


When we first met,
I was 20 years old.



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DVD BEAVER catalogues the (sometimes minute) differences in DVD versions of the same film: in this case, the 1962 *L'Eclisse*

Why stop at your local video store?

A Canadian website encourages movie fans to do their DVD buying all around the world

BY JAIME J. WEINMAN • If you've already bought all the hundreds of thousands of DVDs in North America, and you're getting bored, there's a Canadian website with a solution: buy DVDs from everywhere in the world. It's DVD Beaver (www.dvdbeaver.com), created by Mississauga, Ont., resident Gary W. Tooze. It covers U.S. DVDs but also DVDs from Europe, Asia and elsewhere. And since overseas DVDs won't play on North American DVD players, it's like a big commercial for so-called "region-free" players, which enable users to view any disc from anywhere in the world. After DVDs supplanted laser discs, watching movies at home became a mainstream hobby. Tooze and his reviewers have a mission: make DVD collecting fun for obsessive specialists again.

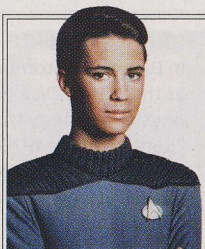
Tooze, a former computer programmer who has worked full-time on DVD Beaver for the last 3½ years, has an evangelical purpose: to show people what they're missing by limiting themselves to one country's worth of discs. In an interview with *Maclean's*, he said that his site encourages people to "maximize their entertainment potential" by helping themselves to the obscure movies reviewed on his site, like a Korean TV miniseries based on *All About Eve* (relocating it to a TV news station in Seoul), or an unauthorized Italian special edition of Andy Warhol's three-hour *The Chelsea Girls*. Tooze's own favourite film, the 1999 French drama *Rosetta*, is not available outside France, and he says he'd never have seen it if he hadn't gone region-free. The whole site is reminiscent of the independent theatres that used to lure people in with the promise of obscure, unpublicized movies; those theatres mostly don't exist now, so DVD Beaver has become their online equivalent.

The idea is that it's worth importing DVDs from overseas to get what Tooze calls "the total movie experience" that run-of-the-mill DVD buyers are missing. This philosophy applies even to mainstream U.S. movies. Reviewers use screen captures to compare the same shot in every DVD release of a film, and while sometimes the mainstream product looks better, other times we'll be told that there is a better picture or different extras on a foreign disc. Writers examine every possible difference between one DVD and another: a review of Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes* explains that the U.S. DVD is "slightly cropped on the right edge" but that a German DVD suffers from "sharp, sibilant s-sounds." The point is that it's worth searching the earth for the perfect representation of a movie; Tooze insists that we shouldn't settle for "inferior or manipulated DVDs" just because they're the ones we find in stores.

It's a mission statement that may have been influenced by one of DVD Beaver's contributors, Jonathan Rosenbaum, and especially his book, *Movie Wars: How Hollywood and the Media Conspire to Limit What Films We Can See*. Rosenbaum argues that theatres and mainstream critics tend to limit us to a tiny selection of films, mostly U.S. product plus a few pre-approved "masterpieces" from around the world. By ignoring less-publicized

movies from Europe, Asia and even the U.S., Rosenbaum thundered, the media was "leaving out most of what keeps the art of world cinema, including American cinema, alive." Now, with DVD Beaver and sites like DVD Basen (a directory of DVD reviews from every "region"), there are collectors who share Rosenbaum's vision of movie-going as a global scavenger hunt. Tooze shares the view that we should "keep an open mind and not simply succumb to the frivolous and manipulative whims of the marketplace."

DVD Beaver itself is doing pretty well in that same marketplace; it's one of the top 10 most-read DVD sites, and has spun off a newsletter and discussion groups. The site has even become popular and mainstream enough to inspire its share of internal disputes and mainstream-media attacks: Mahnola Dargis wrote in the *New York Times* that DVD Beaver was "run by geeks whose fetishistic attention to technical detail mirrors that of hard-core audiophiles." But however mainstream the site becomes, its main function is still to give readers the comforting feeling they're buying DVDs the mainstream media won't tell them about. Tooze expresses pity for people who choose to limit their options by sampling only one continent's worth of DVDs: "Mark Twain said there is no difference between the man who can't read and the man who doesn't read." But then again, with so many DVDs available from anywhere on earth, who has time to read anyway? **M**



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"Wil Wheaton (of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*) would like you to know that he does not and will not endorse [the American Automobile Association's] insurance. We initially reported that Mr. Wheaton disliked all of AAA. Not so. He tells us: 'I'm happy with the rest of the AAA services I've used, and continue to use. The insurance, though, can eat a bag of dicks.'" —*The Consumerist* website, as reported on www.regrettheerror.com