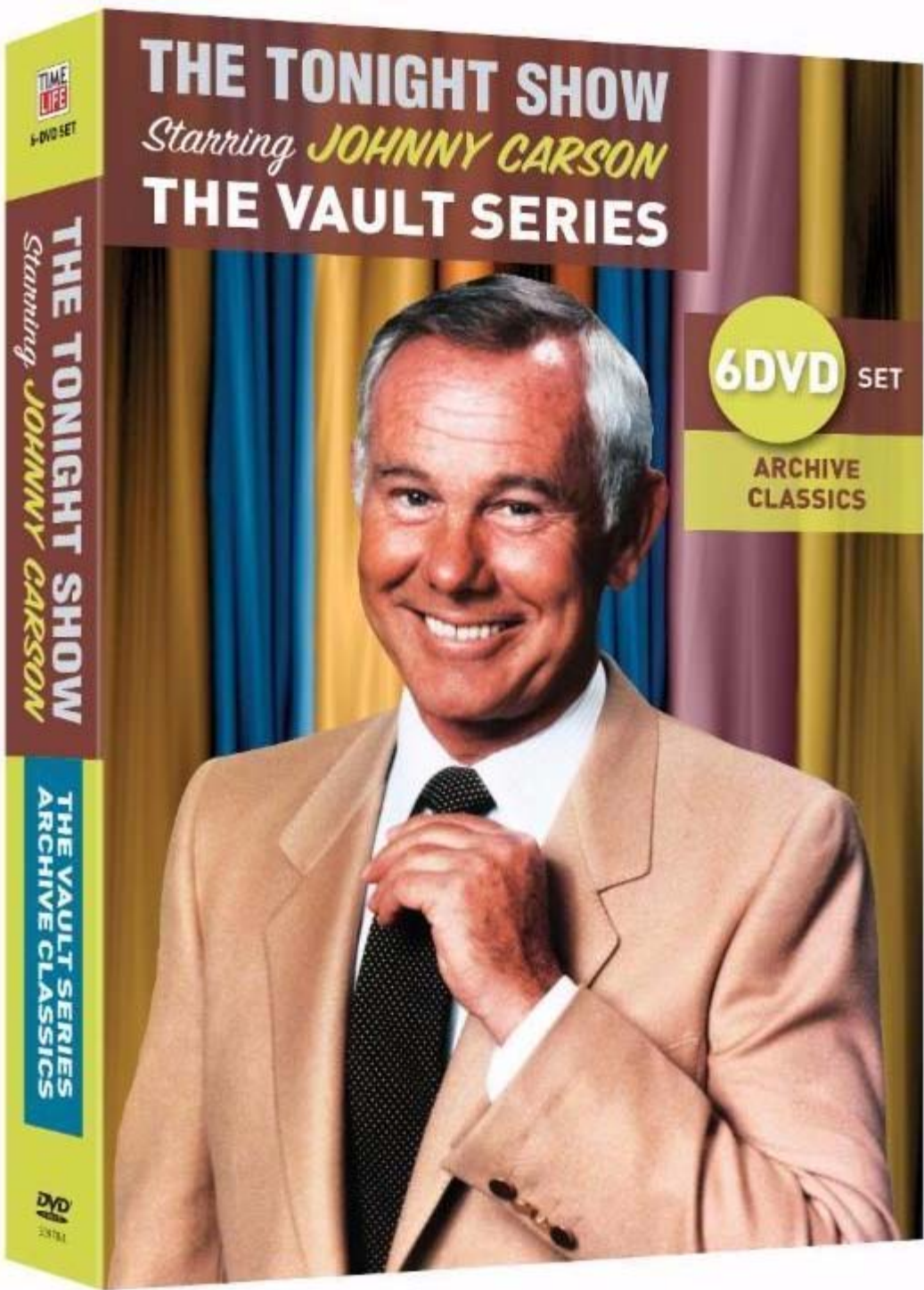
Matthew McConaughey has relished his renaissance as a bankable star too. He hasn't accomplished it by wisely choosing obviously commercial properties. In fact, it was "commercial" and deadly uninteresting fare that had seemed to poison his career. McConaughey rebounded with a WTF indifference, choosing unlikely films that ended up garnering him an Oscar attention and often box office. So here is the noble, well-intentioned *Free State Of Jones*, a Hollywood movie about slavery even more stodgily traditional than the current *Birth Of A Nation* because it stars a white man as the (historically accurate) leader of a rebellion. Good intentions didn't equal box office OR Oscar glory, but at least you know McConaughey made it because he wanted to make it.

On the other hand, Kevin Hart has become a box office star without making any genuinely good movies and that can't keep working for him. *Central Intelligence* is the latest mild fare where he fast talks his way around a dumb script. Hart should pay more attention to the career of his costar Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson. (Just try and stop me from calling him that. I won't!) Johnson has taken the mantle of Arnold Schwarzenegger, a big hulking guy in affable comedies and convincing action flicks. He manages to make enough decent ones that fans can accept the occasional misfire like this buddy comedy sans laughs. Is it his agent? His manager? His own good taste about what works for him and what might not suck by the time it gets to the screen. Who knows? But Hart should find out pronto.

At some stage, stars are happy just to get a project made, no matter how acclaimed their career. That's probably the case for Shirley MacLaine, who has finished helicoptering into *Downton Abbey* to trade bon mots with Maggie Smith and is back to making her own movies. *Wild Oats* is perfectly harmless fare for viewers of a certain age who will enjoy this flick based on a memoir of MacLaine about making a movie on location and why she was drawn to take a risk on it, in the metaphysical sense. It costars Jessica Lange who in this context must surely enjoy being the younger competition. Both are pros who bring out what they can from pretty thin material about movie making and the such.

And at an early stage, Daniel Radcliffe made the savvy choice to build a career with methodical intelligence. It helps to have the platform of *Harry Potter*, naturally. But as the least natural of actors in those movies, Radcliffe has diligently learned on the job, taking choice TV roles, stage turns, independent movies and more, all to learn learn learn about the craft of acting, work alongside other and better talent (like Clive Owen and Richard Griffiths) and damned if he hasn't become a solid, even exceptional actor and built up a heck of an interesting resume along the way. He's also maintained enough star power to boost something as utterly nutty as *Swiss Army Man*, a buddy comedy about a guy and a corpse. It's bonkers and I giggle and shudder to think of any kids who think Radcliffe = Potter and check this out unsuspectingly. By now, they should have learned and we have too: Radcliffe has very good taste and uses his stardom well. If he's in it, I'm interested.





THE TONIGHT SHOW
Starring JOHNNY CARSON
THE VAULT SERIES

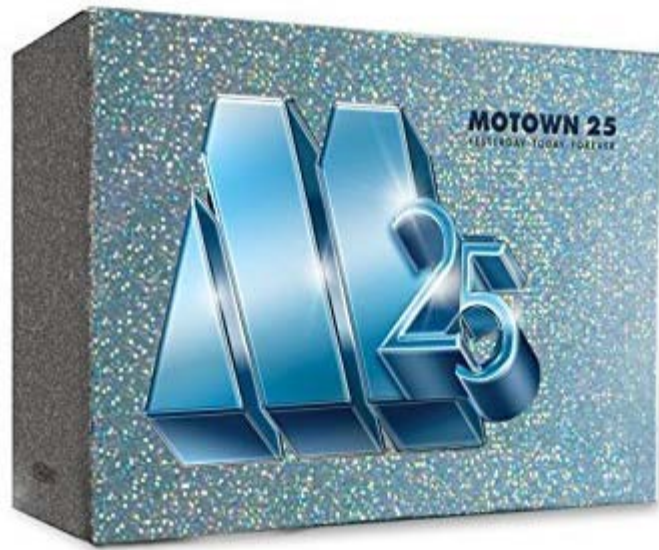
THE TONIGHT SHOW
Starring JOHNNY CARSON

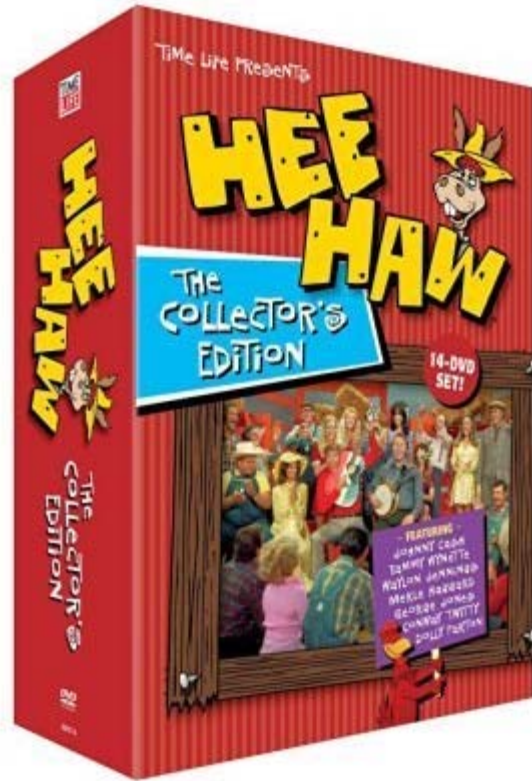
THE VAULT SERIES
ARCHIVE CLASSICS

6DVD SET

ARCHIVE CLASSICS

DVD VIDEO





THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES: THE BOB HOPE SPECIALS (\$59.95 DVD; Time Life/WEA)

THE TONIGHT SHOW STARRING JOHNNY CARSON: THE VAULT SERIES (\$59.95 DVD; Time Life/WEA)

MOTOWN 25: YESTERDAY, TODAY, FOREVER (\$79.95 DVD; Time Life/WEA)

PERRY MASON: THE COMPLETE SERIES (\$179.98 DVD; Paramount)

DEXTER: THE COMPLETE SERIES (\$135.99 BluRay; Paramount)

HEE-HAW: THE COLLECTOR'S EDITION (\$199.95 DVD; Time Life/WEA)

Bob Hope is a curious but important figure in popular culture. He made some good movies with Bing Crosby and of course he was a major star, launching from vaudeville onto Broadway (briefly) and then into the movies and radio and TV. He stayed on top for decades; he innovated the monologue (topical bits spiced by his personality) that was perfected by Johnny Carson and used by virtually every talk show host today; he innovated in hiring a staff of writers to provide gags and on and on and on. The one thing he didn't do was create a lot of enduring comedy material. He certainly created an enduring comic persona — the weaselly coward who lusted for women but voiced their objections to him before he could. But his jokes? His movies? Not so good, except for one or two of the Road movies. So his influence is huge and his legacy perhaps best remembered right here: the annual TV specials that toasted the troops and made Hope not just a star but a

perennial presence in American homes for generations. Gathered in *Thanks For The Memories*, you get complete specials and excerpts from many more, including the admirable USO tours. His jokes were corny, his taste in talent suspect, his skits outclassed any week by Carol Burnett (and on a weekly basis!). But by God he was there, like fruitcake. If you watched them at the time, you'll surely enjoy seeing them again. If you wonder what all the fuss was about, this is certainly a far better place to start than most of those radio shows or movies.

Johnny Carson did what Hope did, but so much better. Hope tugged at his collar and mocked himself and you knew why. Carson looked unflappable and mocked himself and you wished you could be him. A new flurry of boxed sets come in 3 DVD, 6 DVD and 12 DVD versions. The bigger the set, the more complete episodes of *The Tonight Show* you get, along with some impressive extras. His shows seem a model of thoughtful chat compared to the frenzy of today, which is pretty remarkable since Carson's shows flew by compared to say the really lengthy (and terrific) chats of, say, Dick Cavett. What has an unexpected Proustian power for me are the commercials, ads of the day included as a treat. Today, I fast forward through ads though of course that wasn't usually possible back then. And oh the shock of recognition. Carson is a treat and surely you'll have your own wished for episodes. (What about the one with...?) But these are very enjoyable peeks into a vast catalog of talk.

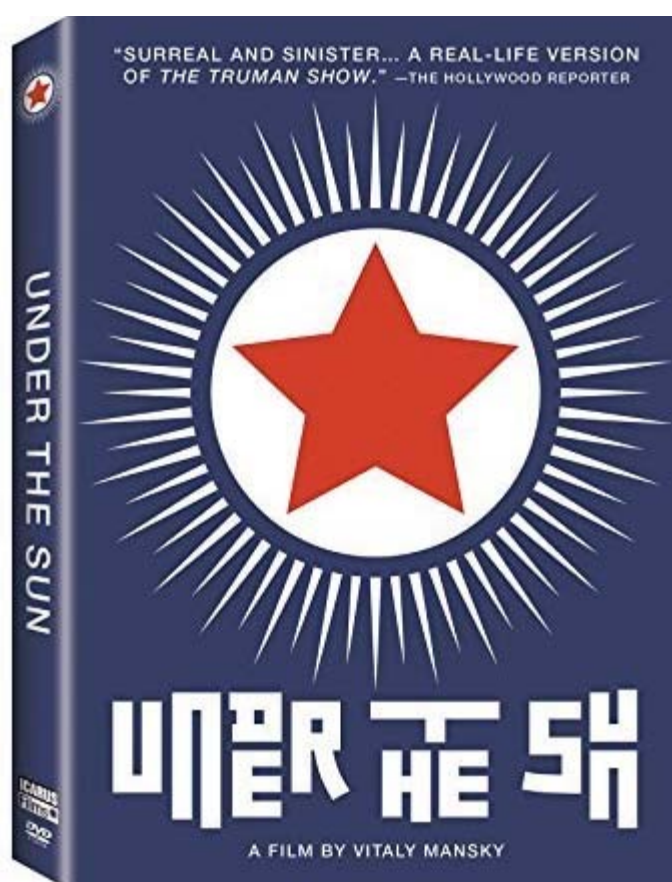
The TV special *Motown 25* has been distilled down to one iconic moment in our minds: Michael Jackson performing onstage as *Thriller* took off into the stratosphere. Oh for those more innocent times when lip syncing could still fool us into believing it was all happening live. No matter: his dancing is so electric you're willing to forgive the canned vocals. This six DVD set contains the entire special and rehearsals (not just what aired) and there are indeed other treats to savor. Loads of extras and even a reproduction of the program people got at the event add to the fun. But it's all about Michael, as it should be.

I remain thoroughly intrigued by the fact that Robert Downey Jr. is determined to revive the *Perry Mason* TV series. To me, it's the definition of a dated TV drama, one that was cutting edge in its day but now hopelessly old-fashioned. Every week, Perry Mason would get a new case and every week whatever witness he had on the stand would break down under the relentless brilliant questioning of our hero and blurt out, "Yes! YES! I killed him!" or some such thing. Raymond Burr is a dependable TV presence, with added interest since we now know he was a closeted actor who maintained his fame for decades as both *Perry Mason* and *Ironside*, surely taking pleasure in bringing another disdained minority into the spotlight back in a day when many people felt it was distasteful for people in wheelchairs to come out into public and force others to look at them. *Perry Mason: The Complete Series* has every darn episode of the long-running drama and you can watch them in pretty much any order from any season and I'll be damned if you could tell the difference. That was a plus for syndication, but now it just doesn't suffice. And what intrigues Downey Jr? If nothing else, the challenge of getting us to believe the breakdown of a witness on the stand will be major yet surely the show is nothing without it.

Dexter The Complete Series on the other hand MUST be watched in order, as most dramas must these days, even the ones that are nominally not dominated by major story arcs. Earlier editions of this boxed set were

elaborate and more expensive. Here's what I long for every show: a high quality remastering, good extras, a compact boxed set and the entire show all in one place. Of course, what I also long for is Dexter to go off into the sunset with Julia Stiles as his perfect new love, but the ideal ending for the show was unfortunately squandered and it went on for two more, uninteresting seasons and an awful ending. That can't take away from a show that for five years managed the high wire act of making a serial killer our empathetic hero.

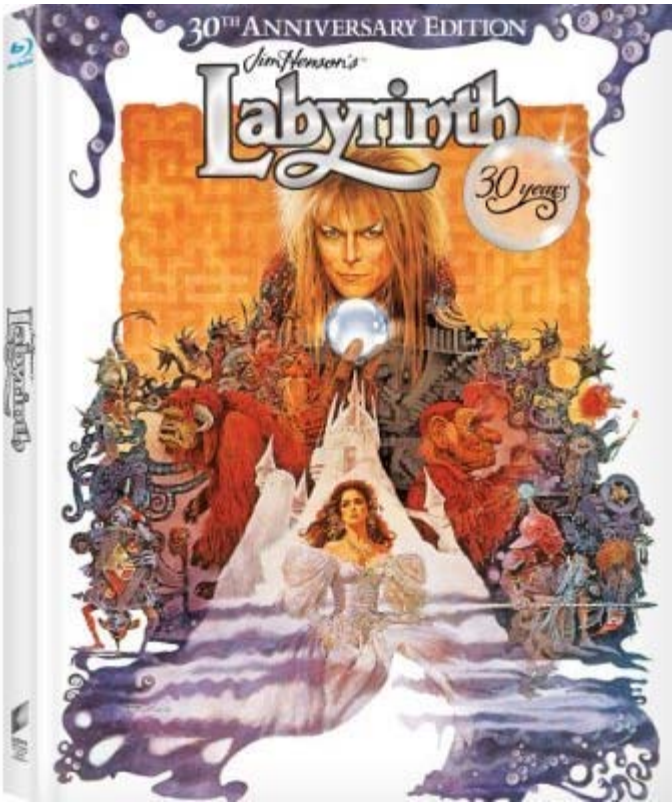
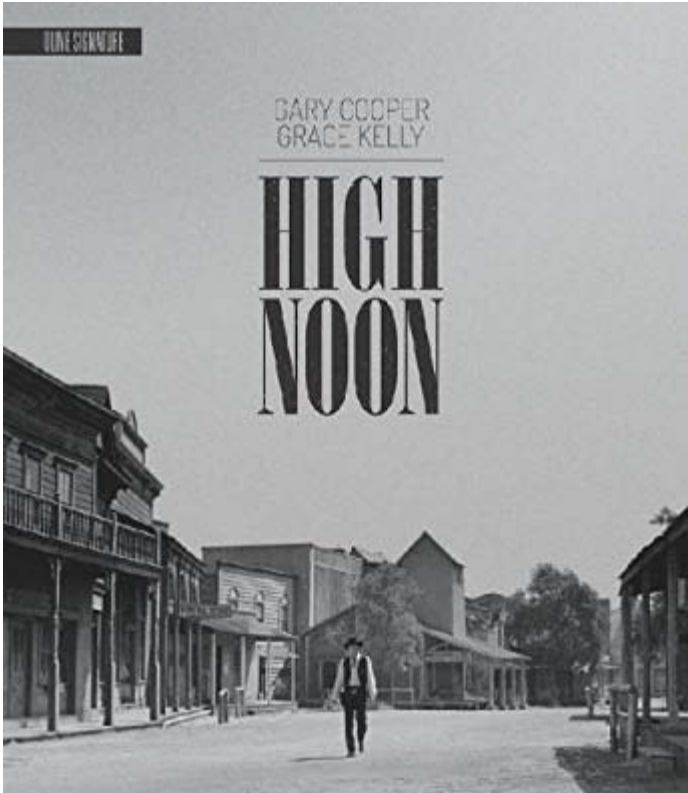
I'll admit it: I watched *Hee-Haw*. Oh it's jokes were cornier than a Bob Hope monologue, but they seemed to WANT the jokes to be corny. (Perhaps because they were often delivered in a cornfield?) What keeps this variety series worth revisiting is the top notch country music talent they showcased each and every week alongside stellar regulars like Buck Owens and Roy Clark. It turned even a suburban kid like me into a fan of country music and it'll do the same for you. This boxed set contains a few complete episodes, loads of sketches and more than a hundred musical performances from the likes of Johnny Cash to Dolly Parton.

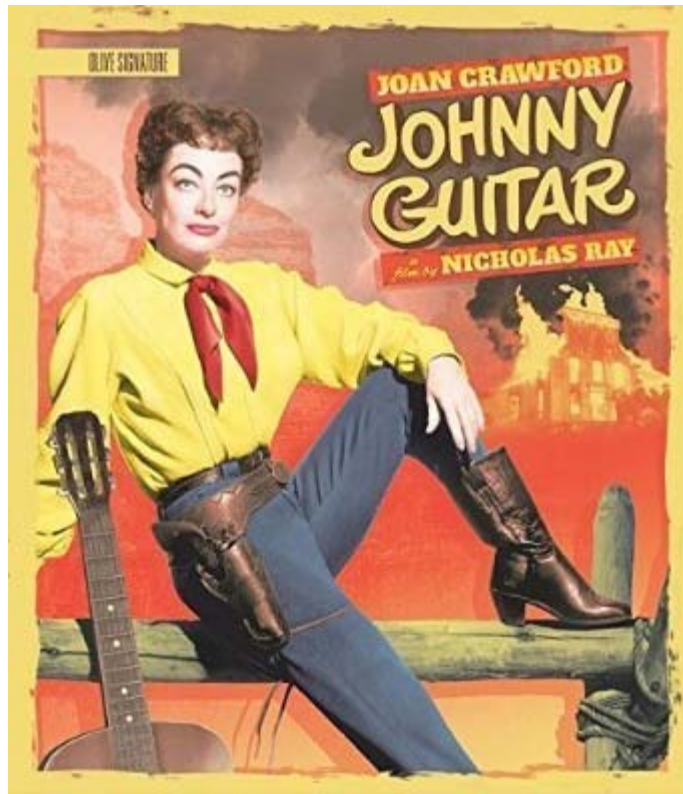


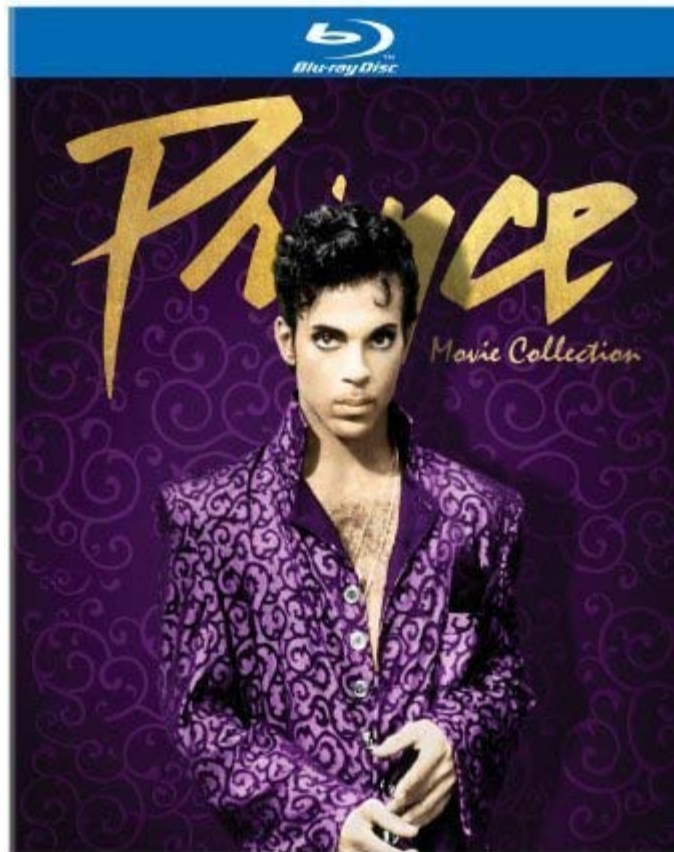
UNDER THE SUN (\$29.98 DVD; Icarus Films)

Surely one of the most dangerous documentary films ever made, *Under The Sun* began when director Vitaly Mansky received permission to make a documentary film in the repressive, nightmarish world of North Korea. His every move was monitored, his every shot approved — government officials stood nearby and demanded actors do multiple takes of scenes during the making of what was ostensibly a documentary about life in that country. Unknown to them, Mansky kept the digital cameras rolling after “cut” was called and captured the

lunacy of what was really going on and how propaganda is engineered. The result is a blackly amusing farce that has an underlying tension; you know Mansky gets away with it but boy does it seem foolhardy.







HIGH NOON (\$39.95 BluRay; Olive Signature)

LABYRINTH 30TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION (\$19.99 BluRay; Sony Pictures Home Entertainment)

JOHNNY GUITAR (\$39.95 BluRay; Olive Signature)

THE CAPTIVE (\$24.95 BluRay; Olive Films)

PRINCE MOVIE COLLECTION (\$24.98 BluRay; Warner Bros. Home Entertainment)

I don't care what branded label a company gives its product. I don't care what excuse they find for releasing it. (The 27th anniversary. An actor's birthday. A director's death.) I'm just delighted when classic films are presented with care. I always keep in mind we're probably seeing many of these films with better picture quality and sound than people enjoyed during the movie's first run. And that's amazing.

There's talk of a sequel to the western *High Noon*. That's a terrible idea. Not because the movie is so great. But because whatever pleasure is to be had from this ticking clock, McCarthy Era parable is absolutely squeezed out of the idea by workmanlike direction and strong acting led by Gary Cooper as the lone lawman who must face down bad guys on his own. Olive has a new Signature series to present better known classic films with all the care they lavish on obscurities and this is as good a showcase as any for what they offer — great prints, strong extras, the works.

Labyrinth is an elaborate fantasy I quite enjoyed when it first came out; like few fantasy films, it presents the budding sexuality of its female lead as a key element in the storyline without ever exploiting its young star. She is the *heroine*, not merely the decorative object of the action. Lots of factors ensure this remains of interest: David Bowie is a compelling presence as a co-lead; Jennifer Connelly makes a striking impression; and Jim Henson oversaw the puppetry. And here's a bonus: it's really quite good. Not just a curio but a genuinely original work.

Johnny Guitar is a Nicholas Ray film beloved by cineastes. I think it can only be enjoyed as camp — and I don't care for camp. But many others can't get enough of the crazy camera angles, saturated colors and...distinctive presence of Joan Crawford. God knows you won't soon forget it. Another Signature entry.

Cecil B. DeMille's *The Captive* is another lost silent film that has resurfaced. Since we've lost what 80 or 90% of all silent films, every resurrection is precious. In this case, it's more than of historical interest, thanks to a surprising storyline set during the Balkans War with a woman falling in love with a Turk prisoner. Eye-opening for what Hollywood was tackling and well preserved by Olive Films.

Finally, there's a three movie collection on BluRay that has obviously been slapped together in the wake of Prince's death. That's just fine by me. Why not re-release his movies on BluRay after his death? It's better than hiding them. You get his only decent fictional film — *Purple Rain* — plus *Under The Cherry Moon* and *Graffiti Bridge*, which unlike *Purple Rain* can't be enjoyed that much even if you do fast forward to the music. *Purple Rain* has been remastered but it's still pretty murky, as was the original low budget film. The concert scenes in it remain stunning. The three disc set is so inexpensive it's worth it just for *Purple Rain*.

Unfortunately, Prince's best movie is the concert film *Sign O The Times* and that's locked in limbo, only available as a Japanese import. I absolutely loved it when I saw it in the movie theaters and consider it one of the great concert films...but I've only been able to see it that one time.

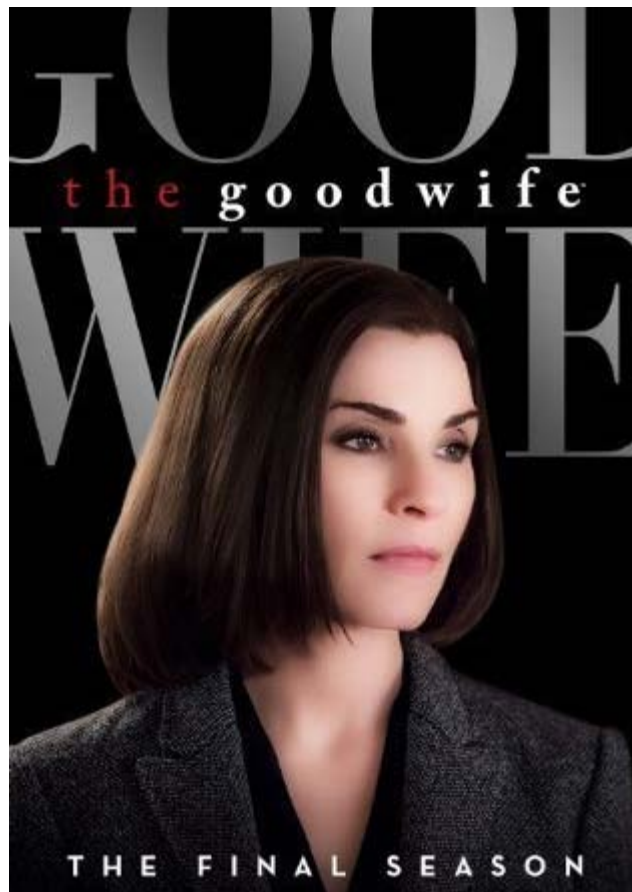


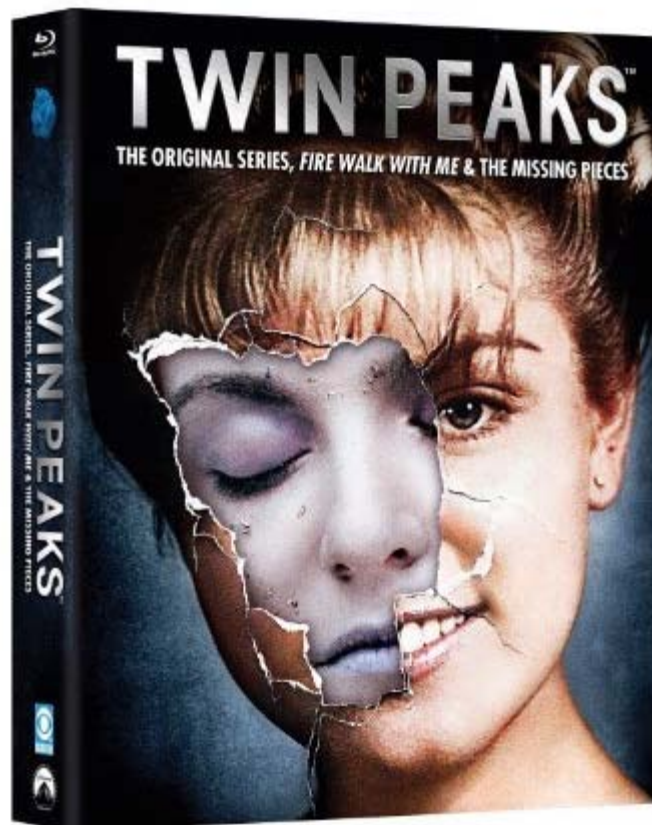
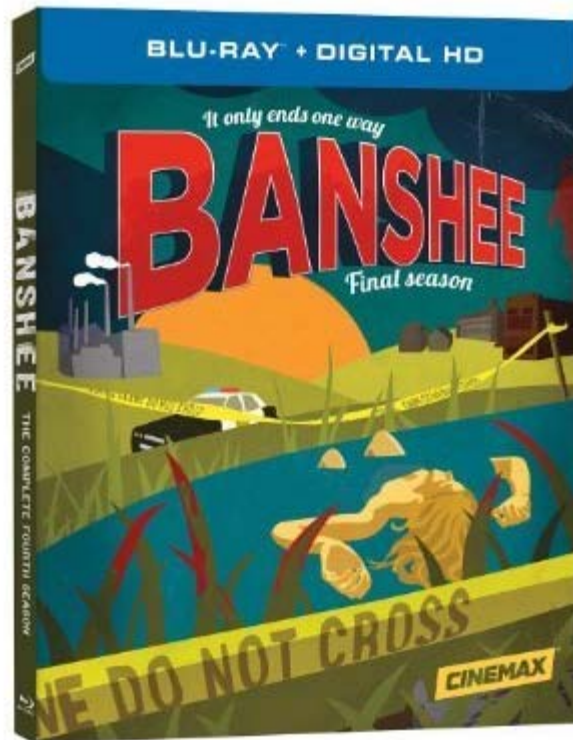
X-MEN APOCALYPSE (\$39.99 BluRay; 20th Century Fox)

THE PURGE: ELECTION YEAR (\$34.98 BluRay; Universal Studios Home Entertainment)

X-Men is the superhero franchise that is easily the best acted, most inventive without betraying its comic book world and yet barely seems to register on the radar until a new one comes out which people see, sort of enjoy and then quickly forget. Has a super villain put an invisibility ray on this franchise? Nothing's changing with *X-Men: Apocalypse*, an overly elaborate, over-stuffed sequel — hey, I didn't say I loved X-Men, just that it's weirdly ignored. The cast (led by James McAvoy) is superb, the plotting vaguely absurd, yet it's both serious and fun in ways DC can only fantasize about. The Tobey Maguire *Spiderman* movies are still the gold standard for recent super hero movies, but *X-Men* deserves more respect than it gets.

In contrast, the *Purge* movies get too much credit. Essentially, they're horror porn — ultra-violent B movies that exist only to deliver creepy shocks a la *Saw*. But their frame — an annual night when people can get ultra-violent and it's permissible by law — is very clever. Unlike say *The Twilight Zone* or *Star Trek* (whose episode "The Return Of The Archons" is very similar to the movie's conceit) or the *Living Dead* movies, that idea isn't plumbed for any modest insight or social satire worth mentioning. It's just violence on top of violence. Maybe *The Purge: Election Year* is marginally more coherent as action but it still doesn't make anything out of a very rich set-up.





THE GOOD WIFE: THE SIXTH AND FINAL SEASON (\$44.99 DVD; CBS/Paramount)

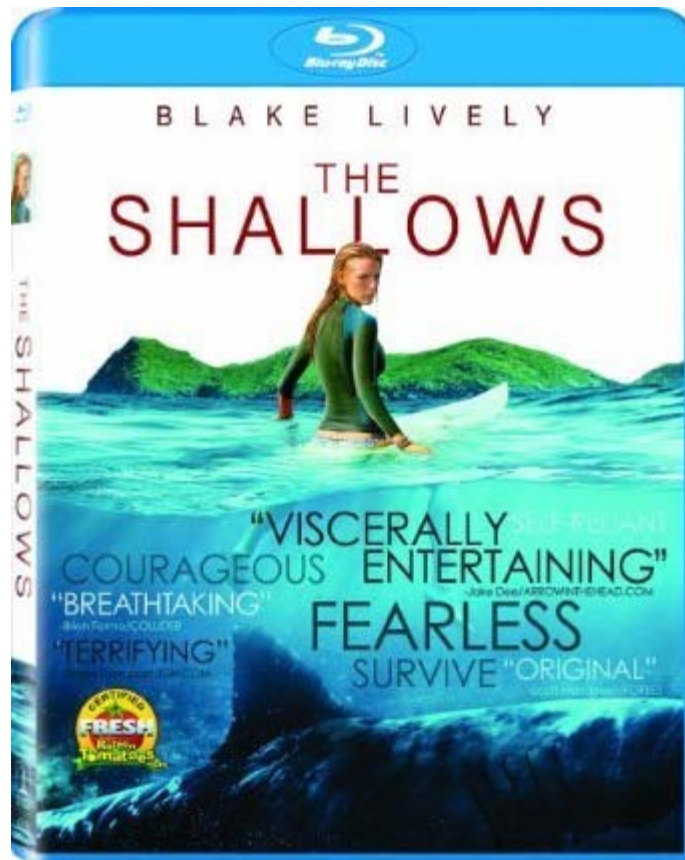
BANSHEE: THE FOURTH SEASON (\$34.98 BluRay; Cinemax)

TWIN PEAKS: THE ORIGINAL SERIES, FIRE WALK WITH ME AND THE MISSING PIECES (\$72.99 BluRay; Paramount)

All good things come to an end and on TV that often happens after they've stopped being good. *The Good Wife* had reached its sell-by date. Yet the soapy drama might have gone on for years if key creatives hadn't decided to leave, prompting star Julianna Margulies to call it a day. Who am I to criticize? It's got to be hard to walk away from a show that has given you tremendous creative peaks and employs hundreds of people who have become like family. Sure they would have been better mapping out an end for season five. (Or really, season four; soaps can run out of ideas very quickly.) Still, they left with their dignity intact.

The quirky *Banshee* knew the final bell was ringing. They didn't quite manage to wrap things up nicely with a solid big showdown. It's not easy to end a show well, even when you do realize in advance the fat lady is about to sing. Still, it's a funky little series worth a peek, peak tv or no peak tv.

Twin Peaks was of course created in the wrong era. It should have been a miniseries. Or at the very least it should have been conceived as a self-contained season of 12 episodes, culminating with the reveal of the killer. That's how I urge people watching the series for the first time to view it. Stop there. And then if you must, watch the rest after a respectful break. Done that way, season two might have been an entirely different mystery for Agent Dale Cooper — heck, it might not even have taken place in Twin Peaks. But at least it wouldn't have fallen into the Lost trap of endlessly complicating an already circuitous story. David Lynch said their mistake was in feeling the need to reveal the killer. I think most everyone else agrees the mistake was in thinking this might be an ongoing series of five seasons and 100 episodes. Ah well. Here you get the entire original series, the prequel movie and missing bits, not to mention loads of extras. We're finally getting more *Twin Peaks*. I'll believe it's on the right track if they move right into new adventures rather than rehashing and referring repeatedly to what came before. I'm excited and worried but it really doesn't matter. The landmark status of the original remains inviolable.



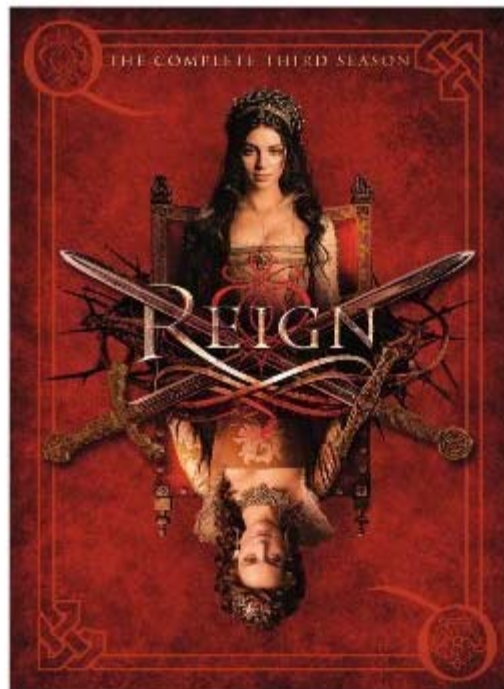


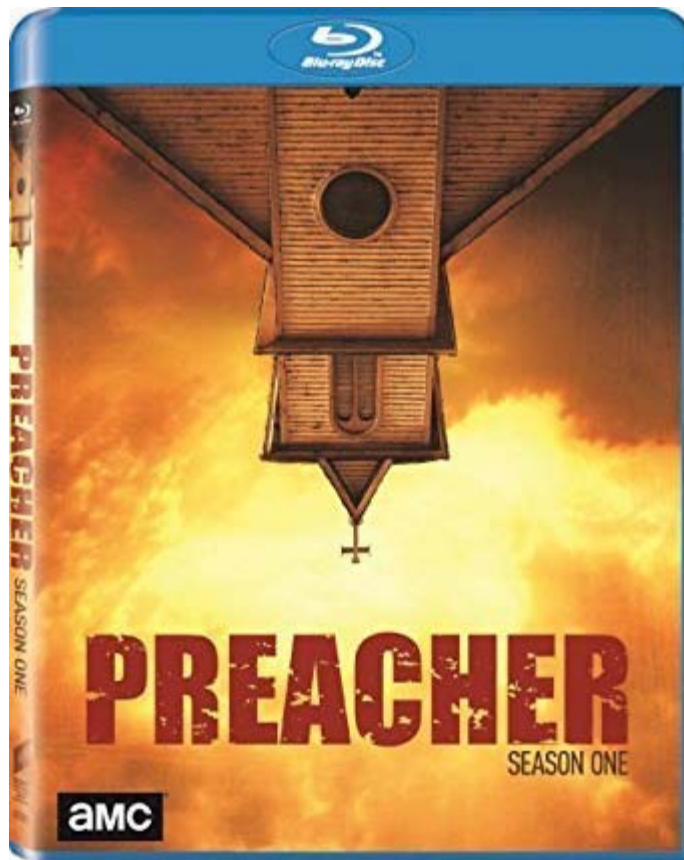
Sometimes you just wanna have fun. So say hey to the B movie, even if sometimes the B movie cost \$160 million to make. *The Shallows* is pure pleasure --- a young woman is stranded near shore, with nothing between her and safety except a killer shark. Blake Lively holds the screen and adds compelling star power to a disposable idea. It doesn't work without a good actor at the center and enough clever ideas and twists so that you feel the danger and never get frustrated over a protagonist avoiding an obvious solution. Somewhere, Roger Corman is smiling.

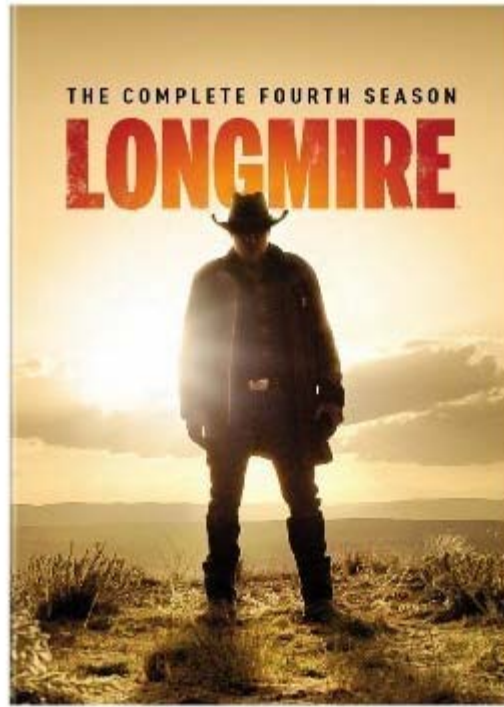
Similarly, *The Neon Demon* is a B movie whackadoodle. It's simply an out of control, no one is paying any attention nutjob of a movie and if you expected anything less from director Nicolas Winding Refn, you didn't see his last movie *Only God Forgives*. It's nominally the story of a young, innocent woman being introduced to the dangerous lure of modeling in Los Angeles. Sex, drugs, gold body paint and the occasional wild panther — it's all in a day's work for our heroine. Beautiful actors, outrageous scenes, lurid proclivities are all on display. None of it makes sense, which is of course the lunatic point. Some people actually complained it couldn't be taken seriously...as if it ever wanted to be. A cult favorite in the making.

Warcraft is not really a B movie and certainly not a guilty pleasure. However it does show director Duncan Jones (son of David Bowie) holding his own on a larger canvas than ever before. Competent is not exactly a huge compliment but heck, what did you expect from a movie based on a video game where no one bothered to write a screenplay? I think it was John Waters who said Hollywood spoiled all the fun by making B movies on A movie budgets and a flick like this is a prime example. Even fans of the video game will likely be

nonplussed, but Jones deserves a better property. *Warcraft* made a gazillion dollars in China so there might actually be a sequel...just don't be surprised if it's in Mandarin.







THE ORIGINALS SEASON THREE (\$47.99 BluRay; Warner Archive Collection)

REIGN COMPLETE THIRD SEASON (\$39.99 DVD; Warner Home Video)

PREACHER SEASON ONE (\$65.99 BluRay; Sony Pictures Home Entertainment)

BLUE BLOODS SEASON SIX (\$39.99 DVD; CBS/Paramount)

LONGMIRE SEASON FOUR (\$34.99 BluRay; Warner Archive Collection)

THE VENTURE BROS. SEASON SIX (\$29.99 BluRay; Cartoon Network)

There's so much TV on TV (not to mention online), you can be forgiven for sometimes saying, "Oh, is that still on?" That's probably your reaction to *The Vampire Diaries*, the soapier, less insane primetime version of modern vampires that never had the buzz of *True Blood*, but hey, it's still on the air. So is the spin-off *The Originals*, which has never been very original or found its own voice. It may well be the *Different World* of vampire-based soap operas. Like that *Cosby Show* spin-off, it's hard to imagine this drama surviving on its own. When *Vampire Diaries* says goodbye, *The Originals* will surely see the wooden stake poised over its heart.

Similarly, the so-silly it's kind of fun costumer soap *Reign* is beginning its fourth season and I doubt anyone is more shocked than the cast. Ratings have been slipping but the CW has its own metric of buzz and consumer satisfaction. It's like HBO, which can be indifferent to ratings as long as someone somewhere values a show enough to subscribe to its service. (Hence the many years *Arli\$\$* remained on the air.) I'm not sure who's watching *Reign* and I wish they would tune into *Crazy Ex Girlfriend* instead, but how often can you rewatch *Lady Jane* with Cary Elwes and Helena Bonham Carter? So I understand.

But poor *Preacher* had every reason to expect the world to take notice when it debuted. A controversial TV adaptation of a controversial, boundary pushing comic book. And yet, all but hardcore fans may be caught thinking, "Oh, did that air already?" Such is the over-saturated TV world we live in. I mean, really. If you can't get press after not just questioning but mocking organized religion, when can you? Actually, *Preacher* walks a somewhat finer line than the comics, arguably, but it's still so button-pushing that the show should have benefitted from the boycotts that never came. It's like *Will & Grace*, which knew people would freak out over gay people who actually seemed to have sex lives...and yet it was so well done no one ever raised a fuss. (The baddies knew the battle was already lost.) In this case, it's not so much that *Preacher* was too good to critique but rather that not enough people watched to make it worth complaining about. Maybe that will change if folk actually check out the season here. And frankly, they've no reason to hold back in the slightest for season two.

All concerns about attention and controversy can be set aside when it comes to *Blue Bloods*. This solid, dependable drama is exactly what CBS does best: turn out comfort food TV that can be enjoyed whenever you dip in or watched faithfully each and every week. Tom Selleck is the patriarch of a family of cops and he anchors the show very well indeed. It's probably our luck Selleck was screwed out of *Indiana Jones* because he never would have been as good as Harrison Ford as Indy, while Ford might not have been as compelling

on the small screen. We've had *Magnum P.I.*, the *Jesse Stone* TV movies, his stints on *Friends* and *Las Vegas* and now what could become his longest running hit yet. And Will Estes of *American Dreams* is taking good notes, I'll bet; he's got what it takes to follow in Selleck's footsteps as a TV presence for years to come.

Longmire is another thoroughly enjoyable if not ground-breaking TV show. Strike that — sometimes you want a show that's *not* groundbreaking, not so desperate to create a huge mythology that it forgets to tell a good story. It's also the best western on TV, now that *Justified* is gone. Author Craig Johnson should be very pleased, thanks to a show that does his character justice and a strong cast led by Robert Taylor, Lou Diamond Phillips and the wonderful Katee Sackhoff of *Battlestar Galactica*.

And amidst all that peak TV there's *The Venture Bros.*, the longest running hit on Adult Swim and a perfect encapsulation of what works in that block. It's a cartoon for adults that doesn't really work unless you have a real love for cartoons. A goof on *Jonny Quest*, it has somehow spun out that thin idea for six seasons. This season may not have been the best, but it's far more substantive at this stage than anyone had any right to expect and goofy good fun. But maybe they should wrap things up soon? I mean, those kids Hank and Dean have been on the air for six seasons; pretty soon they'll be too old for even Sergeant Hatred to care about their fate anymore.

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