

CC recommends: New on DVD

by [John Petrakis](#)

This article appears in the [December 13, 2005](#) issue.

Off the Map. Directed by Campbell Scott. Sony Pictures, \$24.96.

This overlooked, low-budget independent film concerns a loving family living off the land in the New Mexican desert that embraces a wandering IRS agent seeking meaning in life. The film mixes subtle comedy and glowing spirituality in just the right amounts. Joan Allen and Sam Elliot shine as the determined mother and depressed father.

The Assassination of Richard Nixon. Directed by Niels Mueller. New Line Home Video, \$19.98.

Sean Penn is the best but not the only reason to see this disturbing tale, based on the true story of Sam Bicke, a failed businessman who sought to kill President Nixon in 1974. The film has structural similarities to *Taxi Driver*, but Bicke's rationale for committing murder stems from genuine outrage over the direction of his country.

Crash. Directed by Paul Haggis. Lions Gate, \$28.98.

Anger, prejudice and racial stereotyping are at the heart of this skillfully crafted story of a handful of desperate Los Angelinos whose paths keep crossing during a few days of rage. With more twists, turns and detours than a Los Angeles freeway, the film keeps surprising us. Matt Dillon is superb as a morally confused cop.

Look at Me. Directed by Agnès Jaoui. Sony Pictures, \$29.95.

This wise and clever French film analyzes the pernicious side effects of fame as seen through the eyes of a self-centered novelist, his trophy wife, his needy and angry daughter, and the daughter's ambivalent music teacher. In between moments of ethical struggle are some beautifully written dialogue scenes that both complicate and clarify matters.

Pickpocket. Directed by Robert Bresson. Criterion Collection, \$39.95.

“With theft, I entered by the back door into the kingdom of morality,” wrote legendary writer/director Robert Bresson (1901-1999) about this French classic (1959). Inspired by Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, it’s about a silent young man who encounters sin, remorse, forgiveness and redemption while slipping his hand into overcoats and purses. As with much of Bresson’s work, the devil is in the details.

Baby, the Rain Must Fall. Directed by Robert Mulligan. Sony Pictures, \$24.96.

Once Marlon Brando hung up his leather jacket, the mantle of cool passed to Steve McQueen, who wore it until his death in 1980 at the age of 50. McQueen is perfectly cast as an ex-con who can’t seem to follow the straight and narrow, despite the unconditional love of his beautiful wife, played by Lee Remick. Created in 1962 by the same team—director Robert Mulligan and writer Horton Foote—that made *To Kill a Mockingbird* three years earlier.

The Gleaners and I. Produced by Agnès Varda. Zeitgeist Films, \$29.99.

The French filmmaker Agnès Varda made this delightful and entirely surprising documentary in 2000 about gleaning, the act of acquiring discarded items. It presents virtually every kind of gleaner, from those who comb farmland after harvests (an honorable tradition) to metropolitan weekend passersby who pick up items on the curbside. Gleaning becomes a metaphor for Varda’s own work and for her life after the death of her husband.

Crossfire. Directed by Edward Dmytryk. Turner Home Entertainment, \$19.98.

An affable man (Sam Levene) hosting a party of soldiers is murdered because he’s Jewish. This 1947 film was one of the first to explore the theme of anti-Semitism, and though it doesn’t do so on a very profound level, it’s extremely effective, largely because of the film noir atmosphere built by director Edward Dmytryk. The cast includes Gloria Grahame (an asset to any picture) and a trio of Roberts—Young as the homicide detective and Mitchum and Ryan as soldiers. Ryan gives a terrifying and indelible performance.

Goodbye, Mr. Chips. Directed by Sam Wood. Warner Home Video, \$19.98.

Robert Donat gives a justly celebrated performance as a beloved master at an English boarding school in the first (1939) film adaptation of the James Hilton novella, directed by Sam Wood. It’s a charmer, with just the right amount of

sentimentality; it warms you up without making you feel you've been had. Greer Garson plays the woman who turns Chips into a great teacher.