

Reviews of recent and upcoming DVD releases

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(MCT)**

"28 Weeks Later" (R, 2007, Fox)

The rage virus that turned Londoners into crazed zombies in "28 Days Later" appears to have been eradicated, and the powers that be are now letting short bursts of survivors back into a designated safe zone. As one can guess by the mere existence of "28 Weeks Later," something's bound to go wrong with that plan. That part is no secret, but the events that lead to it _ including a killer opening scene that's better than most horror films' climaxes _ most definitely are. You need not have seen "Days" to enjoy "Weeks," which quickly brings you up to speed and starts over with a brand new cast and story-within-a-story. But those who have seen the excellent first film probably will get that much more of a kick out of the sequel, which travels well against the grain as that rare horror movie sequel that doesn't just retread on old material. "Weeks" deals in thrills more than cheap scares, and its focus on one family of could-be survivors (Robert Carlyle, Catherine McCormack, Imogen Poots and Mackintosh Muggleton) gives it some good storytelling chops as well.

Extras: Filmmaker commentary, deleted scenes (with commentary), five behind-the-scenes features.

"Surf's Up" (PG, 2007, Sony Pictures)

An adorable computer-animated film ... about Hollywood's animal du jour, penguins ... who surf ... that wasn't made by Pixar? It sounds like just another animated also-ran, and the generic title doesn't help matters. So how's this for a surprise: "Surf's Up" just might be the best computer-animated movie Pixar hasn't made. It accomplishes that partly by doing what Pixar does best _ namely, oozing immense kids appeal while cooking up smart joke after smart joke that only adults will truly understand. But "Surf's Up" also scores points by trying something new with the genre and presenting its story in full mockumentary form, shaky cam and all. It works shockingly and hilariously well, and that's a credit to the creativity of the animators as well as the writers and voice actors, who have the timing down perfectly. The film isn't immune to formula _ it's still a kids' movie about surfing penguins, after all _ but the humor generally scores when the story has its back against the wall. And when all else fails, it sure is pretty to look at.

Extras: Two animated shorts (one new, one from 2002), filmmaker commentary, three games, four behind-the-scenes features, progression reels, music video, photo galleries, DVD-ROM content.

"Shark: Season One" (NR, 2006, Fox)

Hey look, it's yet another hour-long legal drama on TV! What's next, a new hour-long medical drama? In all seriousness, though, "Shark" has its place on the schedule, and it owes that place entirely to its main (and title) character, a former high-priced defense attorney who's traumatized into switching sides and working for the prosecution. That character, in turn, owes an even larger debt to the talents of James Woods, whose presence elevates a textbook show with a textbook supporting cast into something much more entertaining than the sum of its parts. That's to say nothing of Woods' ability to

authoritatively deliver lines that would sound silly coming out of most actors' mouths. Whether that charm can survive the long haul remains to be seen, but the first season serves as a pretty good omen that it can. Jeri Ryan, Henry Simmons, Danielle Panabaker and Sophina Brown, among others, also star.

Contents: 22 episodes, plus commentary, a behind-the-scenes feature, deleted scenes and bloopers.

"Black Sheep" (NR, 2006, Dimension Extreme)

Henry Oldfield (Nathan Meister) is so afraid of sheep, he wants nothing to do with his share of the family farm. But when he returns to sell his piece of the land, he finds that his brother Angus has been playing mad scientist with the sheep, who in turn have mutated into crazed, people-eating monster sheep. From here, "Black Sheep" can exist either as (a) a self-serious disaster of a film or (b) a tongue-in-cheek train wreck that knows how to have a good time. Fortunately, it opts for the latter, right down to giving us sheep with human-like expressions of disgust and voice "acting" that's reminiscent of a creature from the "Star Wars" cantina. Most impressively, though, "Sheep" doesn't automatically make it so easy to root for the sheep, as one might assume it would. The option is always there, of course, but some of the cast members are so enjoyably out of their minds that you might take their side before all is said and done.

Extras: Cast/crew commentary, deleted scenes (with commentary), special scene shot for DVD, making-of feature, bloopers.

"Everybody Hates Chris: The Second Season" (NR, 2006, CBS)

All of a sudden, a young Chris Rock (Tyler James Williams) is growing up before our eyes, seeking gainful employment and even running for class president despite his complete lack of popularity. Good for him, too: Considering some of the grown-ups he has to deal with (recurring guest stars Whoopi Goldberg and Ernest "Roger Thomas" Thomas, among others), it's amazing he has any desire to grow up at all. Terrific as the first season of "Everybody Hates Chris" was, it was still a show that, at least subtly, was trying things out and seeing what worked and what didn't. That's what inventive comedies do, and it pays even greater dividends in season two, which is both funnier and more self-assured than the already-funny first season. If the new fall comedies aren't doing it for you, uncovering this underrated gem is as good a Plan B as any. Terry Crews and Tichina Arnold also star, and Rock himself narrates.

Contents: 22 episodes, plus eight behind-the-scenes features and bloopers.

"Reign Over Me" (R, 2007, Sony Pictures)

"Reign Over Me" is about two people. One of them, Alan (Don Cheadle), is a dentist whose marriage is threatening to crumble. Then there's Alan's former roommate, Charlie (Adam Sandler), who was so traumatized by losing his family on Sept. 11 that he doesn't even remember Alan when a chance encounter brings them back together. As it's designed, "Me" is more a film about Charlie than it is Alan, whose troubles are used to establish perspective more than anything else. That's understandable; a lost family is certainly worse than a troubled one. But Charlie's character is so far gone that he inspires exhaustion and aggravation more than sympathy. And while a scene at the end of the second act makes you feel bad for ever feeling aggravated, a scene shortly after makes you feel stupid for ever feeling bad.

"Reign Over Me" has good writing and acting, and it presents a fresh perspective on an event with which we're all familiar. But good writing and good characters don't always make for a good experience, and "Me" doesn't offer enough upside to compensate for all the bad feelings it releases. Liv Tyler, Saffron Burrows and Jada Pinkett Smith also star.

Extras: Making-of feature, Cheadle/Sandler jam session, photo gallery.

"Evan Almighty" (PG, 2007, Universal)

The rise of Steve Carell has brought joy to the lives of many comedy fans, but "Evan Almighty" proves that even his powers have their limits. It doesn't initially appear that way: The first 30 minutes of "Almighty," are, in fact, pretty funny. But once Carell's character transforms from a rookie congressman to a modern-day Noah, the film loses its grip on the schmaltz jar and spills the stuff all over the place. Pretty soon, "Almighty" isn't sure whether it wants to be a comedy or not, and outside of some funny bits involving animals being animals, it ceases to be one. "Almighty's" overlying message is easy to swallow regardless of religious conviction, but when the film's final conflict hedges on the passage of a slimy land bill and little more, it all seems kind of absurd. Carell and a talented cast of co-stars (Morgan Freeman, John Michael Higgins, Wanda Sykes, Jonah Hill, John Goodman and several of Carell's "Daily Show" buddies) do their best, but a script this convoluted never had a chance.

Extras: Deleted scenes, outtakes, 10 behind-the-scenes features (some serious, some not so much), trivia game.

"Wrong Turn 2: Dead End" (NR, 2007, Fox)

Ever wonder what the deformed hill people from those "The Hills Have Eyes" remakes are up to when they're not making a film? As it happens, they're just hanging out in the woods, waiting to kill and consume more obnoxious people. The will-be victims are especially grating in "Wrong Turn 2," which finds them gathered in some remote location to film a reality show. That, apparently, is the new go-to plot device for unimaginative films. And "WT2" is nothing if not unimaginative, from the premise to the stock characters to the aforementioned complete rip-off of another, better film franchise's predators. Predictably, "WT2" ups the ante in the gore department, which probably is why it exists in the first place. If you just can't get enough of spilling entrails, maybe you'll enjoy it. But given how many "grrror" films seem to flood the straight-to-video shelf these days, it's hard to imagine a more pointless addition to any library than this one.

Extras: Cast/crew commentary, three behind-the-scenes features.

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