DVD Select: Things are adding up in 'The Number 23'

by Robert_J_Hawkins

I once knew a guy who had his name legally changed to Love 22. He was an "Abecedarian" which, as he practiced it, was the ability to find the number 22 in virtually everything. He could take any word, title or sentence and by applying a pre-existing numerical value for each letter, get the whole thing to add up to 22.

'THE NUMBER 23' - In the thriller 'The Number 23,' Jim Carrey is a man obsessed that a mystery novel was actually written about him. CNS Photo courtesy of Christine Loss. 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

Why? I don't know. But after 15 minutes with Love 22, you too, began to see 22s everywhere.

He also claimed the world's record for tossing a Frisbee over the ocean and every Easter he planned to walk across the channel that separated two Rhode Island fishing communities, called Jerusalem and Galilee - but those are stories for another day.

What brings this to mind is the Jim Carrey psychological thriller "The Number 23" (New Line Cinema, 2

stars).

I know. Your first question isn't about the number 23, it is about Carrey in a psychological thriller.

He does OK, mostly. Carrey plays Walter Sparrow, an animal control officer in a fairly small town who is married to Agatha (Virginia Madsen), a woman with intellectual leanings who owns the local bakery. Their life is bucolic to say the least, sweetened by a teenage son Robin (Logan Lerman) who apparently forgives them for his stupid name.

That all changes when Agatha gives Walter a thin, self-published book called "The Number 23" by one Topsy Krettes. The book grips Walter right away, if only because some of the details in what seems to be a long buildup to a confession of murder seems to have parallels in his own life.

Then there is the obsession with the number 23 which takes on the power of a living force in the minds of the obsessed who find that everything - everything - is reducible to the number 23.

At least here the number 23, however briefly, has some mythic purpose - it is tied to Satan in some weird way, like 2 divided by 3 gives you .666, aka sign of the Antichrist. Doesn't matter. That is just one of a million loose ends that go nowhere in the third act.

The more Walter reads the book, the more he obsesses over the number 23 and dreams really bad dreams in which he is the unsavory detective in the book and his wife is the sultry temptress who is eventually murdered - and for which another man is framed.

Walter concludes that this is no work of fiction. It is a confession. And the last chapter, with all the necessary

clues, is missing from the book. When he sets out to discover the identity of Topsy Krettes, Walter gets the shock of his life.

And the movie just generally falls apart.

Of all the endings possible, the one director Joel Schumacher put up there on the screen is my least favorite. It essentially abandons the journey into magical thinking that has gripped Walter and ends up a low-rent CSI episode.

ALSO THIS WEEK

"Perfume: The Story of a Murderer" (Paramount, 3 stars) A seductive period thriller about a young man with an extraordinary talent for concocting perfumes. Unfortunately, for the perfect scent he will require the bodies of a number of beautiful women. Directed by Tom Tykwer ("Run Lola Run") and stars Ben Whishaw, Dustin Hoffman, Alan Rickman and Rachel Hurd-Wood. Based on the best-seller of the same name by Patrick Suskind.

"Zodiac" (Paramount, 2 1/2 stars) Creep Week continues. In 1969 a serial killer held San Francisco in thrall - killing and taunting cops with impunity. The Zodiac Killer's behavior drew four men to obsess over his capture - a crime reporter, a homicide cop and his partner and an editorial cartoonist (Robert Downey Jr., Jake Gyllenhaal, Mark Ruffalo and Anthony Edwards, respectively). They became something of celebrities for a while, even eclipsing the killer. Eventually though, the hunt took its toll and they became victims of a sort.

"Renaissance" (Miramax, 2 1/2 stars) An animated sci-fi thriller that has the feel of a black and white graphic novel. Why? Because it is drawn in high-contrast black and white. The story takes place in Paris where a researcher for the soulless corporate power that rules all is kidnapped and the quiet loner cop must find her before his own soul is sucked into the ruling machine. Common story, hard to stop watching once you start. Daniel Craig, Ian Holm, Jonathan Pryce and Catherine McCormack have key voice roles.

"Unconscious" (Liberation Entertainment, Spanish, 3 stars) A psychiatrist returns to 1913 as a disciple of Sigmund Freud's teachings but soon disappears leaving his pregnant wife and psychiatrist brother to figure out what happened in this provocative romantic comedy/farce from Spain.

"The Nomad Warrior" (Genius Products, 2 stars) While this ancient war epic shares an identical typographical style, look and story line with next week's blockbuster "300" it is not set in Greece. It is set in Kazakhstan - skip the Borat jokes - where a warrior tries to untie the tribes against an invading enemy. Little has changed, apparently, over the ages.

Among the rest: Creepy-cool South Korean mutant-horror flick "The Host"; sexy comedy about odd doings on the grocery store night shift "Cashback"; political murder mystery/thriller "Slow Burn"; romantic comedy about an adult swim class "The Big Bad Swim"; offbeat comedy "Live Free or Die" from a pair of "Seinfeld" writers.

IT CAME FROM TV

- Season two of the irreverent "Weeds" with Mary-Louise Parker.

- "Star Trek: Fan Collective - Captain's Log" contains 15 episodes from various Trek shows, five of which were chosen by the actors who played captains and the rest by fans.

- "A Bit of Fry & Laurie: The Complete Collection ... very Bit" - yes, the entire sketch comedy series oeuvre of Hugh Laurie and Stephen Fry on four discs.

- The sixth season of "Tales From the Crypt"

- From TV's golden era, 30 episodes of the spine-tingling terror anthology series "Suspense" (1949-54).

- Yer durn tootin' that Walter Brennan stars in 1957's season one of "The Real McCoys."

- And, yes, the urbane Robert Guillaume gave season one of "Benson" its coolness factor.

FROM THE VAULTS

Paramount is celebrating the 10th anniversary of the legal drama "The Rainmaker" (adapted from the John Grisham novel). The "collector's edition" includes a commentary track by director Francis Ford Coppola and actor Danny DeVito; a couple more Coppola featurettes and screen tests for stars Matt Damon, Claire Danes, Mary Kay Place and Virginia Madsen.

Nobody makes violence look as graceful and artistic as director John Woo and Genius Products has packaged two of those beauties into one package: the transcending U.S. breakthrough "Hard Boiled" (1992) and an early diamond in the rough "Last Hurrah for Chivalry" (1979).

Speaking of hard boiled, with the third film due in theaters, Universal Studios is going "Bourne" again with a repackaging of Matt Damon's action figure vehicles "The Bourne Identity" and "The Bourne Supremacy." Why? Because film three is due in theaters in August, "The Bourne Ultimatum" in which, once again, lesser

men try to screw around with Jason Bourne's life. The set comes with a third disc with 45 minutes of "Bourne Ultimatum" teaser material and all the DVD features from the first two discs.

If only Damon could sing, we'd sing his praises as today's Frank Sinatra. He's that rough, cool, brutal and smooth. The real Sinatra made plenty of decent movies, too, including the original "Ocean's Eleven" the spawn of which Damon is attached to (not as Danny Ocean, though). But the point here is that MGM is releasing a box-o-Sinatra under its MGM Movie Legends series. "Ocean's Eleven" isn't part of it, but neither is "Robin and the Seven Hoods." Whew.

Here's what's cooking inside "The Frank Sinatra Gift Set": the dazzling musical "Guys & Dolls" with Marlon Brando; the war drama "Kings Go Forth"; the Frank Capra comedy "Hole in the Head"; Sinatra's pet project "The Manchurian Candidate"; and the epic "The Pride & the Passion" in which Sinatra, Cary Grant and Sophia Loren battle Napoleon with the aid of one huge gun.

And speaking of young swingers from the 1960s, Universal debuts the "Doris Day and Rock Hudson Comedy Collection." America's Perfect Couple (except for a closeted secret or two) bring up the yucks in "Pillow Talk," "Lover Come Back" and "Send Me No Flowers."

Ever try to perfect the Woody Woodpecker laugh when you were a kid? Not easy, I tell you. So enjoy the master in "The Woody Woodpecker and Friends Classic Cartoon Collection." All 75 original theatrical cartoons (including eight Oscar-nominated shorts) are digitally remastered. Walter Lantz gave the zany redhead his start in 1940 and had 200 theatrical shorts under his belt before he retired.

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