

Reviews of recent and upcoming DVD releases

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(MCT)

"The Devil Came on Horseback" (NR, 2007, Docurama)

Faced with a desk-job future, U.S. Marine Captain Brian Steidle instead headed to Darfur, Sudan, where he witnessed, firsthand, the genocide that has cost hundreds of thousands of people their lives. The first half of "The Devil Came on Horseback" is a document of this trip, supported by Steidle narrating letters he wrote back home and some horrific images and video. Unsurprisingly, it's powerful stuff. What is surprising is that when all is said and done, it's "Horseback's" second half that leaves the strongest impression. Steidle returns to the United States with albums full of incredible, unprecedented images, and the wall of denial and indifference he runs into upon revealing these images is pretty galling. That wall has since begun to crumble, and Steidle is as responsible as anyone for that. But "Horseback" is perhaps the best illustration yet of what it takes to overcome the stiff indifference many feel about a corner of the world with which they have no direct relationship. It's a shame only the pre-preached choir are likely to make any effort to see it. If "Horseback" belongs anywhere, it's on television where unsuspecting eyes might catch it.

Extras: Short film "Supporting Survivors," information about how you can help.

"Talk to Me" (R, 2007, Focus Features)

It's hard to quantify that special quality that separates the great biopics from the bland ones. But whatever it is, it's all over "Talk to Me," which recounts the adventures of an ex-con (Don Cheadle as Ralph Waldo "Petey" Greene) who, fittingly, talked his way into an on-air job at Washington, D.C.'s WOL Radio. Maybe it's the inspiring true account of a guy who made something out of nothing in a big way. Maybe it's Cheadle, whose talent is blinding when he's having as much fun as he is here. Perhaps it's Cheadle's castmates (Taraji P. Henson, Martin Sheen, Cedric the Entertainer and especially Chiwetel Ejiofor), who don't miss a step in keeping up with him. Or maybe it's the awesome clothes, big hair and exceptional music that glue the whole production together. Take your pick, or just throw your arms into the air and say it's all of the above. There are no wrong answers here, nor are there any dull moments.

Extras: Deleted scenes, behind-the-scenes feature, cast/crew discussion of the real-life events that inspired the film.

"Spider-Man 3: 2-Disc Special Edition" (PG-13, 2007, Sony Pictures)

"Spider-Man 3" has a tough act to follow, what with "Spider-Man 2" being one of the best superhero movies ever made. Naturally, as many films ending in "3" do, it brings the kitchen sink, tying up every loose end it can while dropping not one (James Franco as New Goblin/Harry Osborn), not two (Thomas Haden Church as Sandman/Flint Marko) but three (Topher Grace as Venom/Eddie Brock) supervillains into the mix. There's enough content here for "Spider-Man 4" and arguably "Spider-Man 5," and one wouldn't be wrong to

begrudge the film for having to impose a time limit on some pretty spectacular encounters with each of the three villains, Sandman in particular. But while the line between doing too much and doing a little bit of everything is a thin one, "3" toes but never crosses from the latter to the former. And while it's easy to wonder how good this story would be if it was spaced out over two movies, it's just as easy to marvel at how proficiently "3" juggles so many storylines before sending them all toward a single climax that's both cohesive and rewarding in some surprising ways. It doesn't top "2," but it's a most worthy follow-up. Let's just hope the fourth film, already announced, doesn't try to outdo this one.

Extras: Cast commentary, crew commentary, 11 behind-the-scenes features, international promo spots, bloopers, photo galleries, music video.

"My So-Called Life: The Complete Series" (NR, 1994, Shout Factory)

Nostalgia has a way of playing tricks on your memory. Maybe you look back fondly on a show from 10 or 15 years ago and overlook how much television has changed in that period of time. Then you watch that show for the first time since all that time ago, and you're shocked at how badly it's aged. It happens all the time _ but not, surprisingly, this time. There are indications that "My So-Called Life" is a product of a different era: No one's Googling anyone, for instance, and a straying parent sneaks a phone call to his mistress using the house phone instead of his work cell. But beyond some cosmetic tweaks, "MSCL" could have premiered on the current fall schedule and not only fit in just fine, but excelled. Frankly, one could argue that, even 13 years later, it's still too smart for the times. More than ever, it's a shame this brilliant series never lived to see its 20th episode, much less its 100th. At least we finally have this DVD set _ courtesy of the studio that does TV-on-DVD sets better than anyone _ as a consolation prize. If you miss Angela Chase (Claire Danes) and fear her time has passed, fear no longer.

Contents: 19 episodes, plus cast/crew commentary, five behind-the-scenes features, cast/crew panel from 1995, photo gallery and a 36-page color booklet.

"Day Watch: Unrated" (NR, 2006, Fox)

The truce between light and dark that withered in 2004's "Night Watch" is on the fast track to crumbling entirely in "Day Watch," which begins with the son of a Day Watch officer flirting with a turn to the dark side. If that makes zero sense to you, you're not ready to see this film _ yet. "Day Watch" is two-plus hours of spectacular storytelling, mythology and unreal special effects, but seeing it without seeing "Night Watch" first is akin to watching "The Empire Strikes Back" with no prior knowledge of "Star Wars." The ensuing showdown doesn't dazzle any less, and the special effects are still a serious treat for the eyes. But without the historical ammunition that comes from seeing the first film, there's no possible way for the story's full impact to be realized. See that film, then see this one, and you'll be two-thirds through arguably the best-kept secret in the annals of film trilogies. ("Twilight Watch," the third chapter, is in production now.) In Russian with English subtitles, but a serviceable English dub is available if you'd prefer to keep your eyes on the eye candy.

Extras: Director commentary, making-of feature, promo spots.

"Squidbillies: Volume One" (NR, 2005, Adult Swim)

Imagine if Cletus the Slack-Jawed Yokel from "The Simpsons" got his own show.

Imagine, also, if Cletus had a slack-jawed family, a slight mean streak, an eyesore for an ex and some really clever trucker hats. Finally, imagine that Cletus and his son are not human beings, but squids. Guess what? Someone was two steps ahead of you and not only imagined it, but made it happen. "Squidbillies" is a prototypical Adult Swim production: 11-minute episodes, sometimes-atrocious animation, a blend of humor that's incredibly stupid and brilliant at the same time. And like many Adult Swim cartoons, "Squidbillies" picks a target _ in this case, the deep south _ and unloads round after round of scathing ammo into it. Fortunately, no letter-writing campaign is needed, because the humor is far too over the top to properly offend anyone. Never mind that life is too short to get worked up by a show starring a bunch of cartoon squids.

Contents: 20 episodes, plus six(!) pilot episodes, "Space Ghost" segment featuring Squidbilly Early Cuyler, deleted scenes, concept art, roundbar discussion, Unknown Hinson feature, and the world's most confusing DVD menu interface.

"Miami Ink: Season 1" (NR, 2005, TLC)

This is how overstuffed television is with reality shows: Among reality programs about the business of running a tattoo parlor, "Miami Inked" isn't even the first of its kind. That honor goes to "Inked," which beat it out of the gate by a scant few months. But while "Inked" seems to sniff out drama from its shop and clients _ no surprise, seeing as it's based in Vegas _ "Miami Ink" is a bit more grounded. Drama ensues, but the show keeps its focus on the business side of things and chooses to spotlight why its customers get the tattoos they get instead of whether they're nuts or not. Recommending one over the other is pointless, because tastes vary and the shows are almost identical in the way they adhere to the usual reality show storytelling conventions. But if you need a show about tattoo parlors and you need it now, this is the way to go by default. "Inked" is out on DVD, but only in "best-of" form. This on the other hand, is a more complete and cohesive set.

Contents: 21 episodes, no extras.

"Captivity: Unrated" (NR, 2007, Lions Gate)

Man, and you thought Elisha Cuthbert was hard to watch when she was in peril as Jack Bauer's daughter. Until you've seen her as Jennifer Tree in "Captivity," you haven't seen anything. That, of course, isn't to say you should see "Captivity." A "me too" film to the end, "Captivity" opens up by slapping together a full hour or so of random acts of torture and depraved perversion. The film offers some contrived insight into why Tree has been abducted, but it's flimsy at best. Only thanks to a mid-movie "twist" do we finally get some real sense as to why anything in "Captivity" is happening. Unfortunately, even the world's stupidest bat could see that twist coming. Worse, the revelation runs completely counter to the aforementioned contrived insight, and it replaces it with some vague dialogue that more or less confirms whatever fear you had about the writers having no idea how to justify this whole mess. Throw in a boring climax and a completely absurd second "twist" at the end, and you've got one of the more useless movies of 2007.

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

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

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