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# DVDs: 21 -- The Latest Stealth Hit Movie

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With *The Dark Knight* shredding one box office record after another and even casual fans talking about second weekend box office drops ("Hey, 60% for a front-loaded spectacle like *Iron Man* is not bad!"), it's easy to forget that some movies can still slip under the radar, pile up money and turn into box office hits when no one is looking. Usually, word of mouth follows a good movie and gets them touted as success stories. What I'm talking about here are the movies that weren't

championed by critics and yet somehow pulled in a bigger chunk of change than anyone remembers. You see what they grossed and say, "Really? How did that happen?"

Take *21*, the card counting casino caper based on the true story of MIT students who figured out a way to win at blackjack. (It's not cheating as such, but casinos hate it when you can game the system to your advantage and fight it aggressively.) *21* (\$28.96 for standard or \$34.95 for a special edition and \$38.96 for BluRay; Columbia) features a young good-looking cast of kids and Kevin Spacey and Laurence Fishburne in key supporting roles. The movie got mixed reviews, the poker craze has faded a bit since gambling online became illegal and the movie opened to general...disinterest. But somehow it opened to \$24 million and had enough legs to triple that take and gross \$81 million in the US.

How did that happen? But look back over the charts of the past few years and you can find a number of movies that seemed to do a lot better than you would guess. Did that dumb comedy *Wild Hogs* starring John Travolta and the perennially underestimated Tim Allen REALLY gross \$168 million? Apparently. (All figures are US grosses alone.) Did The Rock and a little girl really hit \$89 million with *The Game Plan*? Yep, and that's not nearly as shocking as Vin Diesel playing a nanny in *The Pacifier* and raking in \$113 million.

I can never remember who starred in the anonymously named *Failure To Launch* (It was Matthew

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McConaughey and Sarah Jessica Parker) but I can't forget it grossed an impressive \$88 million. Her husband Matthew Broderick pulled in \$97 million as *Inspector Gadget* though it sure seemed like a flop at the time. That talking animal trailer somehow raised *Kangaroo Jack* to \$66 million and I doubt even the people who made it are anything but shocked. And sometimes a movie can be reviled for destroying a beloved classic, SEEM like a terrible flop and yet be the top-grossing movie of the year at \$260 million: that would be *How The Grinch Stole Christmas* (and it wasn't Jim Carrey's fault). So if you think you know how successful or not a movie was, think again. They might just surprise you.

Is there any movie that leaves you gobsmacked at how much money it actually made?

Also out this week: two more exceptional Criterion releases, the Kurosawa drama *High and Low* and the wonderfully packaged and creepy *Vampyr* (\$39.95 each; Criterion); if you're suddenly a fan of Maggie Gyllenhaal after *The Dark Knight*, check out her naughty turn in the nicely perverse *Secretary* (\$14.98; Lionsgate); Robert Smigel's aggressively bawdy sketch show *Comedy Central's TV Funhouse* (\$26.98; Paramount); *Without The King* (\$24.95; First Run), an entertaining documentary about the last king of Swaziland that proves just about anyone will let camera crews into their lives - even clueless monarchs; Tom Selleck's in full control of *Las Vegas Season Five* (\$59.98; Universal), though Josh Duhamel is still taller; NFLer Chad Johnson hosts *In Just One Play: The Big-Play Men of the NFL* (\$19.98; Warner Bros.) though instead of 90 minutes of clips I'd rather watch them all be drug-tested; *Andre Techine 4-Film Collector's Edition* (\$34.98; LionsGate) a bargain especially if you don't already own his acclaimed *Wild Reeds* from 1994; *Twin Daggers* (\$26.98; LionsGate), a so-so chop-socky movie; *Heavy Metal In Baghdad* (\$19.95; Arts Alliance), an engrossing documentary about Iraqis who just wanna rock; director Jean-Pierre Melville's last noir, *Dirty Money* (\$19.98; LionsGate) starring the impossibly beautiful duo of Alain Delon and Catherine Deneuve; the festival hit labor of love comedy *Big Dreams Little Tokyo* (\$14.99; Echo Bridge), which was written and directed and stars Dave Boyle; the umpteenth spin on *Spinal Tap*, this one -- *Brutal Massacre* (\$26.97; Anchor Bay) -- about a horror director tackling his magnum opus; mixed martial arts conquers the UK in *Cage Rage Superstar Collection* (\$14.98; Mill Creek) which gets huge props for including almost 60 fights amidst 13 hours of footage for a super-low price; and finally if you are tired of waiting for an IMAX screening of *The Dark Knight* that isn't sold out, check out the Blu-Ray edition of the campy 60s version *Batman The Movie* (\$39.98; Fox). POW! BLAM! BOP! At least you'll have some fun.

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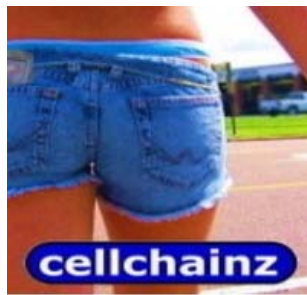
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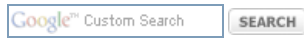
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