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## Michael Giltz

Freelance writer and raconteur

Posted: March 10, 2011 06:51 PM



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# DVDs: Zombies Attack in *The Walking Dead*

Inspiring Funny Hot Scary Outrageous Amazing Weird Crazy

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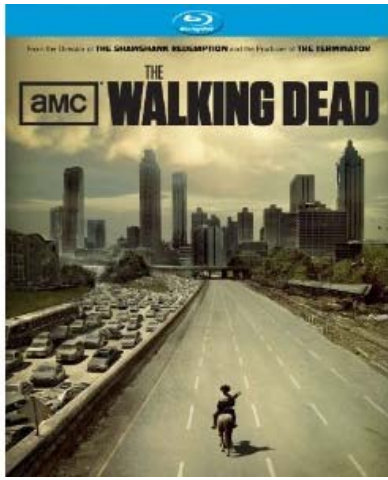
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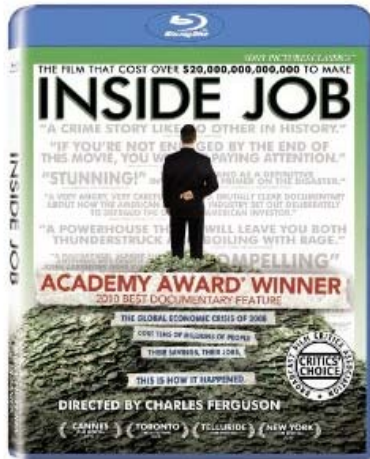
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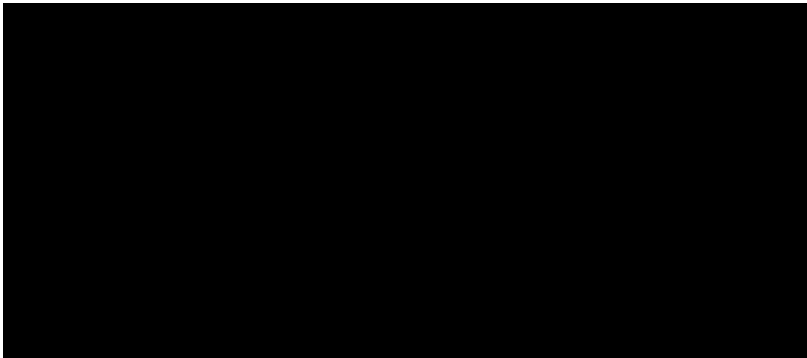
PlayStation Network Could Be Down For Days



**THE WALKING DEAD COMPLETE FIRST SEASON** (\$49.99 BluRay or \$39.98 regular DVD; Anchor Bay) -- You just know AMC is kicking itself for only ordering six episodes (including an extended pilot that's 66 minutes long and five standard episodes about 43 minutes each). So while they and we wait for a longer season two to start in the fall, new fans can catch up with the first zombie series. I'm not a Night Of The Living Dead fanatic or much of a horror buff in general. But I do like a good "boo!" and this show was great fun from start to finish. The cast -- anchored by Andrew Lincoln as Sheriff Rick Grimes -- is solid throughout, but has a very appealing B-movie aura. Why is this good? Because no big name is there to signal in advance either the fact that they're only in it for a few episodes or that they're safe. Anyone could go at any time. Frank Darabont is the man behind this adaptation of the comic book series by Robert Kirkman that started off awfully similar to *28 Days Later* but soon found its own voice. Darabont kept making movies that stretched themselves out dangerously thin to capture all the details of a novel or short story. TV may just be the perfect medium. The look (thanks to handheld grainy cameras during zombie scenes) is spot-on and they never let the interesting dramatic moments get in the way of the simple pleasures of watching people avoid being eaten by zombies. *Zombie School* is definitely good prep as an extra for your Halloween escapades. Can't wait to see season two.



**INSIDE JOB** (\$34.95 BluRay or \$28.95 regular DVD; Sony) -- One of the best movies of the year and definitely the best acceptance speech at this year's Academy Awards.



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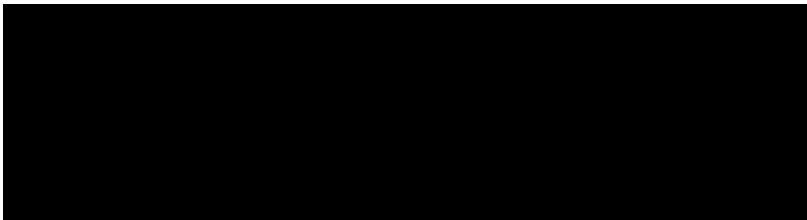
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A wonderfully illuminating documentary about an especially complex topic. *Inside Job* hopefully can arouse people into forcing legal action to be taken against those who have so clearly broken the law and swindled the taxpayers and citizens out of literally hundreds of millions of dollars. (I wrote that last year; obviously it didn't. Maybe the DVD can have that effect?) *Inside Job* is a relentless, accurate and highly entertaining look at the financial meltdown. Director Charles Ferguson clearly maps out the origins of the crisis, how it could have been prevented, how it could have been lessened, where the bodies are buried and who buried them. From Elliot Spitzer to a spokesman for the financial industry on Wall Street, from France's head of finance to guys living in tents in Florida, Ferguson went everywhere and spoke to everyone willing to talk. (He also has a ball noting when people refused to talk, typically after a damning fact in the film about them is driven home.) it's like a Michael Moore movie without the light touch that can allow some people to dismiss the substance of what is said. The writing and editing -- done by the team of Chad Beck and Adam Bolt -- is a model of clarity, precision and entertainment, especially given the obtuse, unwieldy subject. No one can dismiss this film; Ferguson is too thorough, too specific. Interview after interview, he politely makes people squirm. If the result is not even sterner reforms from Congress than those pushed by Obama to wholesale ethics reform on our college campuses, the only one we can blame is ourselves. Ferguson has done his part.



**MORNING GLORY** (\$34.99 BluRay or \$29.98 regular DVD; Paramount) -- Hmm, can we get a do-over? Morning Glory is a perfectly good first draft for a smart update of Broadcast News. We've got a fine cast with some great chemistry. Clearly the story being set up is about a passionate young TV producer saddled with a fourth place morning show. In desperation, she forces an out-to-pasture news anchor with loads of prestige (Harrison Ford doing a Clint Eastwood growl) to team up with the game current host (Diane Keaton, in fine form). They will hate each other on sight but once their personalities strike sparks, people will love to watch them spar on air and the show will take fire. All of this happens, but not in the right order and not nearly with enough focus. Keaton and Ford work great together, but after one or two scenes where they amusingly drive each other nuts during the morning broadcast, this is dropped. Our heroine Rachel McAdams confronts Ford about treating her and everyone else so rudely and demands he open up to her and show some respect -- right after he's just opened up to her and shown her some respect. Huh? Ford's desperate desire to do real reporting again (which plenty of morning shows do) isn't her way into getting his cooperation -- it's something he has to trick McAdams into allowing, as if the great scoop he turns out to have wouldn't thrill anyone in news with half a brain. For an idiotic plot purpose, McAdams is being wooed by the Today show and they schedule their interview with her -- get this -- DURING THE BROADCAST TIME OF BOTH THEIR COMPETING SHOWS. I know why the screenplay did this, but it's hard to think of anything more lazy than this. Don't you think the woman in charge of the show might possibly have something to do when her show is live on the air and maybe just maybe schedule the interview for later in the day? It's a shame because the cast is solid and offered plenty of opportunities for fun. Keaton in particular is criminally underused. What a shame all around.



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**BAMBI DIAMOND EDITION** (\$39.99 BluRay and DVD combo; Disney) -- Disney always takes extra care with its classic animated movies so you know Bambi comes stuffed with all sorts of extras. When you think of the film itself, I know the first thing that pops into your mind is the off-screen but still wrenching death of Bambi's mother. But this great movie is one heart-stopping moment after another, from Bambi's mother's death to the hunters to the forest fire that almost kills all of Bambi's friends. Seeing it again, the movie is clearly echoed in *The Lion King*. It's as fresh and charming as ever and since there are no humans in it (one of the few flaws in *Snow White* are Snow and her dull Prince), the movie hasn't aged a moment. It's hard to believe anyone went hunting ever again after seeing this movie. And by the way, it looks absolutely stunning on BluRay. The movie positively glows, it's so gorgeously drawn. Sheer pleasure.



**FOUR LIONS** (\$29.98 BluRay or \$26.98 regular DVD; Magnolia) -- Co-writer and director Chris Morris is a big name in the UK, sort of a very smart cross between Sascha Baron Cohen and Bill Maher. His film debut is an impossible to categorize, very clever and very funny look at hapless Muslim terrorists in the UK. They're a team of "would-be's" -- a would-be rapper, a would-be tough guy, a would-be regular guy who is just a dolt that wants to fit in and so on. Watching them bumble their way through a plot to wreck havoc in London is ballsy, tightrope-walking entertainment that always keeps them believably, hilariously human. Too much plot description would spoil this black comedy. One of the best films of the year and a very promising debut for Morris.

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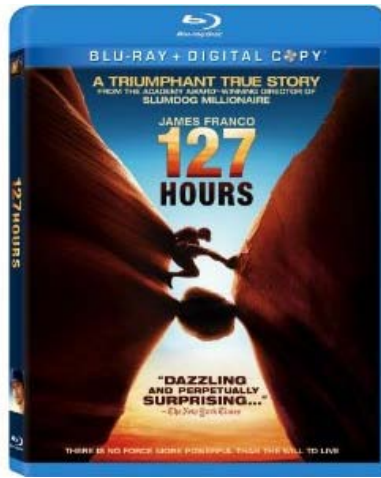
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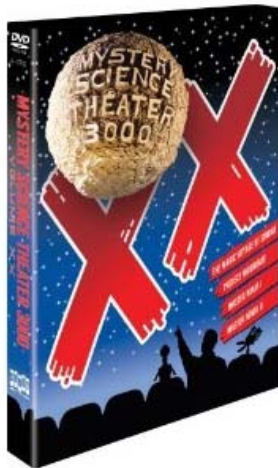
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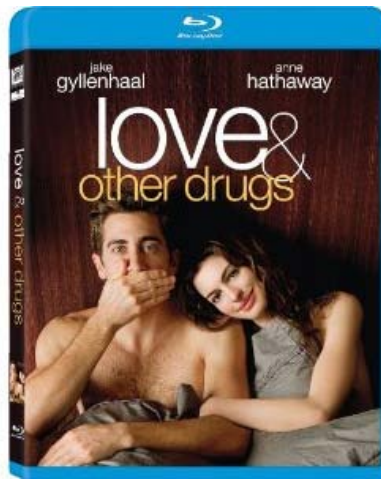




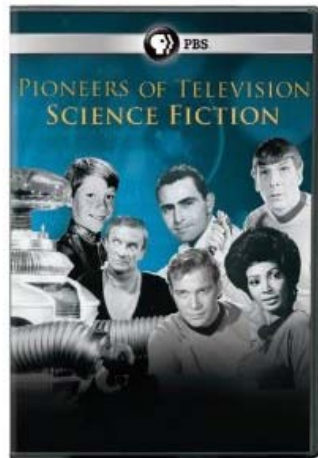
**127 HOURS** (\$39.99 BluRay and \$29.98 regular DVD; FOX) -- By now, you know the story: a very good hiker and climber found himself trapped in an isolated canyon with his arm crushed beneath a boulder. No one knew his hiking plan so no help would be on its way. Remarkably, he found the desperate courage to cut his arm off and survive. It is not a grueling or difficult film to sit through and I'm as big a baby as you are when it comes to self-sawing of limbs. But it's also not a very good film. James Franco is great as the hiker. He holds our attention effortlessly. But director Danny Boyle didn't trust his actor or the inherent drama of the situation. He felt people would become bored or restless watching such a one-man show, however inspiring. So the movie is filled with loads of flashbacks and visions and other visual tricks to jazz up the tale. When the camera stays focused on Franco, so do we. When Boyle starts juggling every visual and audio trick in the book, ironically, we get bored. Another feather in the cap for Franco but more of a curiosity than a satisfying film.



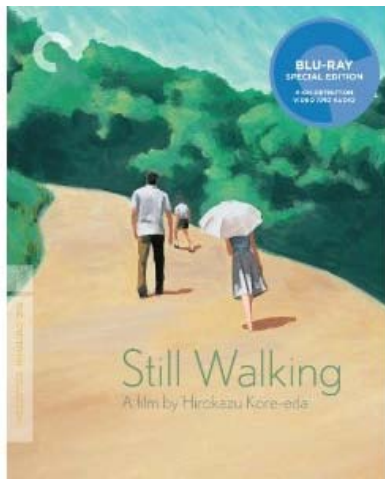
**MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000 VOLUME XX** (\$59.97; Shout) -- You wouldn't want to pay \$15 for any of the awful movies collected on this set. But when you've got Joel Hodgson and his robot pals making wise, suddenly The Magic Voyage of Sinbad, Project Moonbase and both Master Ninja and Master Ninja II are a lot more fun. The latest volume in the seemingly endless MST3K series has some fine extras like a ComicCon panel and a chat with the director of photography Jeff Stonehouse. As so often happens, the insights of people rarely highlighted in interviews (like the DP or the production designer or editor or composer) are invariably interesting and fun.



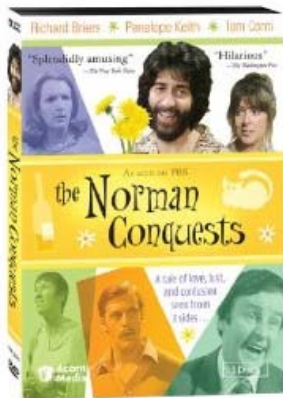
**LOVE & OTHER DRUGS** (\$39.99 BluRay or \$29.98 regular DVD; Fox) -- Since Jake Gyllenhaal cheated on Anne Hathaway in *Brokeback Mountain* (hey, it was Heath Ledger, after all), it's nice to see the chemistry they demonstrated get a real workout in this brittle romantic drama that got some polarizing reviews but after opening modestly showed some good legs and even doubled its gross overseas to almost hit \$100 million at the box office. Lesson to the romantically inclined: don't date Viagra salesmen unless you've been in training.



**PIONEERS OF TELEVISION SEASON 2** (\$24.99 for all four episodes or \$14.99 for each sixty minute show; PBS) -- Since they crammed all four episodes onto one disc for the entire Season 2 covering four areas, I'm not sure why they even bothered putting out single disc episodes focused on westerns, crime dramas, science fiction and kids' tv. The single discs are way too expensive for what they are. Even fanatics for one genre would be smarter to lay out \$25 and get all four episodes. But the problems with this series don't end with the wasteful packaging. This lazy documentary show examines a genre of TV each week, giving a very superficial overview of TV's most influential shows. Westerns is probably the best here, though that's not saying much. They do corral many top stars to sit down for a chat (from William Shatner to James Garner and many, many more) and everyone is in amiable mood. But the insight is sorely lacking. The entire Westerns episode is hinged on the idea that Westerns showed a racially diverse America and was quite bold given the era they were popular in. Then the sci-fi episode says science fiction was an ideal venue for discussing race relations...which otherwise were completely ignored on television. Uh, except for all the examples you cited on TV's most popular shows in the western section Worst of all are the unnecessary and awkward and just downright silly-looking reenactments, which range from a youthful Rod Serling spooking his mother with a gorilla mask to a reenactment of actors filming a western on a backlot. Absolutely none of it works or is even remotely necessary. With tens of thousands of hours of TV at their disposal, did they really need to waste time and money by shooting these reenactments? Undemanding fans of a particular genre might enjoy seeing old stars again and there are tidbits of information. But this is a wasted opportunity not worthy of PBS.



**STILL WALKING** (\$39.95 BluRay and \$29.95 regular DVD; Criterion) -- I'm not a filmmaker. Yet. (Maybe soon someone will take an option on my screenplay about a rakish, absurdly handsome but penniless freelance writer caught up in an international plot to rob Farmville of all its animals.) But if I were, I'd have another dream after winning an Academy Award. What dream? To be added to the Criterion library. Whenever a contemporary film makes the cut and is added to the Criterion canon, I imagine directors and actors breaking open a bottle of champagne. It's as clear a sign of having entered the pantheon (short of "...and the winner is") that I know about. So Hirokazu Kore-eda must be very happy to see his gentle, perceptive film about family (made as a tribute to his mother) get that stamp of approval. Extras include new interviews, a making-of documentary, a fine essay by Dennis Lim and some recipes for food made in the film. If you whip up some pork belly kakuni, call me.



**THE NORMAN CONQUESTS** (\$59.99; Acorn) -- I saw a revival of **The Norman Conquests** on Broadway that was wonderfully satisfying. Writing one good comedy is hard enough. Writing three very good comedies and having them all dovetail perfectly so that each one can be watched alone and make perfect sense but all three together tell the story of one long weekend with numerous romantic entanglements? Truly a feat of brilliance from playwright Alan Ayckbourn. The plays don't double down the hilarity a la *Noises Off*. It's not that the laughs build the more plays you see in this three-part work. But each one is wholly satisfying and builds to a very funny finish. As mentioned, it takes place during one long weekend, with one play set in the garden, one in the kitchen and one in the dining room. This famed TV adaptation does the trilogy justice, thanks to a cast led by Tom Conti. Great fun.

*Thanks for reading. Michael Giltz is the co-host 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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