

Pit Stop (1969), Arrow Films, 2015, 91 mins, \$39.95 • Arty action film from director Jack Hill set in the world of figure-8 racing. Shot in black-and-white, at night, Hill's realistic film casts a greasy aura of desperation, a road-to-nowhere vibe. You can almost smell the scorched rubber, the oil slicks, the burn off of high-octane fuel. Dick Davalos is Rick Bowman, a street racer, who, after being arrested, is signed by race promoter Grant Willard (Brian Donlevy as an amoral heavy). Davalos, hair puffed up in an anachronistic pompadour, is an overaged JD, full of 1950s-era existential angst. Director Hill said that Bowman was a figure who wins at the cost of his soul, but Davalos's muted, subtle performance questions whether he ever had a soul to begin with. Cold, fatalistic, obsessive.

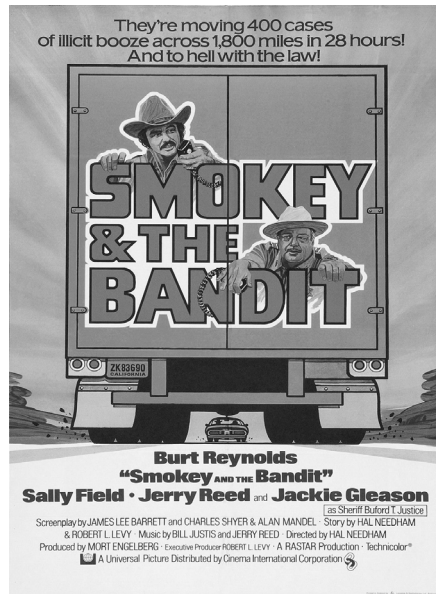
Anatahan (1953, 1958), Kino Classics, 2017, 91 mins, \$29.95 • Strange capstone to director Josef von Sternberg's career: a group of twelve Japanese sailors are stranded on a small South Pacific Island; military discipline and human decency breaks down when they encounter a woman (the stunning Akemi Negishi as Keiko). In an offbeat exercise in narrative telling, von Sternberg's voice-over summarizes what we see and flash-forwards to what's to come. There are no subtitles. Non-native speakers only know what von Sternberg *tells* us. This creates layers of uncertainty between dialogue and summary. Visually, von Sternberg fetishizes the female body, placing a nude Negishi behind netting, plant fronds, and gauzed curtains; moreover, the voice of a European on the soundtrack, taking the position of one of the story's drones (the powerless men drawn to Keiko's beauty but unable to attain her) forms an even more troubling gaze: that of the European looking upon Asian culture and claiming a position within it. A real curio.

Smokey and the Bandit (1977), Universal, 2017, 96 mins, \$19.98 • This high-octane classic, full of daring stunts, humor, and badass attitude is back, celebrating its fortieth anniversary with remastered beer-drinking, rubber-burning fun. Burt

Crosscuts

BRIEF BLU-RAY REVIEWS

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Reynolds and Sally Field fill the screen with their charisma, teasing, flirting. She's vulnerable and proves that smart can be funny. She also has the charm to break Burt of his good-old-boy posturing and get him to reveal some real vulnerabilities behind the bravado and fey laugh. Jerry Reed has written one incredible theme song that always gets my boogie foot a tapping, and who can forget the understated performance of Fred the dog? Or the Method work of the Trans Am? Director Hal Needham even throws in a Brechtian flourish: Burt, after avoiding a smokey, lifts his head and smiles right into the camera, telling us, hey, this film is a total phony, but ain't it all a barrel of fun, boys and girls? Alfred Hitchcock loved *Smokey*. I do, too. Guilty pleasure.

The Happy Ending (1969), Twilight Time, 2016, 112 mins, \$29.95 • Incredible second-wave feminist film from writer/director Richard Brooks that deconstructs classic fairy tales. It begins with gauzy images of skiing in Colorado, passion before a fireplace, and a wedding, and then explores the "lived happily ever after"

hangover. Jean Simmons is Mary Wilson, a troubled housewife, over thirty-five, and bored. She pops pills, drinks excessively, seeks escape in romantic movies, has a face-lift, and eventually leaves her husband for a getaway adventure in Jamaica. Will she find the self she lost when she left college midway through her senior year to get married? Simmons's performance is nuanced, multileveled, and should have won an Oscar. She's depressed and desperate, seeking solutions to "the problem that has no name." Mary believes she ought to be happy and yet sex doesn't lift her emptiness. Brooks has written a *sequel* to Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. And to help lift the veil on so-called happy marriages, he has assembled a stellar cast: Nanette Fabray, a pill-popping coconspirator; Bobby Darin, a phony baloney gigolo with as many accents as Tim Horton's has donuts; Shirley Jones, a tough sounding mistress who yearns for real romance (and may have found it); and the great Teresa Wright, in denial over her daughter's dissatisfactions, and, perhaps, her own. Poignant, haunting.

The Man from Planet X (1951), MGM/Scream Factory, 71 mins, \$27.99 • SF classic from cult film fave Edgar G "Detour" Ulmer, about an unknown planet that has somehow commandeered itself from its orbit and is heading toward earth. Meanwhile, in Burry, Scotland, a man from Planet X plots, or so it would seem, our takeover. Margaret Field (Sally's mom) is Enid, a nearing-thirty ingénue who aids Robert Clarke (reporter John Lawrence), sporting a macho bomber jacket and Clark Gable mustache, in thwarting the threat. The alien, with a face that resembles a wide-screen image squeezed into Academy aspect ratio, never speaks. His eyes, apparently, have no pupils, creating further levels of dissonance. Okay, this film is strictly low-budget: the rocks on the moor appear to be made of paper-mache, the backdrops are painted, and miniatures of various buildings look like, well, miniatures, but Ulmer's verve and chiaroscuro lighting give the film a poetically ethereal and expressionistic vibe. Loads of fun. □