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DVDs: What Happened To The Boondocks?

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Aaron McGruder is the most intriguing, funny and frustrating talent to emerge from the world of comic strips since Garry Trudeau and Doonesbury. McGruder is a comic strip artist who grew bored with comic strips, a TV animation innovator who took so long to deliver his shows people forgot about them and a savvy media presence who didn't want to waste his time being a talking head. His strip The Boondocks will always be a landmark. Incisive, intelligent,

bold and most important of all hilarious, it told the story of two brothers -- the informed Huey and the hip hop obsessed Riley -- living with their grandfather.

McGruder refused to play by the idiotic rules of the industry, which typically gives artists no rest in churning out new strips every day for the first five years of their contract. (After that, you might get two weeks off.) Like Trudeau, who retired Doonesbury for a year and now takes vacations to recharge and keep the hours he works somewhat sane, McGruder took care with his strips and refused to stick to crazy deadlines. Then he launched the TV version, which has a tremendous voice cast (led by the marvelous Regina King) and it captured his mindset perfectly.

And then all hell broke loose.

McGruder started to hand over the drawing of his strips to other people, delivering only the text. He made clear he felt the TV series was a better outlet for what he wanted to accomplish. Eventually, the strip would go on hiatus with no determined return date. Finally, it stopped altogether.

But the TV show had its own problems. Season Two just never seemed to appear. I mean, never. Was McGruder pushing the boundaries, freaking out the cable channel with his provocative work, which had created a stir the first time around? A process that should have taken 9 months ended

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up taking two years -- an eternity in TV terms. Or, if you prefer, similar to the gaps in *The Sopranos*. Yet when he finally delivered the shows, there was no drumbeat of excitement leading up to the new episodes -- despite the fact that the show had critical acclaim and a burgeoning audience. Instead, new episodes just started to appear, almost as if Cartoon Network were ashamed of them.

Were they too toxic? Indeed, there was concern about content: BET network threatened to sue over two episodes lampooning the channel and its content. Those never aired but can be found on the new DVD set *The Boondocks The Complete Second Season* (\$49.95; Sony).

I'd love to say that the new episodes were so out there, so scathing and fierce that the Cartoon Network lost its nerve. I'd love to say it was worth the wait. But in fact, like the scraps we saw of the final season from Dave Chappelle's sketch show, season two of *The Boondocks* already seems exhausted of ideas. One or two episodes are so similar to ideas from Season One that for a minute I thought they were repeats.

Don't get me wrong -- the show still has much to recommend. The episodes on snitching and a white teacher who uses the "n" word (hilarious, really, since Riley uses it so much the teacher becomes inured to it) are highlights. And the voice cast is exceptional. You get a glimpse of their camaraderie and the challenges of creating the show with some fine extras, as well as four audio commentary tracks. But despite being a huge fan, I have to admit the level of quality dipped. That doesn't excuse the utter lack of publicity for the show (curious, really), but it does explain why *The Boondocks* hasn't built on the success of season one.

McGruder delivered a brilliant comic strip and then moved on. He collaborated on a very good graphic novel -- *Birth Of A Nation* -- and then moved on. He's delivered two seasons of a TV series that had flashes of brilliance and I imagine he's moved on from that as well. Maybe the next stage is a *Boondocks* movie. I hope so. Because his talent deserves as wide a canvas as he wants. Let's just hope McGruder finds the right storyline to fire his imagination and the right studio to give it the mainstream push his work deserves.

Also out this week: *Heavy Metal In Baghdad* (\$19.95; Hart Sharp), a fascinating documentary about Acrassicauda, the only heavy metal band in Iraq, and the travails of being a band when Scud missiles blow up your van and there's no dependable power for your electric guitar.

Jack Nicholson has built up an almost endless supply of good will over his career, but that still makes dreck like *The Bucket List* (\$28.99; Warner Bros.) a little hard to take -- on the other hand, has a bad movie ever entered an idea into the popular lexicon so quickly?

One of the coolest martial arts movies ever made comes to DVD with *Come Drink With Me* (\$19.97; Weinstein), which stars Cheng Pei-pei as The Golden Swallow, one of the great action heroines.

A fun series of books is bungled in the movie *Jumper* (\$28.99; Fox), which makes the mistake of turning the barely teenage hero into a college age student, though they did make the right move of casting the magnetic Jamie Bell in a supporting role and somehow the movie grossed \$100 million overseas so maybe they'll get it right in a sequel.

Woody Harrelson delivers one of his most acclaimed performances as a gay escort for mature women in *The Walker* (\$27.98; ThinkFilm).

Army Wives Complete First Season (\$39.99; Buena Vista) in a boxed set just as season two of the popular drama/soap begins, with the best extra being a look at real army wives.

High Noon Ultimate Collector's Edition (\$19.98; Lionsgate), the Gary Cooper Western that must hold the record for the most versions of a movie released on DVD not called *Terminator 2* and if you don't own it, this edition is as good as any.

The Rock: The Most Electrifying Man In Sports Entertainment (\$34.95; WWE), a three disc set look at the Rock before he went all soft and started making family films, including 19 complete matches -- really, most sports leagues could take a lesson from the thorough, satisfying packages delivered by the WWE.

Catherine Deneuve 5 Film Collection and *Sophia Loren 4 Film Collection* (\$39.98 each; Lionsgate),

"Washington Unplugged"

Arianna was on CBS' "Washington..."

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Obama Teases Reporter From India During Press Conference (VIDEO)

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Jim Cramer Declares The Depression "Over" (VIDEO)

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ATLANTA — Traces of a chemical used in rocket fuel were found in samples of...

Least Wasteful Cities In America (SLIDESHOW)

It's great to love the city you live in, and better to

two sets sexily packaged in vinyl casing that can't hide the fact that almost all of these movies are negligible and not worth your time.

The Odd Couple Fourth Season (\$39.98; Paramount), with no extras, but who needs 'em when the show is this durable.

The well-named *Witless Protection* (\$29.95; Lionsgate), which proves Larry The Cable Guy is a better organizer of bull riding events than an actor.

Quincy has nothing on Dominic Da Vinci, the coroner of Vancouver and the star of the drama *Da Vinci's Inquest Season 3* (\$59.99; Acorn), which is perfect for people who can't get enough *CSI*.

Millions: A Lottery Story (\$19.98; Life Size), a well-reviewed documentary about how lives are dramatically upended when people win a huge lottery windfall.

Two series that never got no respect: the scrubbed clean wholesomeness of *7th Heaven Sixth Season* (\$49.98; Paramount) whose creator Brenda Hampton had delivered one of the longest-running hits in TV history and yet couldn't get her next ideas on the schedule of a major network and *Home Improvement Eighth Season* (\$23.99; Paramount), which kicked *Seinfeld's* ass in the ratings but never got 1/100th of that show's acclaim.

Funny Games (\$27.98; Warner Bros.), the latest in the bizarre genre of shot by shot remakes and it raises the question of whether the wonderfully dissolute Michael Pitt could ever play a convincing normal guy.

Diva (\$26.98; Lionsgate), the only thriller built around a bootleg recording of an opera singer.

The New York Mets: Essential Games Of Shea Stadium (\$59.95; A&E), six complete classic games played at Shea, such as the '69 World Series Game 4 -- great for fans, but with the thousands of games they have access to and the minimal cost, this is priced a tad too high.

Doctor Who -- Warriors Of The Deep (\$24.98; BBC Video), which collects an entire multi-episode arc featuring Peter Davison as the Doctor in one set, but really they should release boxed sets with all the adventures of each Doctor, rather than this endless stream of piecemeal DVDs.

5 Films By Dario Argento (\$49.98; Anchor Bay) has some good to great examples of the Italian suspenser's work, or so they say - I'm too weak-stomached to watch them.

Flavor Of Love 3 (\$34.98; Anchor Bay), depressingly, we'll have to explain to kids that Flavor Flav was once in an incredibly influential and serious rap group Public Enemy -- I doubt they'll believe us.

The Stan Laurel Collection Volume 2 (\$29.95; Kino) has 21 comedy shorts from Laurel's solo work and a welcome release it is, now if only someone could explain why there's a massive collection of Laurel & Hardy shorts available in Europe but not here I could rest easy.

Rat Patrol: The Complete Series (\$49.98; MGM) falls somewhere between *Combat* and *Hogan's Heroes*.

Finally, *Muhammad: The Last Prophet* (\$29.98; FMG) is an animated film about the Prophet with the unique challenge of not being able to show its central character.

So tell me, are you a fan of Boondocks and did you think Season Two was a bit of a disappointment?

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What a shame that McGruder finds it hard or irrelevant to develop a large body of work at the different stages of his creative evolution. The Boondocks (with Pearls before swine) was the reason i checked the comic pages. The season 1 on tv was a blow out, it was served right, i played it for every one who came to my house (no one knew about the comic show, a point well observed by Mr Glitz). I felt it needed to be seen by a whole lot more people. Heard a few grumbings about Regina King voicing the boys, here's where i differ cos i believe she was superb in her delivery.

And to answer Mr Glitz's question about season 2 being disappointing, yes it is. But the show started losing its bite at the tail end of the 1st season.

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"The Boondocks" comic was utterly brilliant, evidenced by the fact that it intrigued and yet alienated just about every demographic imaginable at one time or another (or constantly...). During the height of its run, I found myself (like many other white suburbanites, I'm sure) hitting Okayplayer.com daily for not only a taste of the comic, but also the culture that helped create it.

As ironic as it may seem, clearly nobody can eviscerate notable African-Americans such as Condi Rice, Oprah and Robert Johnson quite like McGruder (or Dave Chappelle, for that matter). A world without his commentary would be one of pure bigotry.

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Sometimes you still catch it on Cartoon Network, usually late on Adult Swim.
Disturbing and uncomfortable in some respects but brilliant. Too bad it's hard to find regularly even on CN.

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Thanks for reading. Yep, "The Boondocks" has always had a late-night slot because of its adult content. It's not quite the boonies, however, since their late-night block called Adult Swim has been one of Cartoon Network's best blocks of programming. Still the new season just sort of appeared, rather than being ballyhooed.

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