

# Straight to Disc

Movies you might have missed BY CHUCK ADAMS

For the slobbering (but completely harmless) cinephile on your list, what better way to show your immortal hipness than to get her a movie that she probably hasn't seen yet (unless she escaped to Portland on an idle weekend and spent the day at Fox Tower 10)? Here are seven highly esteemed films that skipped Eugene on the big screen but are now available at your local DVD outlets.

**American Gun**

Definitely not an across-the-board crowd or critic pleaser, *American Gun* was released with nary a dent in the early summer cinema block-busting machine. But the film's disparate stories of children, teenagers, school officials and parents



Blood Tea and Red String

dealing with a nation of gunslingers demands our undivided attention. One story thread follows an Oregon mother (Marcia Gay Harden) through the years of coping after her son guns down his classmates and himself. It hits home.

**Twelve and Holding**

Like his 2001 film *L.I.E.*, a similar examination of youth in conflict, director Michael Cuesta brews up situations that are hard to look at, much less explore in lurid detail. Here, the protagonists are three preteens trying to make sense of their best friend's sudden death amid the swirling confusion of parental neglect and puberty. Some of the finest child acting you'll see all year.

**Lonesome Jim**

Steve Buscemi's answer to the schlocky, uneven *Garden State* and the ego fluff of *Jersey Girl* has big-city Jim (Casey Affleck) returning to live amongst his extended family in a small Indiana town. Like the painfully inert tavern setting in Buscemi's *Trees Lounge*, Jim's hometown acts as a ball-and-chain noose, pulling and squeezing him to the breaking point, until, of course, he meets the off-kilter girl with "issues."

**Blood Tea and Red String**

For the budding stop-motion animation cinephile on your list - hint: this person watches both *A Nightmare Before Christmas* and *A Claymation Christmas Celebration* every December - there's not much else to match the awe and painstaking artistry seen in this tale of the White Mice and the Creatures Who Dwell



Under the Oak, director Christiane Cegavske's 13-year-long pet project. It's a boatload of quirkiness, mystery and youthful imagination.

**The Road to Guantanamo**

A striking example of how cinema can achieve poetic justice in the face of an outlaw regime. As told by three Pakistani Brits, this is their story of being swept up in the war in Afghanistan while visiting relatives, "captured" by the Northern Alliance, handed over to the U.S. military, imprisoned/interrogated/tortured in Gitmo for two-and-a-half years and, well ... you know the rest. This is damning cinema.

**Water**

The third film in Deepa Mehta's "Elements" trilogy, *Water* took a lot of brashness and bruising to get made; religious fundamentalists repeatedly torched the set and threatened Mehta's life. Set in 1938, just prior to Gandhi's nonviolent revolution, the film chiefly follows

Chuyia, a widowed child (yes, widowed: Her husband died shortly after their marriage), as she slowly realizes that her move to a widows' colony may be permanent. A work of subtle force and powerful anger.

**Kekexili: Mountain Patrol**

A Beijing journalist is sent to report on the armed conflict between antelope poachers and a band of ten "unofficial" mountain patrolmen in the uninhabited Kekexili region of Tibet. Kekexili serves as both an awe-inspiring backdrop and a silent antagonist in the movie; in one scene a patrolman hops out of his jeep and is literally consumed by the landscape. The poachers are indeed ruthless, but then so is the patrol, frequently beating confessions out of suspects or selling some of their confiscated furs for money ("We have no choice," explains Ri Tai, after they run out of food and gas). It's a modern day *Seven Samurai*: a masterpiece with no easy morals.

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