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Michael Giltz, ContributorBookFilter creator

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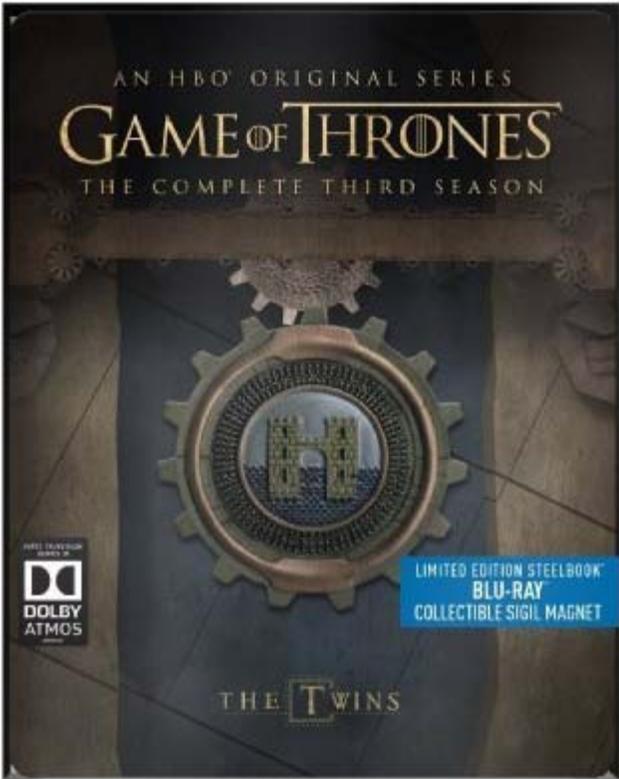
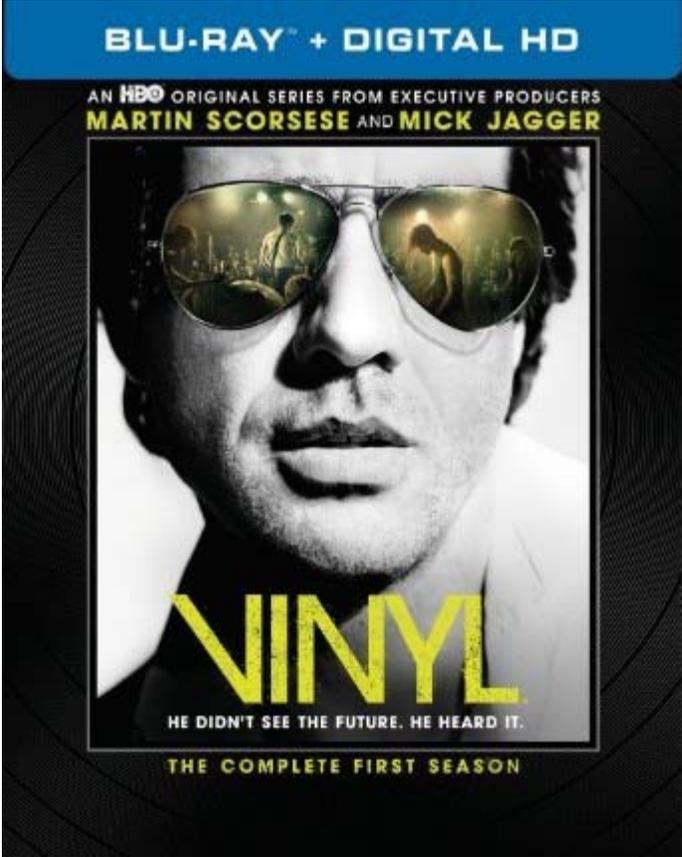
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ZOOTOPIA (\$39.99 BluRay; Disney)

One of the best movies of the year. *Zootopia* plays like a long-lost follow-up to *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, a noir-cartoon (without the combo of live-action and animation that made the original so distinctive.) A young bunny rabbit longs to become a cop, even though a bunny rabbit (much less a female bunny rabbit) has ever done so before. But our heroine moves to the big city of Zootopia (where predators and prey live together in relative harmony) and accomplishes her goal...where she is immediately assigned to writing parking tickets. Like women throughout history, she determines to be ten times as good at her job as any man so that maybe she can get half the credit. But her policing instincts kick in and she is soon embroiled in a mysterious investigation: predators are going rogue and actually attacking prey but the mayor seems to be keeping a lid on it to prevent mass hysteria. Before you know it, she's teamed up with a wily fox to work both sides of the law, solve the crime and keep Zootopia safe for all. This is a smartly animated film, a clever little mystery a la *Chinatown* and a gentle spin on buddy cop movies where two mis-matched characters learn to work together. The acting -- from Ginnifer Goodwin to Jason Bateman to Idris Elba and on down the line -- is excellent. The

jokes -- spoofs of *The Godfather* and a thousand cop movie and TV show cliches -- are witty without yanking us out of the story. And the sophisticated commentary on prejudice is spot-on. What a treat.





VINYL SEASON 1 (\$45.99 BluRay; HBO)

GAME OF THRONES SEASONS 3 AND 4 STEELBOOK EDITIONS (\$79.98 BluRay each; HBO)

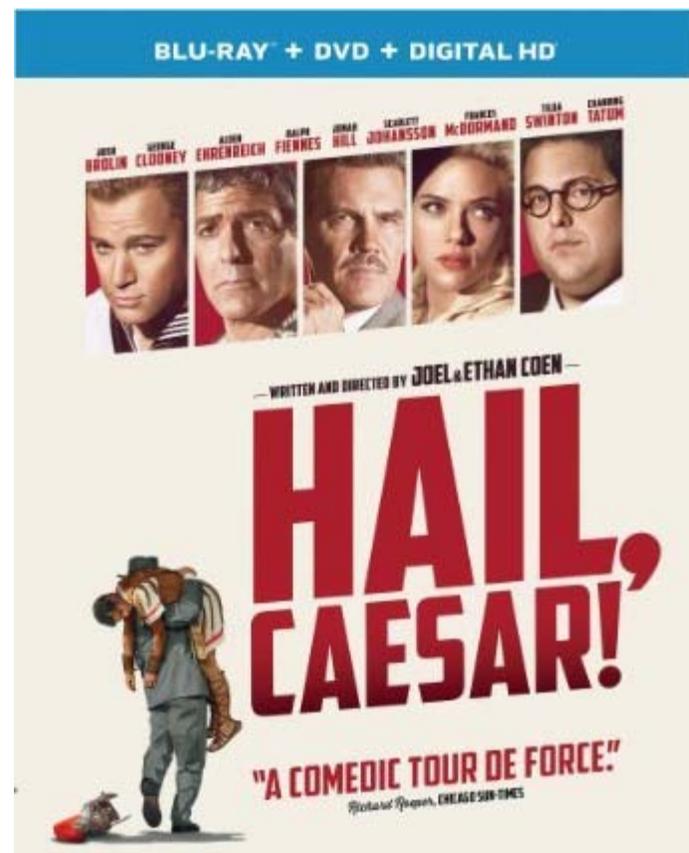
THE X-FILES EVENT SERIES (\$29.99 BluRay; Fox)

HBO's drama set in the cocaine-fueled world of 1970s rock and roll goes wrong in about 18 different ways. But the essential problem with *Vinyl* is that they treat this world as a backdrop for all sorts of melodrama. They didn't trust that working at a record label, trying to discover talent or deal with outrageous stars and so on was inherently dramatic and fascinating. Who gives a damn about the private life of execs when you've got glam rock and stadium shows and new talent bursting out in a club down the street? Season One is only of interest for those who want to see how far astray a TV show can go.

HBO has had trouble in its drama department so it's no surprise they keep repackaging their classics. *Game Of Thrones* may be their biggest hit ever so fanatical fans can rebuy prior seasons in new steelbook limited editions. The appeal is mostly new packaging and some modest new stuff. But really, it's about being able to dive again into a show you love or keep some sealed copy on your shelf to proclaim your passionate support. Yes, it's a fine looking set, especially if you didn't buy it already. But no, buying it won't make George R.R. Martin write any faster.

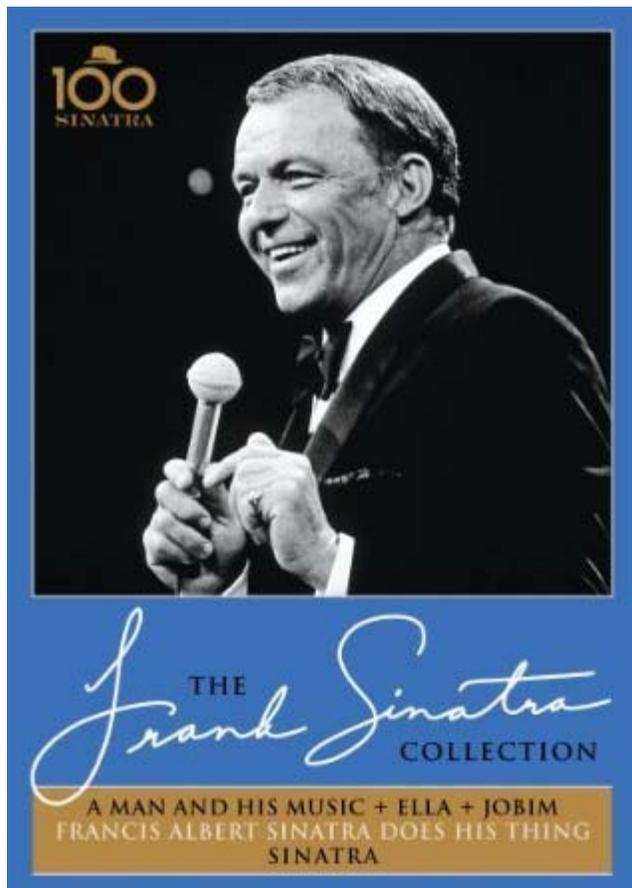
I'm not sure what I expected from a new *X-Files* miniseries but it certainly wasn't this. The problem with the very fun sci-fi drama back in the day was that later seasons and the movies become bogged down in its elaborate conspiracy. Ardent fans knew the best episodes were the stand-alones and that elaborate conspiracy theories were mostly nonsense and best left vague and in the background as mere scenery draping, not as the main plot engine. So here comes a fresh new miniseries with two excellent stars presumably coming back for all the right reasons and plenty of time for Chris Carter to craft a six episode

wing-dinger with maybe a tiny over-all arc but (hopefully) six kick ass tales to entertain. No rush! Take your time! Do it right! The result feels rushed and last minute in the most bizarre manner possible, with a weak start and a cliffhanger ending. Really? After waiting 14 years for a new TV launch? Oh well, at least it did well enough worldwide to probably return again. Less arc, please.



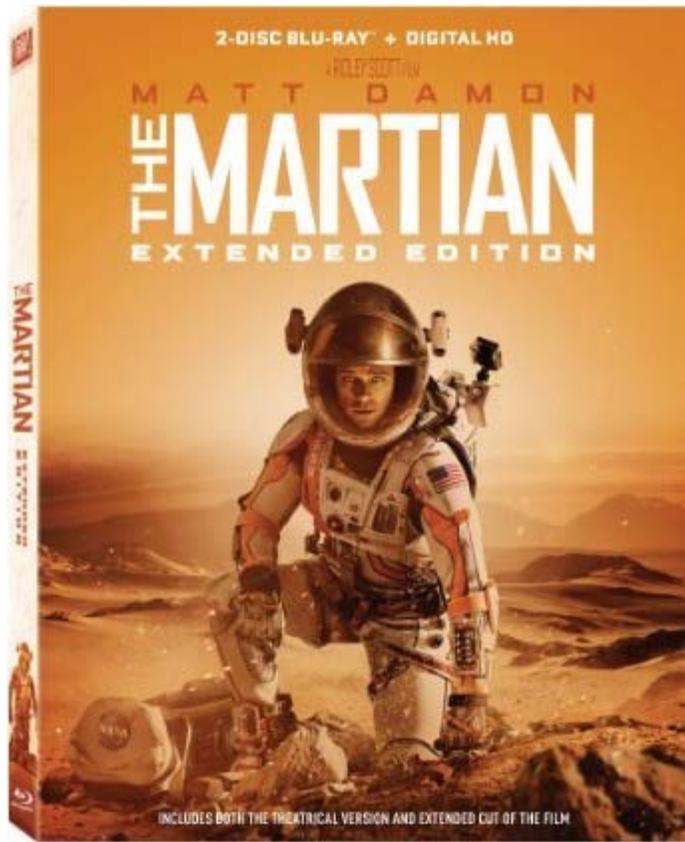
HAIL, CAESAR! (\$34.98 BluRay; Universal)

I watched *Hail, Caesar!* on Blu-ray and in some ways the home is the perfect place to experience this ode to Hollywood. The diminished expectations of a TV screening (ironic, since TV kicks movie's ass these days), the minor key of the humor and my really not expecting much combined to make this better-than-average Coen Brothers. It's about a fixer in 1950s (sort of) Hollywood who must solve countless problems every day, from unmarried female actresses getting pregnant to a big male star being kidnapped and (worse!) becoming enamored with communism. It is most assuredly not a spoof of the studio system, but more of a loving homage. Really, it probably has more in common with the religious themes of *A Serious Man* than comedies like *Raising Arizona*, thanks to that fixer being a devout Catholic who is wrestling with a job offer. The cast is very strong and the little bits of offbeat humor really landed with me. This might well grow and grow with repetition, as smart comedy often does. I liked Channing Tatum's musical dance number, I really liked Scarlett Johansson's New York take on an Esther Williams celebrity and I loved the scenes with Alden Ehrenreich as a western star plopped into a drawing room comedy where he's ruthlessly directed by Ralph Fiennes. ("Would that it t'were so simple!") Amusing.



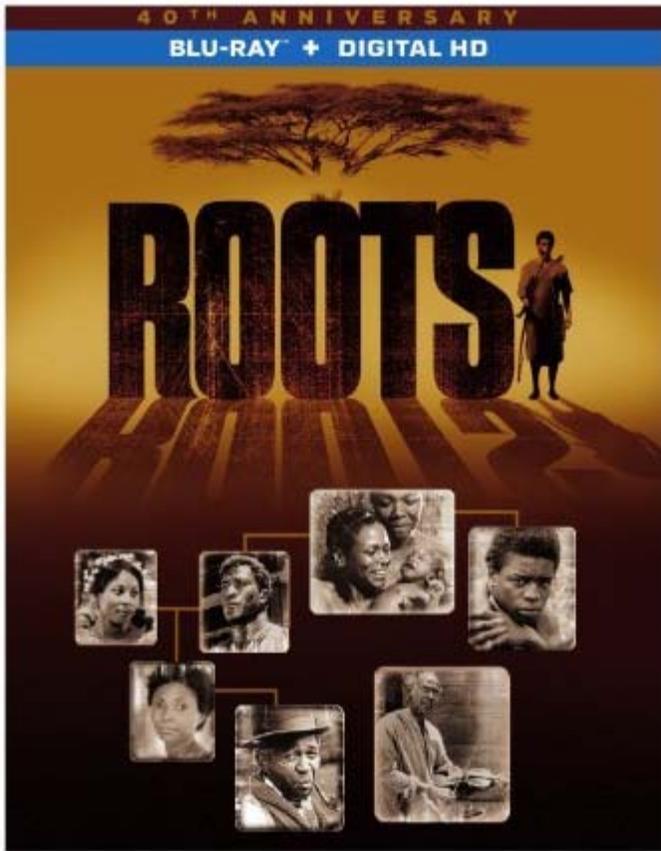
A MAN AND HIS MUSIC + ELLA + JOBIM (\$9.98 DVD; Eagle)

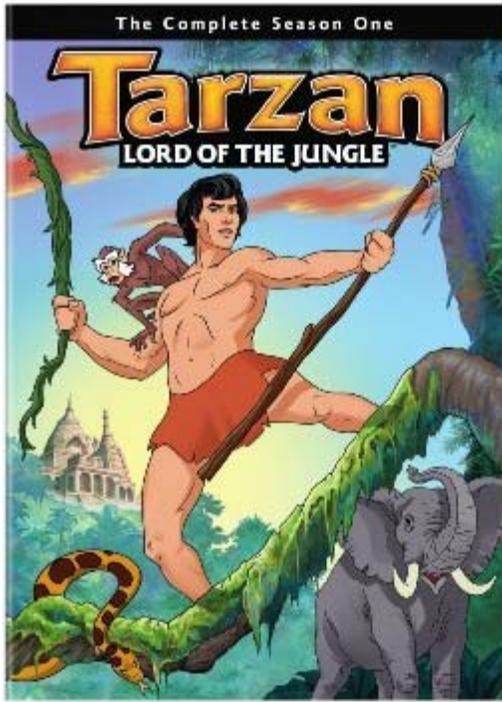
Well, I'm a Frank Sinatra fanatic so when a bunch of his TV specials were released in a boxed set years ago, I jumped. Now, years later, each DVD is finally being released in four individual sets. Fanatics already own them but casual fans should leap in particular for the set *The Man And His Music* with Count Basie and especially this release with two specials for one low price. One half is the swinging Sinatra with Diahann Carroll and the 5th Dimension. But the gem here is Sinatra in two great pairings. He swings with Ella Fitzgerald and then does a medley with Antonio Carlos Jobim. Fitzgerald is of course one of the greatest jazz singers of all time; less appreciated perhaps is what a great duet partner she is with everyone from Louis Armstrong to Frank Sinatra. Fitzgerald brings out the best in literally everyone. And Sinatra's late career masterpieces are the two albums he recorded of bossa nova music alongside Jobim. Indeed, 1967's *Francis Albert Sinatra & Antonio Carlos Jobim* may be his masterpiece, *period*. Watching him do a live medley with Jobim is spellbinding. This is for music fans, not just Sinatra fans. It isn't cleaned up or remastered visually or aurally, so it's not as pristine and good-sounding as we deserve. But it's acceptable and the best we've had on DVD; if you already own it, don't bother and if you don't and think you might like it, by god you will.



THE MARTIAN EXTENDED EDITION (\$39.99 BluRay; Fox)

Actually, the extra ten minutes or so includes more time of Damon's astronaut stranded on Mars and that's all for the good. I felt in the original film his time on Mars felt more like three weeks than the extended nightmare he suffered. (Compare his isolation to Tom Hanks in *Cast Away* where the movie really created a sense of loneliness and despair utterly lacking here.) The other little tidbits include some more scenes at NASA. Since those were by far the weakest aspect of the original film, more of them is decidedly a negative. In general, if you own it already you certainly shouldn't bother and overall you're better off with the original, which is also included, so let price be your guide. One does feel this should have simply been included in the original BluRay release though they will surely argue they didn't have the time to do it right, etc.





ROOTS THE COMPLETE ORIGINAL MINISERIES (\$42.99 BluRay; Warner Home Video)

THE LEAGUE COMPLETE SERIES (\$99.99 DVD; Fox)

TARZAN, LORD OF THE JUNGLE SEASON 1 (\$19.98 DVD; Warner Home Video)

STAR TREK THE NEXT GENERATION COMPLETE SERIES (\$129.98 DVD; Paramount)

This is a new BluRay release of the 1977 *Roots* miniseries, the one that was a remarkably popular, landmark work of television and pop culture. As a phenomenon and a prod to a national discussion on race, it remains significant. As a work of art, it is sorely dated. The event's smartest stunt was casting lovable, well-known TV actors in varied roles, so that viewers somehow felt complicit in the inhumane practices they witnessed. It wasn't some anonymous actor playing a slave owner or cruel overseer. It was a TV star they knew and identified and admired, which somehow made the viewer feel they shared the blame for what they saw. Their heart wanted to excuse and explain away the vicious world of slavery but their mind wouldn't let them. It was a master stroke. But most everything else feels dated, from the acting to the costumes to the clearly faked whipping and other mistreatment. It's very much a relic, albeit a fascinating one given its impact at the time.

I'm not sure how the future will judge the trend of fantasy sports leagues or the TV show they inspired. But *The League* is a purposefully oddball comedy by Jeff and Jackie Schaffer that captures the all-consuming lunacy of people who indulge in them. It could have been worse: fantasy football leagues aren't nearly as time-sucking monsters as fantasy baseball leagues. Like *Seinfeld* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (two other shows Jeff Schaffer worked on), *The League's* best aspect is that it feels like it was made by people with no expectations that anyone else would ever watch. It has a lengthy roster of impressive guest stars and a semi-improv vibe that few other shows (*Curb* being one of them) can pull off. It ain't your average bear. I guess if I was making up a comedy roster, I'd draft it in the third round, hoping no one else would pick it up earlier and I would assume it would prove more durable than other, flashier shows with higher profiles.

Filmation was a creator of (mostly) Saturday morning cartoons, sometimes aspiring to quality (its animated *Star Trek*) and more often cutting corners on the scripts and animation to churn it out. *Tarzan*, *Lord Of The Jungle* from 1976 was definitely in the former quality, though like most Filmation shows they never splurged on lots of detail work in the cartooning department. This series is easily the most faithful adaption of the actual Edgar Rice Burroughs novels, so that alone makes it noteworthy. It's of course a pity the (usually?) shorter 20 episodes done sporadically in seasons 2-4 couldn't be found and included with the 16 longer episodes from the full first season for one complete set. It's even more of a shame that some sort of restoration couldn't be done for the picture or sound. Filmation shows looked pretty junky even back when they first aired. This collection on DVD is positively substandard and can only be recommended for *Tarzan* or cartoon completists who want a sense of what the show is like. Rare for a Filmation effort, it deserves better.

Star Trek The Next Generation gets exactly that with this new inexpensive boxed set. You can keep your elaborate packaging. I and I think most fans would much prefer long-running TV shows like *ST: TNG* to be given a compact, low-cost presentation like this. What really matters is the image and sound and this remains a very strong effort. Like *Roots*, this iteration of *Star Trek* now looks a little dated and awkward. It's actual heyday of quality is much shorter than I remembered at the time. Essentially, the first two seasons spent a lot of time stumbling onto planets and plotlines from the original series. And after that, the Borg arrived, the show upended everything we thought we knew about the series...and then backed off that bold gambit and never recovered. The real star here is Data, as compelling a character as TV has, illuminating how well sci-fi can use outlandish conceits to explore what it means to be human. A good show in a complete set with good picture and sound at a reasonable price. If only all TV series enjoyed a similar fate.



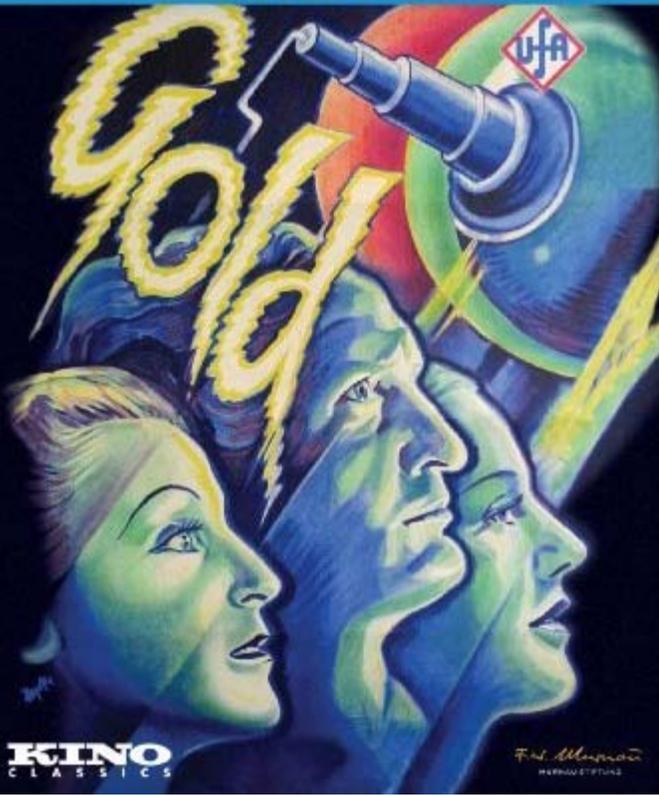
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THE SHORTS COLLECTION
1917-1923 A FIVE-DISC SET



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BUSTER KEATON THE SHORTS COLLECTION 1917-1923 (\$59.95 BluRay; Kino Lorber)

GOLD (\$29.95 BluRay; Kino Lorber)

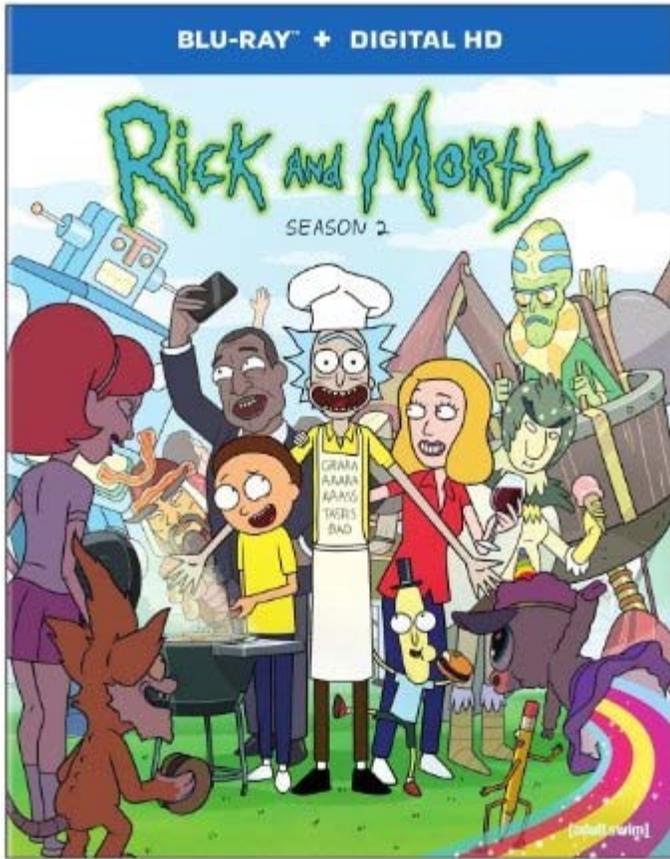
HERE COMES MR. JORDAN (\$39.95 BluRay; Criterion)

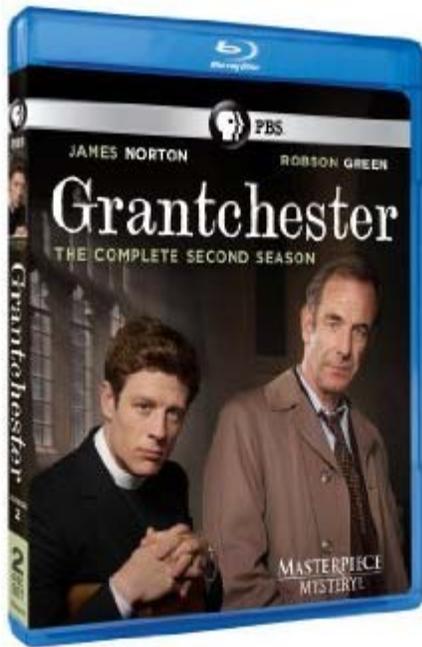
Here's a very strong compilation of Buster Keaton shorts on BluRay, most notably ones done with Fatty Arbuckle. I for one am not jaded by the relatively copious amounts of releases devoted to silent shorts by Keaton and Chaplin et al. I've checked out some of the shorts new to me and gone online to read some detailed reviews by others who know much more about these classic shorts than I. Reading people arguing about which newly commissioned score on which compilation is superior, debating as to whether this cleaned up print sacrifices deeper blacks while that less pristine print has more character and so on is astonishing to me. For most of film history, once shorts passed out of favor they were almost invisible except to a lucky few in major cities. The fact that we can compare and contrast different re-masterings of classic Keaton on different sets is cause for rejoicing. Best of all, Keaton himself is endlessly entertaining so almost any collection of any shorts of his will be a revelation to newcomers. No exception here.

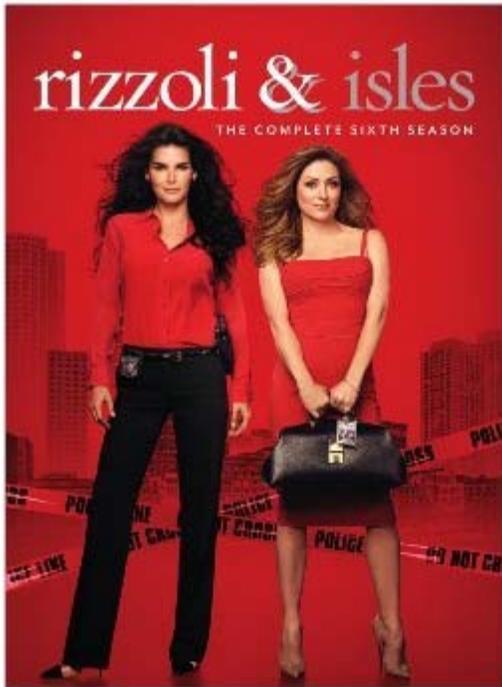
Gold is less of a revelation and more of a curiosity. It's a 1934 sci-fi German film that took more than a year to film and stands in the shadow of Fritz Lang's cautionary masterpiece *Metropolis*. Rightly so, with here the main baddie being British and American businessmen. The sets are stunning at times and were recycled in some American sci-fi films. An alternate French language version shot at the same time is not included unfortunately though since even this is of mostly academic interest, that's probably no great loss artistically. (Though tell that to the Spanish language version of *Dracula*!)

But there can be no debate about the lovely print of *Here Comes Mr. Jordan*, a charming Hollywood fantasy about a boxer who is accidentally brought to heaven by a guardian angel before his time. Played by Robert

Montgomery in easily his best screen role, he's sent back down to earth to go into a new body and try again. It began as a play and has been remade several times (most notably Warren Beatty's *Heaven Can Wait* and Chris Rock's *Down To Earth*) but this is the one to beat. If nothing else, you can't beat Claude Rains. Criterion has a typically wonderful package here, with various extras capped by a radio version that included many of the actors but substituted Montgomery with Cary Grant, the first choice for the lead role. No need to wonder what-if when you can hear how Grant would have been. A delight from start to finish since they don't make 'em like they used to...even when they try.







RICK AND MORTY SEASON 2 (\$29.98 BluRay; Warner Home Video)

DETECTORISTS SERIES 2 (\$39.99 DVD; Acorn Media)

GRANTCHESTER SEASON 2 (\$49.99 BluRay; PBS)

RIZZOLI & ISLES SEASON 6 (\$39.99 DVD; Warner Home Video)

My nephews were shocked! What? I don't watch Rick and Morty?? But it's the best show on TV. So I dove in and immediately understood; it has the rat-a-tat appeal of the random jokes of Family Guy but with a lot more smarts and intellectual playfulness underpinning it. Basically an alcoholic scientist moves in with his daughter's family. Intergalactic and inter-dimensional adventures involving Rick and his grandson Morty (usually of the disturbing, mind-altering kind and playing off some known scientific concept) take place amidst dull suburban family situations. It's anarchic, caustic, heathenish and generally amusing, though I think this is another show where repetition is all. The jokes that are funny the first time might well become hilarious the fifth time I hear them. It's growing on me.

Perhaps a polar opposite to R&M is *Detectorists*, a low-key comedy that is entirely character based. Two pals who specialize in their hobby/would-be careers of metal detection suffer travails and misfortunes both in their private lives and at "work." Mackenzie Crook of the UK's *Office* is the mastermind, writing and directing and starring alongside Toby Jones. It's a pleasure. Two seasons, 13 episodes, and now I'm torn between wanting more and preferring to let this little gem simply exist on its own oddball level and leaving it be. I do think it will return -- after all, it won the BAFTA for best scripted comedy last year and they even did a Christmas special (included here). Just take your time, Crook, and do it when you're ready.

On the other hand, I can take or leave the modest mystery series *Grantchester*. I'm Christian and I love a good murder littered with clues. Toss in a British accent and I'm sold. So it's notable that this minor British show featuring an Anglican priest stumbling onto various crimes barely holds my attention. Yes, James Norton is suitably comely as the man of the cloth who attracts eligible women almost as often as crimes to solve. But

the tales, based on the equally timid short stories of James Runcie, are most interesting when they deal the least with actual crime and more with the workaday life of an Anglican priest. Maybe Runcie thought that wasn't enough and jazzed it up with murder; he was wrong.

Not so with *Rizzoli & Isles*. This cop show features a detective and a medical examiner working in tandem to solve crimes. Like *Cagney & Lacey*, its duo is notably a great team, with Angie Harmon and Sasha Alexander displaying terrific chemistry. Based on the novels by Tess Gerritsen, this is meat and potatoes TV crime stuff. It's worked for years though, with the currently airing seventh season serving as the show's swan song. So soon enough you can expect all seven years together in one box, along with the beginning of fan hopes for a reunion movie or two down the line.

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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.*