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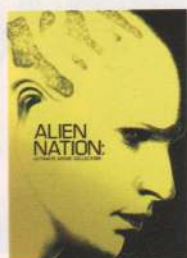
- Her **Sexy** Bandmate
- Girlfriend **Gossip**
- **Secrets** In Their Lyrics

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EDITOR'S PICK

Alien Nation: Ultimate Movie Collection

(Fox): You don't have to remember the short-lived, '80s sci-noir TV series *Alien Nation*, which spawned these five movies, to love this DVD set. Picking up where the series left off, *Alien Nation* follows a Los Angeles cop, his "Newcomer" partner (a fugitive alien slave trying to assimilate), and a purist group that has developed a virus to kill off the alien Newcomers. They encounter the first alien-human hybrid girl, a dangerous cult and the dangers of post-hypnotic suggestion, all in this compelling two-disc box set. Like *Buffy*, *Firefly* and even *Star Trek* before it, *Alien Nation* uses theoretical analogy to tackle broad issues like race, class, sexual orientation and social injustice. Plus, fan-girls will find gag reels, four making-of featurettes and storyboards. (foxhome.com) —DAM

Talking It Out

The actors and the dialogue carry these dramas. | By Candace Moore



Carmen Elias and Susi Sánchez heat things up in *A Love to Keep*

These three dramas prefer the internal landscape to the external one, exploring their characters' relationships to love, discrimination, anger and family through conversation and recollection.

La Cucina (Chianti Pictures): Taking place in three kitchens in the same Los Angeles apartment complex, this character-driven drama relies on the talents of its cast and on Allison Wilke's full-bodied script about love, commitment and sensual pleasure. *The L Word*'s always-lovable Leisha Hailey plays it straight as Shelly, a pregnant woman whose husband flakes out around the house. She stomps upstairs to complain to her neighbor Jude (Rachel Hunter), who's cooking up a storm and preparing to greet her lover Celia after a long day at a film shoot. Shelly and Jude laugh together, weighing the pros and cons of lesbian relationships. Shelly's jealous that Jude and Celia are lovers and best girlfriends. Jude acknowledges it's true but adds that they also find themselves "competing to vent." We then learn that Celia's meal will likely turn cold; she's exploring a bottle of champagne (and potentially more) with a coy seductress from the set. Meanwhile, back at the complex, 30-year-old Lily (Christina Hendricks) and her older lover Michael (Joaquim de Almeida) share two bottles of vino and a caprese salad, while teasing out their ideas about relationships. The lone guitarist riffing into the night is a neighbor who nev-

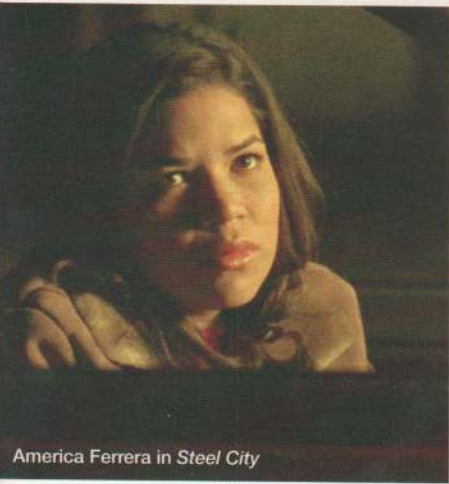
er joins outright into this discourse about love, but gracefully punctuates and accompanies it. The warmth of the lighting, the role of food and wine, and the closeups of the actors keep things intimate; the viewer feels like a respectfully invited guest.

A Love to Keep (Picture This! Entertainment): Juan Carlos Claver's epic drama explores the devastating story of two lovers persecuted during Franco's regime in Spain, when homosexuality was illegal and treated as an aberration that might be abolished through electrotherapy. Schoolteachers Pilar (Carmen Elias) and Elvira (Susi Sánchez) enjoy a contented domestic life together: making love, reading Neruda aloud and collecting dried flower petals in their shared flat. That is, until Pilar's conservative family, along with the police and the medical establishment, intervene and tear their relationship apart. Under the threat of imprisonment, Pilar is sent to an asylum where her co-inhabitants bash their heads against walls, and a woman who has cooked and eaten her mother stalks Pilar in the common area. She is repeatedly strapped to a chair and tortured while a relentless Zippo-snapping doctor shows her slides of naked women. These four years of aversion "therapy" leave Pilar's nerves and psyche permanently scarred. During the 1980s, when the lovers are able to resume their life together in a more tolerant Spain, they find themselves haunted by the dam-

Gals Who've
Spent 1960s
Sugar-sweeteners that are worth
the sugar

age they've sustained. Heart-wrenching in its historical accuracy, this Spanish film (with subtitles) explores homophobia's darkest personal effects. (picturethisentertainment.com)

Steel City (Peace Arch Entertainment): Notable for its superb performances, this contemplative indie is about working-class men and their bruising and healing family relationships in middle America. It begins with a truck accident that leaves a woman dead and Carl Lee (John Heard) behind bars. Young adult PJ (Tom Guiry) visits his dad, Carl, in jail and his angsty older brother at the steel mill. Both are trapped. PJ tools around his blue-lit small town in the family's dented truck, trying to make ends meet after losing his dishwashing job. *Ugly Betty's* America Ferrera plays the patient woman who shows PJ how to love. Raymond J. Barry received an Independent Spirit Award nomination for his portrayal of PJ's no-bullshit uncle Vic, who teaches his slacker nephew new respect and discipline. The alt-country soundtrack serves as yet another introspective character. Now out on DVD, *Steel City* is one of the better recent films to address the subtleties of performing a particular brand of masculinity while ridden with remorse, anger and sadness. While their first instincts may be to deny their feelings, and to break things, the men of the Lee family confront plenty of emotion in this carefully directed film by Brian Jun, who also wrote the script. (peacearch.com) ■



America Ferrera in *Steel City*

DVD & TV PICKS



Gimme Sugar (Logo): Logo's latest lesbian reality show drops us into the girl party of WeHo, where we meet a new "gaggle" of hot and hormonal twentysomethings as they dance, hook up and gossip. Their fearless leader, Charlene, must balance allegiance to her friends and her employers (famed L.A. club promoters) when comedienne Alice hatches a plan for the girls to launch their own ladies night. Later episodes find the gal pals holding an overpriced lesbian car wash for funds. Can we still call such viewing pleasures shameful? Nah, go ahead and bask in televised L.A. dyke night life and then get some shut eye. These girls will do the staying out for you. (logoonline.com)



Sonja (Picture This! Entertainment): This character-driven, German sexual awakening film stars Kirsten Dunst-lookalike Sabrina Kruschwitz as a moody teenager, Sonja, who dreams of kissing her best friend Julia's neck and tells her so. The two roleplay as lovers, constantly cuddle and call each other "silky paw," but Julia is intent on finding a steady boyfriend. Meanwhile, Sonja realizes just how much she loves Julia. (comingofagemovies.com)



I Was a Teenage Feminist (Women Make Movies): Now in her 40s, filmmaker Therese Shechter recalls feminism's positive impact on her youth. In this documentary she seeks to explore the meanings that the F word holds for women and men today, and to get to the heart of the recent ambivalence toward or disavowal of the term. Interviews with Gloria Steinem, the publishers of *Bitch* magazine, the Radical Cheerleaders and other feminist forces-to-be-reckoned-with are interspersed with open discussions with everyday Janes and Joes. Shechter triumphantly redefines and reclaims her own feminism during her journey; hopefully it's contagious. (wmm.com)



Fat Girls (Regent Releasing): Upbeat coming-of-age comedy about aspiring Broadway star Rodney (Ash Christian) and his snarky best friend Sabrina (Ashley Fink), who weighs 300 pounds. Finding your inner fat girl, Rodney muses, is a journey that ends in "being comfortable with yourself." He chooses this path as he explores his gay identity, with help from his dra-

ma teacher. Sabrina brings her new Cuban boyfriend home to meet her two moms. The friends try to brave the last remnants of high school in their small town before they get out of Dodge. (fatgirls-themovie.com)

Film Geek (First Run Features): The video store clerk, Scotty Pelk (Melik Malkasian), in this cute, funny but equally sad send-up of encyclopedic knowledge and movie trivia-dropping is oddly lovable. Writer-director James Westby clearly has a talent for eliciting *schadenfreude*. After losing his job (and cheap access to movie rentals), Scotty follows his indie girl crush, Niko (Tyler Gannon), on an adventure of keg parties and awkward dates at the cinema. She's a black-bobbed art school vixen, who brags about eating pussy and hangs with both queer and frat-style crowds. Scotty finds he can't compete, but he can play his strong suits. (scottys-filmpage.com)



Love Life (Water Bearer Films): Joe, an ex-pro ball player, and Mary, a homemaker with a rich family, have a business arrangement for a marriage in this erotic drama. Both closeted, they figure that as long as they don't get emotionally attached to their sexual flings, they can continue to milk Mary's mom to maintain a nice lifestyle. Problems with the plan arise when Joe develops a genuine hankering for a landscaper and Mary's out lesbian ex-lover comes to stay. (WaterBearerFilms.com) — CM