

DVD Select: Pirates 3 - We want to get off

by Robert_J_Hawkins

Well, the blockbuster "Pirates of the Caribbean" trilogy has come to a fitting conclusion with "At World's End" (Disney, 3 stars), and not a moment too soon. I'm afraid that if they come up with a surprise fourth episode, it will be "Pirates in Space" or "Jack Sparrow's Prance Through the Fifth Dimension." (Actually, if you sit through the credits, your patience will be rewarded with a glimpse into the future, say, 10 years on.)

'PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN' - Geoffrey Rush, Keira Knightley and Johnny Depp star in 'Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End.' CNS Photo courtesy of Peter Mountain. 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 You have to admit, despite its glorious storytelling and lavish sets, "At World's End" got a bit "out there." As in "out there in Rod Serling territory."

The whole underworld thing is a bit dodgy to follow. And when Capt. Jack Sparrow (Johnny Depp) parcels out his personalities in Davy Jones' Locker - pulling a scene right out of "Being John Malkovich" - it was amusing. But when the multiple Sparrows show up again in the prison cell, you have to throw up your hands, cast off logic and yield to the mania. Or else just walk away.

But the sci-fi pirating stuff I can handle.

My biggest struggle was getting my head around the rise of Elizabeth Swann (Keira Knightley) as Queen of the Pirates. I adore Knightley. She's a terrific actress. But it is as if all those dirty, scurvy-wracked, besotted pirates picked their leader out of a Victoria's Secrets catalog. They are filthy, she has ravishingly bronzed skin. They are portly and toothless, she is supermodel thin and her teeth are a beacon in the night. They speak with voices rubbed raw by the salt sea and rum, she sounds like a boarding school girl. They wear rags, she looks like she was dressed by Donatella Versace.

The stupefying betrayals by Will Turner (Orlando Bloom) in order to salvage his woeful dad Bill Turner (Stellan Skarsgard) from the clutches of the Black Pearl were, well, stupefying. And where did Tia Dalma/Calypso (Naomie Harris) go after all the raging whirlpool/vortex and fiddler crab business?

While the original "Curse of the Black Pearl" was an ensemble masterpiece of adventure and storytelling, acting in the sequels "Dead Man's Chest" and "At World's End" took on the airs of NFL end-zone grandstanding. It is as if each actor had to have a star-turn moment (OK, multiple moments). And each must have carried a "Captain Morgan" clause in the contract, specifying a certain number of heroic pirate poses per scene.

OK, pirate rants over. It is a beautiful, electrifying and challenging movie. I shall really miss these characters - assuming that they go away. Not since the days of Errol Flynn ("The Sea Hawk") and Tyrone Power ("Black Swan") has cinematic pirating been so much fun, so full of lusty adventure and fiery romance and double-dealing.

You'll not want to miss the extras either: Keith Richards (Capt. Teague, keeper of the Pirate Codex) and Johnny Depp hang out and Keith gets a homemade guitar (seen in the movie) from an admirer. Richards and Depp look as much like father and son on the set as in the movie.

Also, the multiple Jacks are explained and the "Maelstrom" scene is deconstructed. A feature looks at the actor Yun-Fat Chow (Capt. Sao Feng). Another delves into the Brethren Court, while another looks at the gloriously bombastic and very piratical music of Hans Zimmer. And one that is keenly cool, "Hoist the Colours" delves into that song you just can't get out of your head, especially after you've taken the Pirates of the Caribbean ride at Disneyland.

"Yo-ho-ho, the pirate's life for me ..."

ALSO THIS WEEK

"Superbad" (Sony, 2 stars) Yeah, yeah. It's funny (and yet painful to watch). A coming-of-age comedy conceived by guys long past their teens who still seem amazed when a woman has sex with them. And that's kind of sad.

High school is almost over for best pals the portly foul-mouthed Seth (Jonah Hill) and seemingly ever-perplexed Evan (Michael Cera) and their third wheel Fogell (Christopher Mintz-Plasse, in a nifty debut). They are outside losers in the blood-game of high school society. Their goals are to lose their virginity before moving on to college and more immediate, but connected: get booze so they can get into the Big Party and gain access to the girls who can help them meet goal No. 1. The script was written by Seth Rogen ("Knocked Up") and pal Evan Goldberg and supposedly was initiated when they were going through their own horrific coming of age period.

Even funnier than the movie are some of the DVD extras, especially "Press Junket Meltdown" in which a smarmy English interviewer pushes Jonah Hill's buttons to the max (Example: "Do you think you have to be fat to be funny?") Is it a put on? I don't know.

One that is a goof for sure is "Everybody Hates Michael Cera" in which the pathologically likable actor is spurned and despised by everyone on the set while describing quite an opposite relationship to an interviewer. In "Line-O-Rama," Hill gets to show off his ability to spew riffs of filth off single lines of dialogue in almost

infinite variations. Quite a talent.

“The Nanny Diaries” (Genius, 2 1/2 stars) Jersey girl with brains and beauty gives witches of the Upper East Side their comeuppance while slumming as a nanny for a bratty kid whom she tames before moving on to grad school. Laura Linney and Paul Giamatti are terrific as the horrifically snake-ish Mr. and Mrs. X and for once the passive personality of Scarlett Johansson works to her advantage as the drifting college grad-turned-nanny Annie. This is a better, funnier movie than a lot of critics allowed during its theatrical run. Goes great with a hearty red wine and popcorn.

“Arctic Tale” (Paramount, 2 stars) For once, the penguins aren't the stars - although they could be the main course. There are two tales, actually: the story of little Nanu, a polar bear cub, and Seela, a walrus pup. In very old-style Disney-esque storytelling, we follow these two on the daily life and death struggle for eight years as they reach adulthood. One character who retreats, as they grow, is the ice and snow cap. Although global warming isn't overtly addressed, its impact is ever-present. The choice of Queen Latifah as narrator is a curious and sometimes grating one. The hip-hop ah-ti-tude in her voice can get mildly irritating in a nature film. The cinematography is stunning and serves the story quite well.

“Midnight Clear” (Lionsgate, 2 stars) Your holiday feel-good movie of the week. Five lonely people, each marked by some sadness and desperation, end up sharing Christmas Eve in a one-horse town in Arizona. There's the jobless guy, a mother struggling with a husband in a vegetative state, the elderly woman, the youth minister suffering a crisis of faith and the gas station worker. The film was adapted from a short story by Jerry B. Jenkins and directed by his son, Dallas Jenkins. The film is wildly uneven - the two characters from the original tale are well developed, the rest, no so much.

“Live-in Maid” (Koch Lorber, 3 stars) Seems like only yesterday that Argentina's economy was going down the stagflation fueled tubes. The wealthy class was going broke and going back to work (or to America where the stash was safe.). That was then and the inspiration in 2004 for Jorge Gaggero's “Cama Adentro (Live-In Maid).” The changing roles of the newly-poor snob Beba (Norma Aleandro) and her servant of 30 years Dora (Norma Argentina) are explored with sensitivity and appreciation for the complex and delicate balance of life.

IT CAME FROM TV

"Battlestar Galactica: Razor (Unrated, extended edition)" (Universal) The film that premiered on the Sci-Fi Channel on Nov. 24 is now yours for the keeping in the unrated, extended version. Well, of course it needs unrating and extension, since you already have a Tivo copy of it ... also includes deleted scenes, a feature on the look of the show, a feature in which cast members recall their favorite episodes so far, and a peek at season four.

"Saturday Night Live" (Universal, season 2, eight discs) Chevy Chase left after this 1976 season to become the show's first major flop in movies - but not the last. A new guy came in, Bill Murray, and John Belushi was still alive. So was Gilda Radner. Dan Aykroyd was back for more. And the music stars were real stars: Like The Band, George Harrison, Frank Zappa, the Kinks, Santana, Paul Simon, Brian Wilson, Joe Cocker, Tom Waits and Chuck Berry. The hosts included Steve Martin, Norman Lear, Lily Tomlin, Dick Cavett, Ralph Nader, Sissy Spacek and Fran Tarkenton.

Jack Bauer takes life one day at a time in the political-terror thriller "24" and we get to enjoy that day over 24 addictive one-hour chunks on TV, right? Well, if you couldn't make the commitment, season six is here for your consumption. Jack's release from a Chinese prison has been negotiated so that he can stop a series of terror "suitcase nuke" attacks. The clock is ticking.

The serials: Reach way back to 1966 for season three of "Gomer Pyle, USMC" and to 1992 for season three of "Beverly Hills 90210. Another season three debut, "Diagnosis Murder" from 1995 with Dick Van Dyke starring as the doctor/sleuth. Look for season four of "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit." Drama in the pastor's household kept "7th Heaven" hopping in season five, back in 2000 and now it is yours for the taking.

Idiot alert: Comedy Central releases "The Best of Crank Yankers: Uncensored" - yeah, 50 of your favorite crank calls with hand puppets. Oh, the depth. Oh, the creativity. Oh, the low self-esteem that makes this all possible.

FROM THE VAULTS

Mega-box set of the week: "Ford at Fox" (Fox Home Entertainment) John Ford was a director's director. Four of his six Oscars came for films he made for Twentieth Century Fox, for which he made 50 films in 50 years. Half of that productivity shows up in this box set, including "The Grapes of Wrath," "Tobacco Road," "Young Mr. Lincoln," "My Darling Clementine," "What Price Glory," "Drums Along the Mohawk" and "How Green Was My Valley." The set of 24 films also contains a documentary, "Becoming John Ford" by Nick Redman. Five digitally improved silent films (like "The Iron Horse") made by Ford are included as is a coffee-table book.

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