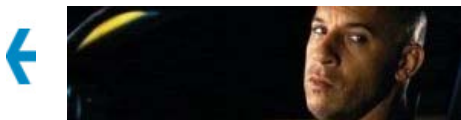


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DVDs: Harry Potter Sees The Future

Posted December 14, 2007 | 04:49 PM (EST)

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Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix (\$34.99; Warner Bros.) is just out on DVD to satisfy the fans who've read the final book three times already and need to take a break. As a film, it finds our heroes in high dudgeon and spoiling for a fight. That edge makes it the most satisfying entry since Alfonso Cuaron set the series high mark in 2004 with *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. It comes with the usual extras and you can also buy *Harry Potter Interactive DVD Game* (\$24.98; Warner Bros.), a pretty banal set of games you play with your remote control. They would be fine as bonus extras on the movie DVD set. But on their own, they can't hold a candle to real video and online games so all but the youngest of kids will be immediately bored.

The real excitement of this *Harry Potter* comes with a slip of paper and a code that's included. That gives buyers the right to download a digital copy of the film for free. Warner Bros. should be applauded for taking this step, which certainly should become standard for all major releases down the road. (No, the digital copy isn't compatible with iPods, but that will surely change in the future.)

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Imagine if you bought a CD to listen to at home and then found out you had to buy another copy to listen to it in your car, another copy to play on your computer and so on. You'd balk, obviously. Soon, when you buy a movie on DVD from a major studio, you'll be able to download a copy (just like with

Harry Potter) for free so you can watch it on your laptop if you prefer and eventually on any portable device you own. It's got to be the wave of the future if studios want to keep customers happy and give them value for their money.

Now if only the book industry would wake up. Right now, they expect you to buy a book two or three or four times so you can read it in different ways. Or you're expected to buy only one version and be stuck with it. Imagine if buying a hardcover book gave you access to a free digital audio

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version of the book you could listen to on your iPod and a text version you could read on your iPhone or Blackberry or computer or whatever you wanted. It would cost publishers very little extra and make a book purchase a lot more appealing. Hopefully, they'll watch what Warner Bros. is doing with *Harry Potter* and realize they're seeing the future, too.

Also out this week: Monte Hellman's classic cult film *Two-Lane Blacktop* (\$39.95; Criterion), the ultimate road trip movie starring of all people James Taylor and Dennis Wilson of the Beach Boys; the fourth season of *The Wire* (\$59.99; HBO) which it is no exaggeration to say is a high water mark in television history (and rest assured, I've seen the first two episodes of the final season and they haven't missed a beat); the third, very good and hopefully final Matt Damon entry in his action franchise, *The Bourne Ultimatum* (\$29.98; Universal) because few trilogies are this strong and they should stop while they're ahead; Ethan Hawke's labor of love *The Hottest State* (\$27.98; ThinkFilm), which features one of the year's best soundtracks courtesy of Jesse Harris; *Bob Hope MGM Movie Legends Collection* (\$39.98; MGM), a boxed set of seven Hope vehicles in which the best coward in cinema history grovels his way through goofiness like 1944's *The Princess and the Pirate*; the second season of the steadily improving polygamy drama *Big Love* (\$59.99; HBO); *High School Musical 2* (\$29.99; Disney) which is more fun than most would admit (go, Lucas Grabeel!), but the success of the first keeps this from being the same innocent charmer; a Tyler Perry festival with season one of his hit sitcom *House of Payne* (\$39.98; Lionsgate) and a boxed set of his stagework *Tyler Perry: The Plays* (\$79.98; Lionsgate), including seven shows; the third season of *Beverly Hills 90210* (\$54.99; Paramount), when the show was in its prime (though like most primetime soaps, it sometimes uses different songs than originally aired for cost reasons); *Lost Complete Third Season* (\$59.99; Buena Vista), which hardcore fans say righted itself halfway through; *Rocky: The Complete Saga* (\$59.98; MGM), which lurches from gritty triumph to blockbuster to franchise to foolishness and finally with the latest entry a modicum of self respect again; *SportsCentury: Dale Earnhardt Jr.* (\$16.95; ESPN), a decent documentary about the racing car driver who had to follow the biggest legend of the game and did so with style; the tenth season of *Frasier* (\$38.99; Paramount), which went on so long it was easy to take for granted; Martin Scorsese's anti-musical *New York, New York* (\$19.98; MGM) with a title song made to order that's so great you'll be shocked to remember the Kander and Ebb tune wasn't even nominated for an Oscar that year ("You Light Up My Life" won); and *Boy Crush* (\$24.95; Wolfe) a collection of gay shorts (how come blacks and Latinos and Christians and other groups don't get a steady stream of shorts the way gays do?) highlighted by the promising piece "Night Swimming" starring the appealing Bobby Steggert.

So tell me, which is your favorite Harry Potter film? Are you bored by the idea of seeing the last two now that you know how it ends? And does getting a free digital download version of a movie you can watch on your laptop seem like a positive step to you? What if you could get a free audio book download with every hardcover you purchased?

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"Prisoner of Azkaban" is by far the best installment of the series, except for some shoddy CGI in the lycanthrope department.

Cuaron's Dementors, the guards of the prison may have hurt the impetus of the following films, as they were so frightening, mysterious spectres resembling grim reapers, that Raif Fiennes lizardlike Voldemort seemed almost anticlimactic in subsequent installments. Faceless enemies, like Mike Myers, Jason Vorhees, and the dementors seem to evoke terror more effectively than those with clear cut definition.

Since nothing else in the series could top the horror of the dementors, nothing subsequent could possibly have the same efficacy.

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The new Die Hard movie comes with the same thing. A downloadable version. I think you download it straight from the DVD and not on-line. I haven't done it so I'm not sure, but I know it's there! A way-super new trend!

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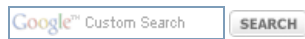
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