



"The Bourne Identity"

Matt Damon is surprisingly convincing in this updating of the Robert Ludlum thriller about a secret agent who can't remember anything — except how to kill (\$26.98, Universal). It's trim, no-nonsense fun from the director of "Go" — until the silly, unsatisfying finale. Still, Damon acquits himself nicely and gets a much better franchise than his buddy Ben Affleck, who starred as the third Jack Ryan in the miserable, misbegotten "The Sum of All Fears."

"Tadpole"

"24 Hour Party People"

Bebe Neuwirth seems to have been lost amid the end-of-year crush of good movies. But her sparky turn as an unapologetic seducer of Oscar, the 15-year-old son of her best friend (Sigourney Weaver, in fine form) is the best part of this sweetly amusing comedy (\$29.99, Miramax). The highlight? The dinner party scene where Neuwirth 'fesses up and is surprised anyone would care. A different party is dissected in "24 Hour Party People," a frantic but loving look at the Manchester music scene in the United Kingdom (\$26.98, MGM). It's impenetrable to anyone who doesn't know the Happy Mondays from the Stone Roses, but essential for those who do.

"Little Otik"

"See the Sea"

Czech animator Jan Svankmajer retells the classic tale of a childless couple who yearn for a baby so much that they take care of a tree stump carved to look like a baby (\$29.99, Zeitgeist). Unfortunately, Little Otik springs to life and becomes very hungry indeed. The movie jumps from witty to desperately sad to horrifying in no time, offering up painful insights into parenthood and love along the way. Original, to say the least. Also just out is "See the Sea" paired with "A Summer Dress" (\$24.99, Zeitgeist). French director Francois Ozon's breakthrough played at Film Forum for ages, and shame on you for not watching it then — he's become one of the most exciting directors around, with the Almodovar-like "Sit-com" and the Charlotte Rampling tearjerker "Under the Sand."

"101 Dalmations II: Patch's London Adventure"

"Snow Queen"

Is this what the winners of "American Idol" can look forward to? The U.K. champion, Will Young, can't even get his album released in the United States (if people didn't watch the show, they don't care about the singer) but he does appear on Disney's latest straight-to-DVD quickie singing "Try Again" (\$29.99, Disney). One wishes Disney would stop trying to milk every classic it's ever made for spinoffs. Better than that is "Snow Queen" (\$19.98, Artisan), starring Bridget Fonda as the evil queen who steals away a young girl's love. At three hours, it's too long for little tykes and not quite exciting enough for the older ones, but at least they made something original.

"I See a Dark Stranger"

"Eye of Vichy"

Deborah Kerr stars in the eccentric comedy "Dark Stranger" as an Irish lass who despises the British so much, she collaborates with the Nazis (\$19.95, HVE). It's a good reminder that Kerr wasn't always as stiff and dull as she seemed in "Tea and Sympathy." But its delightful mix of real suspense and sly humor shouldn't be a surprise: The film came from the team of Frank Launder and Sydney Gilliat, the team behind "The Lady Vanishes" and other classics. For a look at more serious collaborators, Claude Chabrol's "Eye of Vichy" (\$29.95, First Run Features) is a damning compilation of French film footage and newsreels.

"The Magic Christian"

As studios empty their vaults to capitalize on the DVD explosion, we're getting all sorts of minor gems. Peter Sellers has one of his stranger roles in "The Magic Christian" when he adopts Ringo Starr and uses his wealth to make any one do anything they can imagine. (\$14.98, Artisan).