



THE GOD WHO WASN'T THERE

"Irreverently lays out the case that Jesus Christ never existed." -Newsweek



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DVDs: Was Elvis the King When it Came to Movies?

Posted August 7, 2007 | 06:23 PM (EST)

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People love to puncture conventional wisdom. Sgt. Pepper isn't the greatest album of all time because the Beatles aren't even the greatest band. Citizen Kane is nothing compared to Touch of Evil and F For Fake. TV's The Brady Bunch was actually a subversive sitcom that celebrated sexuality and the joys of divorce.

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But sometimes (indeed, a lot of the time), the wisdom is conventional because it's right. Take Elvis at the movies. His soundtracks had some really cool songs on them, didn't they? Viva Las Vegas had Ann-Margret, didn't it? Elvis showed some serious chops in 1958's King Creole, didn't he?

Malarkey. Critics got it right the first time. The Elvis movies were basically soul-sucking wastes of time that turned the King into a joke, wasted his talents (he certainly had charisma but it was, shall we say, wasted on junk like Clambake). And anyone who would sit through all of them could only shake their head in sadness and wonder what might have been.

For hardcore fans, Elvis! - Lights! Camera! Elvis! Collection (\$69.99; Paramount) collects eight different flicks like Girls! Girls! Girls! and Paradise, Hawaiian Style. The crushed blue velvet box says it all.

Conventional wisdom also says Brigitte Bardot was nothing but a sex kitten with minimal talent. Contrarians might insist that Bardot was actually a proto-feminist in control of her body. (Though Bardot's current far-right stances politically might discourage you from doing so.) But the people who simply watch movies (rather than meta-analyze them) are right again. Brigitte Bardot: 5 Film Collection (\$39.98; Lionsgate) offers five lesser films - like Naughty Girl and The Vixen -- from this lesser talent. Hugh Hefner joins the fun to point out that she was really, really hot.

A new TV series based on Flash Gordon on SciFi takes it all too seriously and might make you rethink the fun you had watching that campy 1980 film version with unstoppable music by Queen.

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Don't. The conventional wisdom is right again: *Flash Gordon: Saviour Of The Universe Edition* (\$26.98; Universal) remains hilariously silly fun. Why spoil it by over-thinking? Flash never would.

Some say Shia LaBeouf is the next Tom Hanks, thanks to a summer to remember that includes the animated flick *Surf's Up*, the mega-hit *Transformers* and the word of mouth success *Disturbia*. But conventional wisdom says *Disturbia* is just warmed-over *Rear Window* and it's right again. LaBeouf still has to prove he's more than clever at picking projects.

Rome was written off after a slow start in season one but the fans -- the only ones who can provide conventional wisdom in this instance since they're the only ones who saw it -- insist it got better. They're right. By the end of *Rome: Season Two* (\$99.98; HBO) you'll be kicking yourself that it's all over just as things started kicking into high gear. It's not the scandal of dumping *Deadwood* for the inscrutable and exhausting *John From Cincinnati*. But it's close.

But don't worry: the wisdom of crowds isn't always right and conventional wisdom can sometimes just be lazy thinking. Everyone assumed NASCAR was a hick sport that would never cross over to the mainstream. Now every paper in the country covers the sport and the drivers are household names even in homes that don't include a pickup truck. You can dive into four volumes of ESPN's Ultimate NASCAR series (\$16.95 each, ESPN) but my favorite is *Vol. 2: The Dirt, The Cars, Speed & Danger*. The next sport that everyone says won't cross over but just might? Bull riding.

Conventional wisdom says *The Simpsons* stayed on the air too long and that's certainly true, too. Everyone can argue about when they should have pulled the plug, but the still solid *The Simpsons Season Ten* (\$49.98; Fox) is as good a place as any to have been done with it. Besides, we could be watching the third funny feature film this year instead of just the first.

Finally, conventional wisdom says *The Muppet Show* was the last great TV variety series and *The Muppet Show: The Complete Second Season* (\$39.99; Buena Vista) makes that gloriously evident. Twenty-four episodes with guests ranging from **Julie Andrews** to **Steve Martin** and a laugh quotient that would shame *Saturday Night Live*. Really, who needs wisdom when you've got Fozzie Bear?

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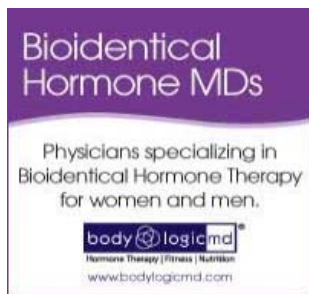
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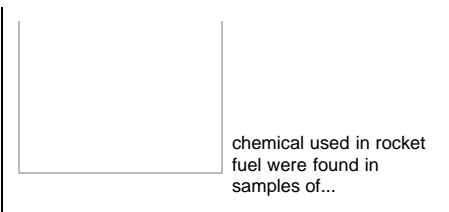
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