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Billboard Marvel Characters Come Direct To DVD This

By Jill Kipnis

It's Captain America! It's Black Panther! It's Thor!

Any of these comic heroes could be the star of one of eight new direct-to-DVD titles, thanks to a new deal between **Marvel Enterprises** and **Lions Gate Entertainment**.

The two companies will jointly develop, produce and distribute the titles, the first of which is expected in late 2005. Each feature-length project will star one Marvel character and include DVD extras.

"What we have an opportunity to do here is to build a brand with a broad demographic of fans, including adults and children," says **Glenn Ross**, president of Lions Gate's family home entertainment division.

The video deal stems from the current theatrical relationship between the companies. In February, Marvel granted Lions Gate licenses to create and distribute theatrical films based on its properties "Iron Fist" and "Black Widow." The companies have additionally agreed to make a sequel to the theatrical release "The Punisher."

"Lions Gate is a great marketer and distributor," **Marvel Studios** chairman/CEO **Avi Arad** said in a statement. "We will bring to the DVDs great added value with our artists, writers and tremendous history. We hope to be in the DVD business for a very long time."

Lions Gate will provide Marvel with licensing fees to fund all of the distribution and marketing of the titles and for charac-

ter rights, while Marvel will be in charge of creative development and production.



PUTUMAYO GOES DVD: Putumayo World Music will enter the DVD market June 8 with "Travel the World with Putumayo."

The DVD-only title, available for \$19.98, will feature 12 music videos and live performances from such world acts as Egyptian singer **Hisham Abbas**, Senegalese band **Tukuleur** and Czech musician **Vera Břila**. Subtitles will be provided in English, Spanish, French and German.

"People are starting to be interested in world music more and more," says **Dan Storper**, founder of Putumayo. "We have four music albums that have sold over 300,000 copies. With some luck, I think we can sell DVDs in high numbers."

Storper says that a direct-response campaign, airing on such networks as **A&E** and the **Travel Channel**, will launch in mid-July. The company is also working on getting airplay on video shows.

Storper says that two to four DVDs will be released per year. Most titles will likely focus on music performances.

NOTABLE CATALOG: Two sports-oriented catalog titles are being

rereleased with some impressive new extras.

Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment's "Ali: Director's Cut" (June 1, \$24.95)—the story of boxing legend **Muhammad Ali** that

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stars **Will Smith** in the title role—features new footage added into the film, a new audio commentary by director **Michael Mann** and a documentary about making the project.



"The film is maybe five or six minutes longer," Mann says. "The drama in this version is much more conflicted. The documentary really shows how Will and I were committed to making this film."

The bonus features on **Universal Studios Home Video's** "Field of Dreams 15th Anniversary Edition" delves into the emotional connection between Americans and their favorite sport. The two-disc DVD set, in stores June 8, is priced at \$26.98.

One segment, "From Father to Son: Passing Along the Pastime," features the film's star, **Kevin Costner**; director **Phil Alden Robinson**; and numerous baseball players discussing the sport's impact on their lives. Other extras include deleted scenes and commentaries.

"It is fascinating to see these special features and see how the film affected the actors and producers," Robinson says.

THE CALL OF THE WILD: Ever wonder how lions really move in the wild? A new TV movie,



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"Pride," which debuts on **A&E** June 21 and will be coming to DVD from **BBC Video** Sept. 7, uses Boulder-cam technology to show how they interact.

The Boulder-cam is a video camera camouflaged as a boulder to allow it to move among the lions. "Pride," a story about the conflicts between two lion prides, uses this

wildlife footage and weaves in a family-oriented story.

Computer-generated effects by **Jim Henson's Creature Shop** were added to the facial and mouth movements of the animals. Some of the actors that provide the cats' voices are **Kate Winslet, Rupert Graves** and **Helen Mirren**.

The DVD will be priced at \$14.98.