

# DVDs this week



## **"American Pie": Ultimate Edition Unrated (\$29.98; Universal)**

Don't get too worked up about the 'unrated' version of *"American Pie."* On the one hand, you can't get much raunchier than a teenage boy masturbating with an apple pie (especially when he's caught by his dad). On the other hand, since this movie is basically sweet and old-fashioned at heart, there wasn't much naughtiness beyond the calculated gross-outs that we've already seen. Like many a teen sex flick, *"American Pie"* revels in boys bursting to be relieved of their virginity but actually quietly suggests sex might actually be better with someone you know and like (or, God forbid, love). The truth of this sentimental heart can be seen in the trailer for *"American Pie 2,"* included in this edition. It rattles off the names of the whole gang (does anyone really remember the names of all those characters) while a wistful *"Wonder Years"* style voiceover says that good times come and go but friends are forever. Touchy feely? You bet. Faithful to the mushy core at the heart of the original? Right again. Is it followed by a scene where our hero (Jason Biggs) is surprised in bed with a girl by his dad, his mom and then the girl's dad and mom? Absolutely.

## **"Bagdad Cafe" (\$19.98; MGM)**

Sometimes, one tiny element of a movie can make it special. This gentle comedy by director Percy Adlon (his only good English language movie) is filled with a marvelous cast, including the plumply luscious Marianne Sagebrecht as an abandoned wayfarer, CCH Pounder as the owner of a diner where she finds a new home, and Jack Palance in his real comeback as a former set designer who wants to capture the beauty of Sagebrecht on canvas. Palance's Oscar-winning turn in *"City Slickers"* was just the icing on the cake compared to his nuanced, touching performance here. But *"Bagdad Cafe"* might just have been an eccentric footnote if it wasn't for one crucial element. That element is the haunting, Oscar-nominated song "Calling You" performed by Jevetta Steele. Adlon obviously knew he'd found gold: this beautiful, poignant number written by Bob Telson appears in one form or another throughout the movie. It's hard to imagine *"Bagdad Cafe"* without it.

## **Jackie Mason Comedy Trilogy (\$29.95; White Star)**

So the package says this DVD is three hours long, and it's only two hours and forty minutes. So sue me. It still has plenty of jokes crammed in there, what with one unremarkable documentary about Mason's career (including the clip from "Ed Sullivan" where he made a finger gesture and found himself blackballed for years) and two concert films. Only one routine is repeated — that one, a beauty about Jewish athleticism. (I'll bet he liked the scene in *"Airplane"* where a passenger is offered a book or a magazine but asks the stewardess for something lighter: "How about this pamphlet on great Jewish athletes?" she responds.) There are only brief clips from his Broadway stands, but "Jackie Mason in Israel" and "Jackie Mason on Campus" (at Oxford, no less) are perfectly solid examples of his smart, caustic routine. Is he reinventing the wheel? No. Is he funny? Yes. Is he offensive? He certainly hopes so. No frills, but fans will be happy.

## **"Mommie Dearest" (\$29.99; Paramount)**

Sometimes a movie actually tries to be campy from the get-go. It almost never works (though the recent *"Charlie's Angels"* actually pulled it off pretty well). In general, for a movie to be truly campy, the people involved have to take their work very seriously indeed. Think of the actors bravely mouthing their dialogue in Ed Wood's *"Plan 9 From Outer Space."* Or consider the all-important public service that *"Reefer Madness"* provides in warning about the dangers of marijuana. (Apparently, one whiff sends you flying out the door to jump in a car and run down pedestrians.) Then there's *"Showgirls,"* which shockingly revealed that Vegas was a town that demeaned women for the sake of flash and pizzazz. *"Mommie Dearest,"* as with all of those movies, was made by people who were very serious about their work. They truly thought they were creating a devastating drama about the vicious private life of Joan Crawford. That's why the scenes of wire hangers and so on are so funny. But it's probably unique among camp classics in that the central performance — by Faye Dunaway — is truly great. She is frighteningly believable as Crawford and brings an intensity to the role that is almost scary. Audiences may laugh, but it's often a nervous release from the fierceness of Dunaway's commitment — surely Crawford couldn't have been that horrendous, that self-centered, that bizarre in real life? Rather than admit it, audiences cackle. It's by no means a good movie, and laughing is surely the only way to enjoy it. But you can also enjoy the brilliant acting by Dunaway that gives this campy film its bite.

— Michael Giltz