

DVD Select: A Bourne-again thriller

by Robert_J_Hawkins

Jason Bourne's life and death is inextricably tied to water. He is originally fished out of it, unconscious and not knowing his own identity. He is nearly drowned as part of his CIA training. He watches as the love of his life floats away beneath a river. And in the third film, "The Bourne Ultimatum" (Universal, 4 stars), well, let's just say Jason Bourne (Matt Damon) dies and is reborn in the Hudson River.

'THE BOURNE ULTIMATUM' - If you are a Jason Bourne fan, you're lucky because Universal now offers 'The Jason Bourne Collection' for less than \$50. Here Jason Bourne (Matt Damon) tracks his subject in Tangiers in 'The Bourne Ultimatum.' CNS Photo courtesy of Jasin Boland. DVD RATINGS

4 stars: Don't miss: rent it/buy it

3 stars: Worth the risk: rent it

2 stars: On the tipping point: if nothing else is available

1 star: Don't bother: wait until it's in the \$1 bin

Part of the appeal of Bourne is the qualities he shares with water. He doesn't just walk through a crowd, he flows, filling space and drawing no attention. The omnipresent surveillance cameras at public squares and train stations are like rocks around which Bourne navigates, never appearing on screen. Unless he wants to.

He may be wanted by every U.S. intelligence operative in the world, yet he never dons a disguise. He only changes identities, because he has none of his own.

"The Bourne Ultimatum" picks up moments after "The Bourne Supremacy," with a pack of Russian cops in hot pursuit of our hero. The rush of the chase never stops until the closing credits.

We know that Bourne is a "black ops" operative, a trained killer for a government agency who followed orders too often - and then had enough. His dossier shows one last target with "Mission Failed" stamped across the page.

He wants to find out who he was before the killing started. But he also wants to find out who ordered the kill on his beloved Marie (Franka Potente in "Bourne Supremacy.") "Someone started all this, and I'm going to find them," he tells Marie's brother.

That makes him a double-threat to agency insiders with dirty hands.

In "Supremacy," Bourne and CIA straight-arrow Pamela Landy (cool, crisp Joan Allen) blew the cover on the rogue Treadstone shop. But it was already a hollow shell. The rogues had moved on to the "upgrade," Blackbriar, from which assassinations, bribery, torture, illegal surveillance and more is conducted. As its oily chief Ezra Kramer (Scott Glenn) proudly tells Landy, red tape and accountability are no longer bureaucratic headaches. "We are the sharp point of the stick now, Pam," he sneers.

Kramer talks in that disconnected lexicon of the soulless and commands a room full of amoral computer geeks. As Bourne begins to zero in on his operation, Kramer tells an aide to "initiate rendition protocols and put the asset on call." Later he says "tell me when the asset is in the nest" and "give the asset the green light. Take them both out."

The "asset" is a trained killer like Bourne - a Bourne 2.0 if you will, who was once a human being, something Kramer is incapable of acknowledging. His techies use their computers like sniper rifles, taking out people with deft keystrokes.

Bourne again encounters CIA operative Nicky Parsons (the sublime Julia Stiles) - again all too briefly, yet their encounter heralds a blockbuster encounter to come in "Bourne 4?" Again, Nicky (a woman of few words) helps Bourne out of a jam in Madrid.

Later, over coffee, Bourne is blunt, "Why are you helping me?" Nicky stares searchingly into his face and in a halting voice says "It was different for me (she pauses) ... with you."

She looks for a reaction and sees none. "You really don't remember anything?"

"No," says Bourne evenly.

Her pain is palpable. Clearly Nicky has as many secrets burning on her surface, as Bourne has locked up deep inside. And clearly their pasts are intertwined in ways we have yet to imagine or see onscreen.

Bourne's violence-filled journey takes him to New York and the offices of Dr. Albert Hirsch (the formidable Albert Finney), the CIA Frankenstein who turned Bourne into a monster. Yes, pieces of the puzzle come together but not enough to appreciate the full picture.

There is work to do, and presumably (a body is never found but there is a smile on the lips of Nicky Parsons) he has lived to fight on another day. Again under the direction of Paul Greengrass ("Bourne Supremacy" "United 93"), this "Bourne" is the best of the lot and easily the best action-thriller of 2007.

If you are a Jason Bourne fan, the good news is that Universal has packaged all three movies into "The Jason Bourne Collection" a four-disc set that comes in a "safe deposit box" package with a Bourne passport, for less than \$50.

ALSO THIS WEEK

"Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix" (Warner Home Video, 4 stars) His childhood is over. From here on in, it only gets rougher for Harry Potter (Daniel Radcliffe). In this fifth of seven installments, it seems as if the whole wizarding world has turned on Harry.

Even though he had to battle Dementors - what did you do on YOUR summer vacation? - he is accused of illegal use of magic. His claims that Voldermort (Ralph Fiennes) and the dark forces are back draw scoffs of denial and sneers from former friends. The shadow of suspicion from the death of Cedric Diggory (Robert Pattinson) hangs over his head. Even Dumbledore (Michael Gambon) seems needlessly distant, even his relationships with Hermione (Emma Watson) and Ron (Rupert Grint) become unraveled.

The political ferret Cornelius Fudge (Robert Hardy) has engineered the appointment of his ally, Dolores Umbridge, (Imelda Staunton) at Hogwarts as teacher of the dark arts. Umbridge, perhaps the most frightening and irrepressibly cheerful character in the whole Potter series, systematically dismantles Dumbledore's authority until she is in full control of the school.

Harry is forced underground, where he organizes a group of friends and believers into an league of wand-wielding wizards called "Dumbledore's Army." And not a moment to soon because Voldermort's own unholy army, with the ungodly evil Bellatrix Lestrange (Helena Bonham Carter) beside him, is on the march.

"The Order of the Phoenix" is the most powerful and adult film yet in the series. Beloved characters die and

once trusted characters prove to be otherwise. These are not the lollipop tales of the first couple of films. Director David Yates seems just the right person to step into the footsteps of Alfonso Cuarón who helmed "Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban." Yates will be on board for the next one, too, "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince."

Extras on the two-disc edition (highly recommended) include a feature "The Hidden Secrets of Harry Potter" which oversells its content but does provide a snappy overview of the story so far. There are 17 minutes worth of deleted scenes and actress Natalia Tena (Tonks) gives a personal tour of the set. Yates and editor Mark Day give a tutorial on decent film editing.

For the super fan, Warner has a limited edition 12-disc "Harry Potter" gift set that includes five movies, 14 video games and a disc with three hours of extras from all five films. Each box comes with five Harry Potter metal bookmarks and four packs of Potter trading cards. The price is about \$150 for Blu-ray or HD-DVD formats and less than \$120 for standard DVD.

"December Boys" (Warner) Not just a wizard, Daniel Radcliffe leads a strong but unknown cast as one of four orphans and close friends who all celebrate their birthdays in December by going to an Australian seaside resort town. There they find themselves in competition for the attentions of a family that tests the bonds of their friendship. Lovely Australian scenery lifts a modest film.

"Interview" (Sony, 2 1/2 stars) Steve Buscemi is a tough and serious political journalist who is ordered to interview and profile a young, seemingly shallow soap actress (Sienna Miller). It is hate at first sight for both of them. As the night moves on we learn that there is more to both of them than first impressions would permit. Buscemi directed and wrote the movie, based on the work of the assassinated Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gogh. Miller is a delight to watch and Buscemi, as always, delivers a first-rate performance.

IT CAME FROM TV

Made-for-TV movie "A Perfect Day" stars Rob Lowe as a successful author whose first novel hits the

best-sellers list. Life takes a turn however when a stranger (Christopher Lloyd) tells him he has only 40 days to live. Now he must sort out - quickly - what's really important in his life. The story is from a Richard Paul Evans novel.

"High School Musical 2: Extended Edition" (Buena Vista) Hey kids, you finally get to see in its entirety the musical number that the scheming Sharpay and hunky Troy were rehearsing for the Midsummer Night's Talent Show.

SERIAL KILLERS

Season 3 of "Beverly Hills 90210" (30 episodes on eight discs); season one of "Dirt" (13 episodes on four discs); "Flight 29 Down: Volume Three" (four episodes); season 10 of "Frasier" (24 episodes on four discs); season three of "Gomer Pyle U.S.M.C." (29 episodes on five discs); season three of "Lost" (23 episodes on seven discs, with many extras)

FROM THE VAULTS

"Two-Lane Blacktop" (Criterion Collection, 1971) Monte Hellman directed this classic road film-as-metaphor starring Warren Oates (as G.T.O.), musicians James Taylor (as The Driver) and Dennis Wilson (as The Mechanic) and Laurie Bird (as The Girl). The nomadic duo known only as The Driver and The Mechanic roam the countryside drag racing other cars. They accept the challenge of G.T.O. to a cross-country, winner-take-all race. The double-disc set includes audio commentaries by Hellman and filmmaker Allison Anders, and a second by author David Meyer and screenwriter Rudy Wurlitzer. It also includes screen-test outtakes, a feature on the restoration of the '55 Chevy that is a central character in the film and more.

Disney continues to plunder its vaults for our pleasure with three new double-disc volumes in its "Walt Disney Treasures" series. The three packages are: "Disneyland: Secrets, Stories and Magic"; "Chronological Donald, Volume 3" (Donald Duck short films, 1947-1950); and "The Adventures of Oswald and Lucky Rabbit" (short films from 1926 to 1928).

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