

## Reviews of recent and upcoming DVD releases

**By Billy O'Keefe**

**McClatchy-Tribune News Service  
(MCT)**

"1408: Two Disc Collector's Edition" (PG-13/NR, 2007, Dimension)

Baggage-riddled occult writer Mike Enslin (John Cusack) is much too jaded to believe his own stories, much less the legend of the Dolphin Hotel's Room 1408, which the hotel's manager (Samuel L. Jackson) describes simply as an evil bleeping room. Naturally, this being a two-hour film based on the writings of Stephen King, there's some merit to the manager's warning. Outside of some moments that will awaken your inner claustrophobe, "1408" isn't a particularly frightening movie. But it's such a messed-up and imaginative trip, starring a fascinating and startlingly well-developed cast of characters that the absence of cheap frights doesn't even matter. Unpredictability is far more valuable, and this film is rich with it in ways large and small. A point near act three seems to indicate a descent into random wackiness, and it temporarily appears that "1408" is a film that doesn't know how to wrap itself up. Stick with it, though, because it quickly finds its footing before delivering a knockout of a final scene.

Extras: Extended cut with alternate ending, director/writers commentary, three behind-the-scenes features, deleted scenes (with commentary).

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"The War: A Ken Burns Film" (NR, 2007, PBS)

Upon completion of his legendary Civil War documentary, Ken Burns publicly proclaimed he was done telling stories about war. Fortunately, his filmmaking skills are more apparent than his promise-keeping talents. Burns takes on World War II in "The War," and the finished "film" \_ to use his words \_ is so unmistakably Burns that he need not even put his name on the door. That, mind you, isn't a bad thing. No one dissects a subject quite like Burns does, and the 15 hours he presents here are so dense with top-flight storytelling and unbelievable, one-of-a-kind images that the minutes just melt away. Despite the "film" designation, "The War" actually splits itself into seven chronological episodes of varying length. Thus, you need not feel any unreasonable obligation to watch it in one sitting or without taking time to watch some lighter fare in between. That, of course, isn't to say you won't want to. "The War" isn't always an easy program to watch, but it's an even harder problem to turn off once it's on.

Extras: Burns commentary, making-of feature, deleted scenes, bonus interviews, bios, photo gallery, educational resources.

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"Sun Dogs" (NR, 2006, Palm Pictures)

Lest there be no confusion \_ because it wouldn't be the first time \_ "Sun Dogs" isn't about the unlikely rise of the Jamaican bobsled team. Rather, it's about the even more unlikely formation of a Jamaican dogsled team. Lack of snow on which to practice is one thing; training stray dogs of all shapes and sizes to pull a sled in tandem is entirely another. Among other things, "Dogs" captures the entire process, rolling camera as a confused pack of dogs endure their first practice and continuing to roll as the same dogs joyously fly down the same path like a well-oiled machine only a short time later. But

"Dogs" also manages, with compelling results, to place its story in a larger context \_ namely, an island with tremendous international renown that nonetheless is crippled by crime and a damaged educational system. The dogs easily steal the show, but the story of a musher (dogsled-speak for rider) named Newton is every bit as intriguing.

Extras: Four mini-features, dog bios.

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"Day Night Day Night" (NR, 2006, IFC FirstTake)

The less a movie says, the more room it leaves for people to interpret whatever message it supposedly has. That leaves a whole lot of room for interpreting "Day Night Day Night," which follows a 19-year-old woman (Luisa Williams) as she prepares to carry out a suicide bombing mission in Times Square. "Night" is an extremely sparse movie, with little outside of mission prep and the mission itself comprising the film's 91 minutes. Wait for the film to make a sweeping statement or for the main character to suddenly bust into monologue mode, and you'll be waiting a while. That leaves the floor open to all kinds of discussion \_ whether "Night" is sympathetic to Williams' character, whether it's making a statement about the goodwill of Americans, or any number of other interpretations in between. Your best bet, in fact, may be to sit back and see "Night" for what it is: suspenseful entertainment. Will she or won't she? Avoid reading the back of the DVD case, with spoils far too much, and see for yourself.

Extras: Writer/director commentary

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"The Sarah Silverman Program. Season One" (NR, 2007, Comedy Central)

Sarah Silverman is a one-woman cottage industry dedicated to slamming overexposed blonde Hollywood princesses, but that's not all she is. Surprisingly \_ if you've never heard of it, anyway \_ "The Sarah Silverman Program" isn't a sketch show or a standup show or anything of that sort, but a sitcom starring an alternate-universe Silverman, an alternate-universe version of her sister (Laura Silverman), a mustached cop (Jay Johnston) and two token gay neighbors (Brian Posehn and Steve Agee). That said, the fingerprints on the show are definitely hers, and the finished product resembles a mix between "Strangers With Candy's" absurd melodrama and "Curb Your Enthusiasm's" failed experiments in social behavior. It's not as ingenious as either of those shows, and the musical numbers are a bit much. But it's definitely different and \_ particularly when Posehn and Agee are on screen \_ often very funny.

Contents: Six episodes, plus commentary, musical performances, karaoke, animatics.

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"Docurama Film Festival IV" (NR, 1989-2007, Docurama)

Docurama's annual DVD film festival seems to bring out the best in its catalog, and the 10 selections (nine new) that comprise "Docurama Film Festival IV" might be the festival's most compelling body of work yet. Subjects include secret atomic bomb-making apparatuses (the glib but scary "Building Bombs"), a 29-year-old nobody taking on the political machine ("Can Mr. Smith Get to Washington Anymore?") and what five teachers experience in their first year on a very tough job ("The First Year"). If you'd prefer something lighter, there's always "Wanderlust," which dissects the phenomenon known as the road trip movie, and "I Like Killing Flies," which takes us inside one of the most unique restaurants on the planet. (No, they don't serve flies.) As always, you can buy the films separately or together at a discount, and you can log onto [docuramafilmfestival.com](http://docuramafilmfestival.com) to "experience" the

festival and discuss the films with others. (In a nice touch, Docurama actually updated the site this year after puzzlingly ignoring it last time.) Details on all 10 films, including extras, can be found at the site: [www.docurama.com/productdetail.html?productid=NV-NVG-9930](http://www.docurama.com/productdetail.html?productid=NV-NVG-9930).

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"Jericho: The First Season" (NR, 2006, CBS)

Without anybody's help, Jericho, Kan., was a pretty small town. But even the smallest of towns can shrink ever more when a nuclear mushroom cloud lights the horizon a few hundred miles away and subsequently knocks out power and communication with the rest of the country. As ensemble dramas go, "Jericho" is a funny breed. It's not hurting for characters and stories to tell, but it's not likely to inspire favorites in the same way other ensemble shows often do. Even the main character (Skeet Ulrich) is a bit annoying, and that's to say nothing of the morose teenager (Erik Knudsen) and the big-city IRS employee (Alicia Coppola) who constantly reminds us she's from a big city. Fortunately, "Jericho" has enough storytelling angles so as not to lean on its characters for too much support. Uncovering the secrets of the town \_ and, naturally, finding out what caused the explosion and what happens next \_ makes for some fun television. Lennie James, Gerald McRaney and Kenneth Mitchell, among several others, also star.

Contents: 22 episodes, plus commentary, deleted scenes, a making-of feature and a feature on the post-World War II nuclear arms race.

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Just the Extras: New Special Editions Now Available

\_ "Misery: Collector's Edition" (R, 1990, Fox): Director commentary, screenwriter commentary, seven behind-the-scenes features.

\_ "The Jungle Book: 40th Anniversary Platinum Edition" (G, 1967, Disney): Mixed commentary with animators from today and yesterday, making-of feature, seven bonus songs, alternate take of "Bare Necessities" song, and a look at a character who never made it into the finished film.

\_ "Babel: Collector's Edition" (R, 2006, Paramount): Feature-length behind-the-scenes director video diary.

\_ "Elizabeth: Spotlight Series" (R, 1998, Universal): Director commentary, two behind-the-scenes features, photo gallery, sneak peek at the sequel.

\_ "Species: Collector's Edition" (R, 1995, MGM): Cast/director commentary, director/crew commentary, seven behind-the-scenes features, alternate ending, image gallery, sneak peak at the sequel.

\_ "Funny Face: 50th Anniversary Edition" (NR, 1957, Paramount): Paramount retrospective, two behind-the-scenes features, photo gallery.

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(Billy O'Keefe writes video game and DVD reviews for McClatchy-Tribune News Service.)

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