

Blu-Ray Feature: 2010 High-Def Holiday Gift Guide

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on November 29, 2010 - 2:21pm

- [24](#) [2]
- [Avatar](#) [3]
- [Back to the Future Trilogy](#) [4]
- [Blu-ray Review](#) [5]
- [Brian Tallerico](#) [6]
- [Deadwood](#) [7]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [8]
- [Inception](#) [9]
- [Lost](#) [10]
- [Paths of Glory](#) [11]
- [The Complete Metropolis](#) [12]
- [The Goonies](#) [13]
- [The Humphrey Bogart Collection](#) [14]
- [The Night of the Hunter](#) [15]
- [The Pacific](#) [16]
- [Theater, TV, DVD & Blu-Ray](#) [17]

CHICAGO – With hundreds of choices new and old, how can you possibly decide what to get the Blu-ray fan in your circle of gift-giving this holiday season? It's that time of year — when we try to read the mental wish lists of our friends and family members and get them the perfect gift. If you're thinking about buying a Blu-ray for your significant other or even just for the office party grab bag, here's the HollywoodChicago.com handy guide to the best of the season. Everything is available now except where noted. Films and television programs included are “Back to the Future,” “The Goonies,” “Avatar,” “Inception,” “Metropolis,” “The Night of the Hunter,” “Paths of Glory,” “24,” “Lost,” “The Pacific,” “Deadwood,” “Toy Story 3,” “Fantasia,” “Aliens,” “The Twilight Saga: Eclipse,” and much more.

For '80s Fans:

“Back to the Future: 25th Anniversary Trilogy”

It's rare to see a series of films and its fans treated as incredibly as Universal has with the 25th Anniversary edition of the “Back to the Future” trilogy. This is one of the most remarkable and impressive Blu-ray releases to date: a box set that not only features pristinely-restored versions of the three films but includes hours of spectacular special features. It's a must-own and arguably the best release in a very good season for Blu-ray collectors. The film itself looks amazing in HD and the films are accompanied by hours of special features including an incredibly-detailed and lengthy documentary about the making of the film that features new interviews with ALL of the players, including Michael J. Fox and executive producer Steven Spielberg.

“The Goonies: 25th Anniversary Edition”

“The Goonies: 25th Anniversary Edition” would look pretty impressive under the Christmas tree given that it's one of Warner Bros.' massive sets crammed with collectibles. What's in the big box? Of course, there's the movie itself, a cherished adventure flick produced by Steven Spielberg and directed by Richard Donner at the height of this kind of action entertainment in the mid-'80s. “The Goonies” is a direct descendant of what Spielberg was trying to do with films like “Raiders of the Lost Ark” and even the “Star Wars” trilogy in the way it tried to bring intense adventure to suburbia. The movie is great and all but this is a release about paper — the kind on which collectibles are printed. Buyers get a new board game, 10 collectible storyboard prints, a 64-page 1985 souvenir magazine, and a reprint of an Empire Magazine “Where Are They Now?” article from 2009. Read your magazines, decorate your room with the storyboard cards, and invite your friends over to play your new “Goonies” board game.

For Mind-Trippers:

“Avatar: Extended Blu-Ray Collector’s Edition”

We will get into this release in more depth this week with a full-length review but the 3-disc Blu-ray release of James Cameron’s “Avatar” is a stunner with three different versions of the film, perfect HD video and audio, and amazing special features. Yes, it sucks that “Avatar” has been released twice in one year on Blu-ray and that the version you spent your hard-earned money has already been made obsolete but this edition is so good and so interesting that not only is it a must-buy for fans of the film but could convert those of you that didn’t fall for Cameron’s vision the first time. And, yes, once again, just as with “Aliens” and “The Abyss,” there’s a James Cameron film with a version that’s better than what was released in theaters. We’ll get into more detail soon but don’t leave this one off your list.

“Inception”

Christopher Nolan’s mind-f*ck of a thriller holds up on repeat viewing as well as anything this year as is a masterpiece tailor-made for Blu-ray. Not only can you pause the movie to take a mental break, but you can get a glimpse into the making-of Nolan’s incredible film. Like “Avatar,” we will provide a more in-depth review soon, but the HD video and audio here are typically-strong for Warner Bros. and the second disc of special feature is impressive if not quite-as-revealing as you may hope. Don’t expect all the answers. But the questions are fascinating enough to ask them over and over again. (Will be released on December 7th, 2010.)

For Film Historians:

“The Complete Metropolis”

“The Complete Metropolis” is a must-see for anyone who dares to call himself a film buff. It is easily one of the most important films of all time. In fact, a solid case could be made that it’s the MOST influential film ever made as it influenced all cinematic science fiction to come. The recently-found footage (what makes it “Complete”) is easy to spot as its both much more weathered than the nearly-perfect rest of the film and it’s interesting to note exactly what’s new by picking it out with the naked eye. And the restoration actually required some pre-existing shots to be re-edited as the found footage made it clear that we hadn’t even been seeing what existed in the right order at all times. Every one of the found 25 minutes serves to deepen Lang’s timeless themes of unchecked power and the will of the people to revolt. Imagine finding a few lost tracks to “Abbey Road.” Imagine a lost Beethoven symphony. That’s the parallel here. One of the most incredible movies every made is even better than the history books had recorded. Buy it. Or stop calling yourself a movie buff.

“Humphrey Bogart: The Essential Collection” (DVD-only)

“The Maltese Falcon” and “The Treasure of the Sierra Madre” were both recently issued fantastic Blu-ray releases but “Humphrey Bogart: The Essential Collection” is one of the best DVD box sets ever released so we would be remiss to ignore it simply because it’s not HD. It can be the one old-ray gift you give this year. The set includes 24 films from the period in which Bogart went from a stage star to one of the biggest stars in the world. And, from that period, everything that matters is here including Bogart’s most-beloved classics: “High Sierra,” “The Maltese Falcon,” “Casablanca,” “To Have and Have Not,” “The Big Sleep,” “The Treasure of the Sierra Madre,” and “Key Largo.” Those seven films alone could comprise an “essential” set for most Bogart fans but when you add in films like “The Petrified Forest,” “Kid Galahad,” “Dark Victory,” and “Dark Passage,” it becomes that much more remarkable. Yes, it would have been nice to have some later films like “The African Queen,” “The Caine Mutiny,” or “Sabrina” but those were made after Bogart left WB. True Bogart fans should own “Casablanca,” “The Maltese Falcon,” and “The Treasure of the Sierra Madre” on Blu-ray, especially given the 5-star quality of those releases, but the set is honestly worth the purchase price for just the other 21 films. And now you can have three of Bogie’s most-beloved on DVD as well as Blu-ray.

“The Night of the Hunter”

Charles Laughton directed one movie in his entire career, the terrifying and brilliant “The Night of the Hunter,” a modern Grimm’s fairy tale in which the evil witch in the forest has come to life and taken the form of one of society’s most trusted figure. Laughton’s masterpiece was a critical and commercial failure on its release but history has wisely recognized the lyrical power and sheer terror of one of the best domestic horror movies ever made. The Criterion Collection has had a spectacular year in the world of Blu-ray and their two-disc set for “The Night of the Hunter” stands as one of the best. With hours of fascinating special features, a perfect video transfer, and quite simply one of the best movies of its kind ever made, this is a must-own. The fact that “The Night of the Hunter” as widely-dismissed on its initial release is stunning but history has made reparations for that slight and this set is the ultimate tribute to a classic.

“Paths of Glory”

“Patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel.” No film has ever captured the truth of this brilliant Samuel Johnson quote as Stanley Kubrick’s masterful “Paths of Glory,” one of the best anti-war films ever made. It’s a work that often gets overlooked by the flashier projects like “2001: A Space Odyssey,” “A Clockwork Orange,” or “The Shining” that Kubrick would make later in his career, but it’s easily one the best works form one of history’s best directors and the Criterion Collection Blu-ray release of the film is another stunning beauty. The special features in “Paths of Glory” are typically-impressive for Criterion, including a new audio commentary by critic Gary Giddins, an excerpt from a 1966 audio interview with director Stanley Kubrick, a television interview from 1979 with star Kirk Douglas, new video interviews with Kubrick’s longtime executive producer Jan Harlan, “Paths of Glory” producer James B. Harris, and actress Christiane Kubrick, a French television piece about a real-life World War I execution that partly inspired the film, and a theatrical trailer.

For Serious Couch Potatoes:

“24: The Complete Series” & “Lost: The Complete Collection”

As the incredibly-lackluster 2010-2011 season continues to drone on without producing a single exciting new network hit, I think we’re going to miss “24” and “Lost” even more than we normally would as the calendar switched over. “Lost” is available now on Blu-ray in a gorgeous complete collection or standalone season sets and “24” will be available DVD-only on December 7th (you can also buy the eighth and final season in HD on the same day). As more and more creative voices head to cable with shows like “The Walking Dead” and “Boardwalk Empire,” it seems less and less likely that we will see programs like “24” and “Lost” on network TV again. As “American Idol” works its way through another dull season and the networks realize that there’s not one new hit on their schedules, your loved one will be happy to be able to watch “24” and “Lost” instead of the programs death-marching to cancellation. (“Lost” is available now and “24,” both the complete series and eighth season standalone, will be released on December 7th, 2010.)

“Deadwood: The Complete Series”

HBO’s brilliant “Deadwood” has been chosen for induction into the complete series Blu-ray catalog of the most important TV network in the last twenty years. The 36 episodes of Milch’s brilliant deconstruction of the TV Western have been segmented on 13 discs — four per season and a disc of bonus material. Essentially, this is nothing more than an HD translation of what was released two years ago on standard disc. If you’re still dreaming of that oft-rumored movie that would tie up all the loose ends of this canceled-too-soon program than you’ll have to keep dreaming. Everything you’d find in the individual season sets have been imported to the complete series set along with the new special features available on the 2008 release. The best of that set was “The Meaning of Endings,” a 23-minute discussion with Milch about the controversial end of the show in which the creators walks the set and talks about where he was planning to go in season four. The other features on the extra disc include “The Real Deadwood: Out of the Ashes”, “Q&A With Cast and Creative Team”, “Deadwood 360 Tour”, and “Al Swearengen Audition Reel (as performed by Titus Welliver)”

“The Pacific”

HBO’s “Band of Brothers” has been an annual bestseller around the holiday season, first on DVD and now on Blu-ray, and it seems virtually impossible that their equally-notable “The Pacific,” now on Blu-ray and DVD, would not follow it up the charts and turn out to be one of the most-given HD gifts of the upcoming season. With perfect HD picture and sound, fascinating special features, and one of the best mini-series in the history of television, this is a highlight of a very-impressive season for Blu-ray. “The Pacific” is simply spectacular. The winner of an amazing eight Emmys, including Outstanding Mini-Series, “The Pacific” is really in a class of its own. It is much more than a mere shadow or duplication of “Band of Brothers.” With only two episodes per disc, the compression on “The Pacific” is so minimal that the HD transfer looks even more ridiculously good than you’d expect. And the sound mix is shattering. Turn it up loud and let it rattle your bones. A mini-series like this one is supposed to shake you. “The Pacific” may be just the story of a few people but it is relatable to many. It is a historical document that also feels remarkably timely. Don’t miss it. Don’t fail to own it. Not only is TV this rare something that should be treasured but you will have a tough time finding a better Blu-ray TV box set this season. “The Pacific” stands alone.

“Twilight Zone: Season 2”

“The Twilight Zone” helped shape science fiction of all forms, not just television. It’s one of the most influential programs of all time and most episodes have held up incredibly well. There aren’t many programs from the early ’60s for which a shot-for-shot remake could air in 2010 and still be devastatingly effective. You can say that about most episodes of “The Twilight Zone.” What are the highlights of season two, which ran from 1960 to 1961? “The Eye of the Beholder,” “Nick of Time,” “The Night of the Meek,” “The Invaders,” “The Odyssey of Flight 33,” “Long Distance Call,” “Will the Real Martian Please Stand Up?,” and “The Obsolete Man.” “Beholder” and “Invaders” are two of the most influential half-hours of TV ever. As for notable current-and-future stars of ‘60-‘61, season two included William Shatner, Art Carney, Agnes Moorehead, Buddy Ebsen, Cliff Robertson, and the great Burgess Meredith. Like the first season release, the special features provided are simply mind-blowing. Not only are the previously-available special features included along with a ton of amazing archival material (often just wonderfully-inserted into watching the episodes themselves, such as when a brief spot for the new “The Andy Griffith Show” plays between episodes as you’re watching them back-to-back) but hours of exclusive blu-ray material has been included. Highlights of the new material include a 1953 episode of the series “Suspense” called “Nightmare at Ground Zero” that was written by Serling and 15 radio dramas featuring from Twilight Zone Radio featuring current actors reading/acting old dramas including Jim Caviezel, Jason Alexander, Ed Begley Jr., Fred Willard, Jane Seymour, Henry Rollins, and more. The dramas go for \$1.95 a piece online so that’s technically a \$30 special feature. And it’s just the beginning. 25 new audio commentaries have been recorded featuring historians and experts on the show along with writer/directors, producers, and more. Combined with the old commentaries and vintage audio recollections, it’s hard to think of another show that’s been so dissected and discussed in one release.

For Young Ones:

“Fantasia”

Disney has made a mint by slowly releasing their catalog titles on DVD and now they have taken that pattern of what they call “vault releases” and moved them to Blu-ray, bringing their canon to HD at the rate of two to three movies a year. The release of “Beauty & The Beast” earlier this year is a must-own as is the upcoming edition of “Fantasia,” which includes not just the classic release but “Fantasia 2000,” with both films also included on standard DVD. Previous Disney vault releases have featured impressive HD video but “Fantasia” is naturally an auditory experience and the HD classical score is stunning. Real little kids might be bored at a cartoon that plays like a symphony but they’ll appreciate it eventually. Trust me. (Will be released on November 30th, 2010.)

“Toy Story 3”

“Toy Story 3” is one of the most deeply and purely satisfying films of not just this year, but the last several. Pixar continues to prove that the other shoe does not have to drop following critical darlings “Ratatouille,” “WALL-E,” and “Up” with a film that’s arguably better than anything they’ve done to date. “Toy Story 3” works on every level — as pure family entertainment but also as something adults will appreciate as a loving ode to the days when nothing was more important than our imagination and our friends. Like the best sequels, “Toy Story 3” doesn’t just advance or conclude the action of the films that preceded it but deepens their themes: It thematically wraps up what now must be viewed

as one of the most artistically-satisfying trilogies in film history. The combo release of “Toy Story 3” includes 4 discs — Blu-ray, Blu-ray special features, DVD, and digital copy. The special features on “Toy Story 3” are even more notable than your average great Pixar release with a commentary/storyboard version of the film, dozens of extras, neat games, and more. It’s incredibly rare for a critic to be able to say this: There is not one single, solitary flaw in the home release of “Toy Story 3.”

“The Twilight Saga: Eclipse”

Do we really need to tell you about “The Twilight Saga”? You’re either a member of Team Jacob or Team Edward and have your copy of “Eclipse” ordered or you’re a parent or guardian wondering when you can order the gift most likely to make your teenage daughter scream with glee on Christmas morning. Briefly, and we’ll run a full review in the next few days, the Blu-ray release of “Eclipse” is just okay but the movie itself is the best “Twilight” to date and fans of this franchise don’t exactly need great HD or amazing special features. They just want to watch “Twilight” over and over again. They can on December 4th, 2010.

For Everyone:

“Alien Anthology”

Possibly the best Blu-ray release of not just the last year but ever, “Alien Anthology” has something for everyone, including at least two great films, FIVE DAYS worth of special features, multiple versions of one of the most influential franchises in history, and gorgeous HD picture and sound — this is why Blu-ray was invented in the first place. All four films are presented with pristine video and audio quality, but it’s the first two movies, the ones most of you really care about, that are the most remarkable. They look spectacular. The contrast levels, the color choices, the line detail — they’re jaw-dropping. Even the grain level has been perfectly rendered so the films don’t look unnatural. Apparently, the “Alien 3” and “Alien Resurrection” transfers weren’t as upgraded although they still look great — just not as refined or remarkable as the first two films. As for special features, everything from the “Quadrilogy” set has been transferred over and enhanced by Blu-ray functionality. In terms of new special features, each of the films come with a new isolated score audio track but that’s just the beginning. Believe it or not, the original documentary about the making of “Alien 3,” “Wreckage and Rage,” was censored by Fox when it was released in the “Quadrilogy” to soften Fincher’s opinion about what went wrong with the production. It’s been uncensored. About 100 “Riddlegrams,” art sketches done by Ridley Scott for the first film, which were not available last time, are here now. And all of the documentaries from the last release have additional footage and information totaling about four hours.



[18]

By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [19]

Content Director

HollywoodChicago.com

brian@hollywoodchicago.com [18]

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[4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/back-to-the-future-trilogy>

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[7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/deadwood>

[8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>

[9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/inception>

[10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/lost>

[11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/paths-of-glory>

[12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/the-complete-metropolis>

[13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/the-goonies>

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[18] <mailto:brian@hollywoodchicago.com>

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