

Reviews of recent and upcoming DVD releases

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(MCT)

"Superbad: Unrated: Two-Disc Special Edition" (NR, 2007, Sony Pictures)

Judd Apatow already proved he has an eye for the agonies of high school life when he unleashed "Freaks and Geeks" on a world that wasn't ready for it. For round two, he's upped the ante, freed himself from the shackles of network television censorship, and produced a MySpace-generation "Porky's" that makes the previous torchbearer, "American Pie," look pretty tame by comparison. To some degree, "Superbad" is a mess, a notebook of ideas Apatow somehow managed to arrange into a mostly but not entirely coherent movie about three virgins (Jonah Hill, Michael Cera and Christopher Mintz-Plasse) making one last play for pre-college de-virginization. But it's a well-written, funny and often heartfelt mess that's gifted with a quality of writing most films of this sort couldn't dream of delivering. Strange tangents are much easier to forgive when they're just entertaining enough to make you forget how random they are. (On that note, major thanks to Seth Rogen and Bill Hader, who steal scenes and nearly the whole movie as two of the most underqualified cops you'll ever love.)

Extras: Cast/Apatow commentary, deleted/extended scenes, bloopers, line-o-rama, eight behind-the-scenes features, table reads, on-set diaries, audition and bonus footage.

"24: Season 6" (NR, 2007, Fox)

After five perfectly incredible seasons and one monster of a cliffhanger, season six of "24" felt like a shovel upside the head of a dead horse. Some fantastic opening episodes made it easy to overlook the show's failure to truly capitalize on the aforementioned cliffhanger. But once everyone settled in, season six became a textbook case of one time too many _ another mole, another love triangle, more CTU office politics, another security breach in the most porous government facility this side of a student council headquarters. It doesn't help matters that Jack Bauer (Keifer Sutherland) was flirting with his sister-in-law, or that last season's best characters (Gregory Itzin and Jean Smart as Charles and Martha Logan) are shoehorned into a two-episode arc that goes nowhere, or that the great Chloe O'Brien (Mary Lynn Rajsckub) picked this season to start acting like a grownup. Even at its worst, "24" is fun to watch, and season six has plenty of hallmark moments, including a terrific finale episode that almost makes it all worthwhile. Still, those promises from the producers of a reinvention for season seven couldn't come at a better time (even if they are a year late).

Contents: 24 episodes, plus deleted/extended scenes, four behind-the-scenes features, a funny Ricky Gervais "cameo" scene, Webcast diaries, Mobisodes, DVD-ROM content. Sadly, the annual tradition of giving the DVD crowd an exclusive prequel to the upcoming season appears over or on hiatus, and the "exclusive" season seven preview is actually a teaser that shows even less than what commercials have already revealed.

"The Nanny Diaries" (PG-13, 2007, Weinstein Co.)

Did you like "The Devil Wears Prada?" Well, here it is again. Replace the overqualified college grad-turned-fashionista's assistant with an overqualified college grad-turned-nanny (Scarlett Johansson) to the rich and unpleasant (Laura Linney and Paul Giamatti), and the vague similarities between the two films settle nicely into place. The stark change of profession gives "The Nanny Diaries" a wealth of different material from which to draw, and this, predictably, is its strong suit. "Diaries" comes based on a phenomenally popular book written by two former nannies, and its dissection of parents who treat their kids more like accessories than children is enjoyably pointed. But between those observations lies a rather ordinary Hollywood movie, complete with a romance storyline that predictably succeeds against the odds and various other slices of our nanny's personal life that throw a wrench into the film's style. These moments aren't bad or anything; you just wish they'd end sooner so we can get back to the really good stuff. Fortunately, enough of that is here to make "Diaries" worth seeing if reading the book isn't an option.

Extras: Two behind-the-scenes features, bloopers.

"Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End" (PG-13, 2007, Disney)

The second "Pirates of the Caribbean" film ran far too long and stretched far too thin. And yet, despite all that wasted time, "Dead Man's Chest" apparently didn't tie up enough loose ends to prevent "At World's End" from making the same mistake. There's a lot to like about "End," and it mostly comes down to the same things that were easy to like about the other "Caribbean" movies. Johnny Depp is addictive as Jack Sparrow, and when he isn't around, a loaded cast (Orlando Bloom, Keira Knightley, Geoffrey Rush and newcomer Chow Yun-Fat, among many others) easily backs him up. The action sequences are first-rate, and "End" actually does manage to bring things to a proper conclusion. Before doing so, though, it drags ... and drags ... and drags. A 2:48 runtime might be palatable had "End" been efficient with its storytelling, but too often it's simply a case of scenes that run too long because of excessive posturing, mugging and dramatic pausing. It wouldn't take an editing savant to cut 30 or even 60 minutes out of "End" and make it a significantly snappier and more enjoyable movie, but the franchise is such a cash cow that such issues are of no concern anymore.

Extras: Delete scenes (with commentary), bloopers, eight behind-the-scenes features.

"Arctic Tale" (G, 2007, Paramount)

"Arctic Tale" is a documentary about a family of polar bears and a family of walrus trying to survive a harsh Arctic winter. Sort of. Actually, you know what? Not really. While the footage is of real animals who aren't acting or being prompted, "Tale" is actually a semi-fictionalized story the filmmakers cobbled together using 10 years' worth of footage. So while Queen Latifah narrates the story of Nanu the polar bear cub, the images you see might be of several cubs from different years. "Tale" doesn't mention this except at the very end of the closing credits. That probably isn't by accident, and chances are good most people who saw this film during its theatrical run were none the wiser. Also somewhat dishonest: the assertion on the DVD case that "Tale" comes from the same people who brought us "March of the Penguins." National Geographic had a hand in producing both, but the similarities completely end there. All these revelations are kind of a shame,

because "Tale" otherwise is a good-hearted film with some spectacular imagery. On that note, kids will love it, and adults who can ignore all the hoodwinking still can enjoy this for what it is. The Limbaugh crowd, however, will simply accuse "Tale" of packaging a global warming PSA as a nature film. That's a stretch, but it's not completely without merit.

Extras: Making-of feature, polar bear spotting feature.

"Pigs" (NR, 2007, ThinkFilm)

Miles (Jefferson Brown) sleeps with a lot of girls _ so many, in fact, that his college buddies challenge him to sleep with one girl for every letter in the alphabet. Predictably, finding a girl with a last name starting with X is Miles' biggest challenge. Also predictable: The rest of "Pigs," which spends half its runtime as an unlikable "American Pie" wannabe and the other half mired in Miles' painfully telegraphed transformation from misogynist to Mr. Sensitive once he meets Ms. X (Melanie Marden). Worse, the film can't do either mood right. Part one is boring, unfunny, poorly acted and plain obnoxious, led by an unwatchable sidekick character (Darryn Lucio) who wants but fails miserably to be the second coming of Stifler. By the time that trainwreck pulls into the station, it's beyond impossible to care about a bunch of banal idiots, whose fates practically are scribbled all over their faces. So humdrum is "Pigs" that even at a modest 85 minutes, it seems to drag on forever. And if you're in it simply for some gratuitous nudity and couldn't care less about the story, even you lose. Outside of an inexplicable shot during the credits, there isn't any.

Extras: Filmmaker commentary, deleted scenes, behind-the-scenes feature.

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

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