

The 10 Best Blu-Ray, DVD Releases of 2008

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on December 23, 2008 - 4:43pm

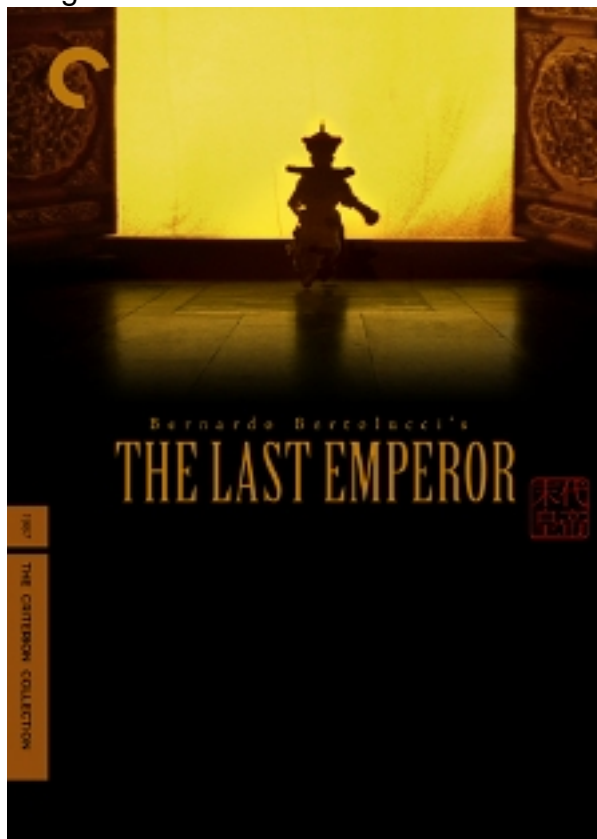
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CHICAGO – For audiences increasingly accustomed to watching movies at home instead of at the multiplex, it was an interesting year for DVDs and Blu-rays.

In this list of top Blu-rays and DVDs of 2008, we cover “Tropic Thunder,” “Dirty Harry,” “The Last Emperor,” “Iron Man,” “The Nightmare Before Christmas,” “Dark City,” “Mad Men,” “Spaced,” “Sleeping Beauty,” “The Godfather” and others including “Band of Brothers,” “Firefly,” “Star Trek,” “Transformers,” “The Wire,” “The Sopranos,” “Dexter,” “24,” “Lost,” “Deadwood” and “Casablanca”.

Of course, the biggest event was the end of the format war between HD-DVD and Blu-ray, but the impact of that Blu-ray victory has yet to fully be realized considering the incredibly small market share still being occupied by the next-gen format. With Blu-Ray players dropping in price by the day and the increasing popularity of HD TVs, it seems like only a matter of time before Blu-Ray supplants DVD in the same way the previous format took over for VHS.

Besides the horrendous economy and the notion that Blu-Ray isn’t significantly superior to DVD to force the change on a technological level, it seems to me that the next hurdle for Blu-Ray is that there just haven’t been enough must-own titles to spur buyers to make the upgrade. Imagine if



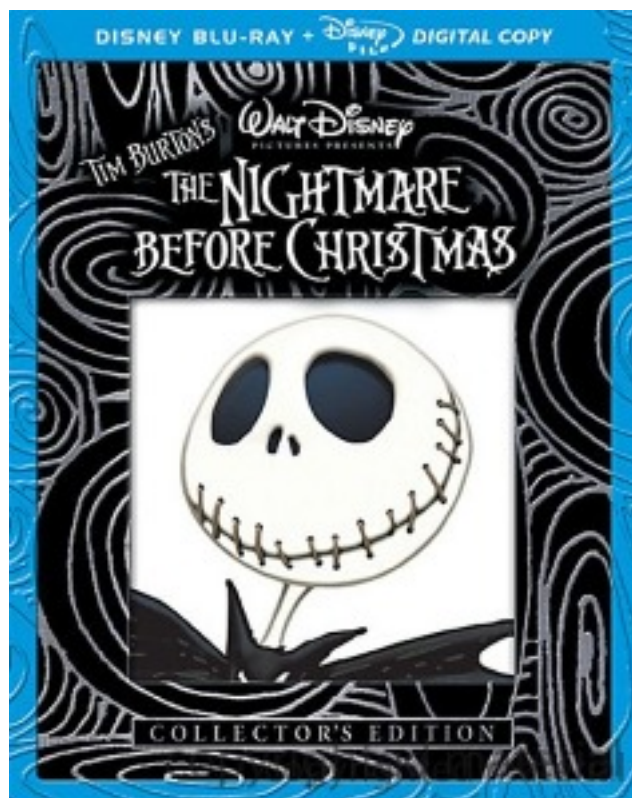
8. “The Last Emperor (Criterion Collection)”

The best Criterion release of the year is also the most extensive. If you’re just starting your Criterion collection, there’s no better place to begin than Bernardo Bertolucci’s multi-Oscar winning epic, now available in an exhaustive four-disc set. The breadth of the set is truly remarkable with the theatrical version of the film, a television version that runs 40 minutes longer, and two discs of supplemental features. The stunning, restored digital transfer would earn the set a spot on this list already but what’s even more remarkable that not one of the special features spread over two discs feels perfunctory. From a featurette that explores the geographic influences of the film to a BBC documentary about Bertolucci to a nearly 100-page booklet included in the packaging, “The Last Emperor” is a must-own.



7. "Iron Man: Two-Disc Ultimate Edition"

The best release of a 2008 film on the home market comes with one of the most beloved films of the year. A stunningly beautiful video transfer and an audio track that will wake the neighbors really amplify a film as technically accomplished as "Iron Man." It's easy to overlook the flaws of the film when you're blown away by the crisp video and crystal clear audio. And director Jon Favreau clearly had the home release in mind during production because he allowed incredible access to the entire process. It would have been easy to hold back special features for an inevitable re-release edition to tie into "Iron Man 2" (like Warner Brothers did with "The Dark Knight"), but, to their great credit, Paramount didn't do that. Movie-specific features, interesting deleted scenes, a 47-minute look at the history of the character on page and screen, and the great feature-length documentary "I Am Iron Man" are stand-outs in a perfect collection that satisfied millions of fans worldwide.



6. "The Nightmare Before Christmas: Collector's Edition"

One of my favorite kids movies of the last twenty years, "The Nightmare Before Christmas" came home on Blu-Ray with an edition that included everything fans of the flick could possibly ask for and more. The movie itself looks and sounds perfect, but Disney didn't stop there, including Tim Burton's two early short films, "Frankenweenie" and "Vincent," a poem that inspired the film read by Christopher Lee, and an all-new commentary track by Tim Burton, Henry Selick, and Danny Elfman. And that's just the start of one of the most comprehensive collections of special features ever included on DVD or Blu-Ray. Concept art, storyboards, deleted scenes, a storyboard-to-film comparison for the entire movie, all the marketing materials, featurettes - there nothing on Earth (or in the land of holidays) that fans could possibly expect on a future release. The Collector's Edition of "A Nightmare Before Christmas" pulls the remarkable trick of taking an already-beloved film and making it even better.



5. “Dark City: Director’s Cut”

The Blu-Ray version of this modern classic redefines the Alex Proyas film as much as the infamous director's cut changed the historical reputation of “Blade Runner” and “Kingdom of Heaven.” Not only is this the only version of “Dark City” that fans should be watching, but it features one of the best video transfers in the short history of Blu-Ray. And the special features are spectacular. There’s a feature-length documentary that starts with basic production material but moves into interviews with critics and scholars about the film and becomes much more than the standard, talking-head junk that you usually associate with features like this one. The critical analysis in “Architecture of Dreams” and the commentary track by the excellent Roger Ebert (one of FIVE audio tracks) should be musts for anyone who writes about film. Most great movies eventually get the treatment they deserve on DVD. Sometimes it just takes ten years and a new format to get it.



4. “Mad Men: Season One”

The show with one of the most complete production design aesthetics in the history of the medium was a natural choice for the best TV on Blu-Ray release of the year. Matthew Weiner’s award-winning show is always keenly aware of how it looks and sounds. It has a better design team than most movies, and nowhere is that more apparent than in gorgeous HD. The picture and audio are flawless through all thirteen episodes, and the special features are the best for a TV release in 2008. Every single episode includes a commentary track and the behind-the-scenes material illustrates the incredible attention to detail that permeates nearly every shot in the series. Like “The Sopranos,” which Weiner worked on before “Mad Men,” it’s a show that’s truly difficult to express the quality of if you haven’t seen it. Watch it. You’ll believe.



3. “Spaced: The Complete Series”

The cult UK hit that created the trifecta of Simon Pegg, Nick Frost, and Edgar Wright (who would go on to make the great “Shaun of the Dead” and “Hot Fuzz”) FINALLY came to Region-1 DVD in 2008, and it was worth the wait. Even if the show wasn’t brilliant (which it is), this would be one of the most impressive TV-on-DVD releases in the history of the format. To accompany this unique, quirky take on the romantic comedy, BBC went to famous fans of the show and asked them to comment on what they loved about “Spaced.” Commentary participants on the episodes include Kevin Smith, Quentin Tarantino, and Matt Stone, all of whom are accompanied by stars of the show itself. Audio commentaries are just the beginning. Outtakes, biographies, an “Homage-O-Meter” for a show filled to the brim with pop culture references, and a feature-length documentary about the history of the show with footage as current as a 2007 Q&A - you’ll spend days with complete series set for “Spaced.”



2. “Sleeping Beauty: 50th Anniversary Edition”

One of the true “game-changers” in the Blu-Ray format this year happened to be for a movie that also changed the form decades ago. With a jaw-dropping video transfer that makes the classic film look completely new, Disney sets a new standard for animation on Blu-Ray. But they don’t stop with presenting a beloved film like it’s never been seen before. Interactivity combined with features that can be appreciated by every generation in the household make “Sleeping Beauty” more timeless than ever. Walt Disney changed how movies were made, and “Sleeping Beauty” has the potential to do the same thing for the home entertainment market. It takes the concept of DVD or Blu-Ray and makes it something educational, historical, and interactive. It’s the kind of seminal release that you should buy even if you don’t have a Blu-Ray player. When you eventually get one, it’s one of the first titles you’re going to want to see.



1. “The Godfather: The Coppola Restoration”

The painstaking restoration of The Godfather trilogy for Blu-Ray is so flawless that it can bring a tear to your eye. No one has seen “The Godfather,” one of the best movies ever made, until they’ve seen this restoration. The visual detail is overwhelming. Even people who can quote these movies in their sleep will be blown away. The final disc of the four-disc Blu-Ray set includes nearly five hours of bonus materials, almost all in HD themselves. All of the featurettes from the 2001 release were imported along with great new ones like “The Masterpiece That Almost Wasn’t,” featuring interviews with people influenced by the series including Guillermo Del Toro, David Chase, Alec Baldwin, and Steven Spielberg. The history and impact of the film is expanded upon in the just-as-good “Godfather World.” Some movies stand the test of time but “The Godfather” has that very rare quality of moviemaking that just makes the film seem better every time you see it. People who don’t like “The Godfather” simply don’t like movies. And there isn’t a Blu-Ray player on Earth truly living up to its potential if “The Godfather: The Coppola Restoration” isn’t sitting next to it.



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By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [26]

Content Director

HollywoodChicago.com

brian@hollywoodchicago.com [25]

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

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