

Geek out Web, gadgets, games

Those long, gnarly URLs have got to stop. The links break in IMs and in e-mails, they're a hassle to <a href> tag, and just try to write one down. Fret no more! A whole crop of URL shrinkers are out there, just waiting to slice and dice those clumsy addresses. These are only a few examples; there are loads of link-shrinkers out there, and most of them are largely interchangeable.

TinyURL (www.tinyurl.com) is probably the most ubiquitous clipper right now. Enter a long URL, and get back one that looks like this: <http://tinyurl.com/34kbu>. The links never expire, and TinyURL offers a handy toolbar link that will tinify the URL for your page. The drawback is that tinyURL generates a nonsense combo of numbers and letters—sort of annoying if you forget what it links to.

Doiop.com (www.doiop.com) offers the same shrinking capabilities, but with the highly useful bonus of letting you create a keyword for the URL. Thus, we created www.doiop.com/mayorsoffice to link to the Mayor's Office of Special Events, a 119-character URL.

URL123 (www.url123.com)

gets a little fancier by offering customizable subdomains when you create a free account. We made <http://timeoutchicago.url123.com/mayorsoffice>, and the links can also be password protected. Registration is always a bitch, but what isn't?

Shorl.com (www.shorl.com) "shorlifies" URLs by giving them goofy, allegedly pronounceable but not necessarily shorter addresses. We made <http://shorl.com/hyakabebapro>, and while that's a bit clunky itself, Shorl generates a name and password so you can see how many hits your Shorl link gets. Yummy stats almost outweigh how irritating the URLs are.

SnipURL (www.snipurl.com) offers customizable addresses, stats and a bookmarklet. You can snip a set of URLs at once—and tag each with a unique nickname—if you're making a set. Again, usability is better when you register. If you set up a "mysnipURL," you can edit your links, export the data to Excel and track stats. SnipURL is available in five languages, which is kinda flashy, even if it's four more languages than we're ever going to use.—Margaret Lyons

almost mean that as a compliment. Tonight, Rachel and Nehemiah hash it out in what should be an A+ battle of the wits. Well, wits might be overstating it, but they do argue about the Iraq War, and, in case you could ever forget for a single second, Rachel served in that war. We respect Rachel's commitment to serve, but holy God, is that chick annoying. In other news, Danny is angry because Melinda kissed someone else. We're getting crabs just thinking about her. Ten bucks says the Danny/Melinda fight is more fun.

Wednesday 13

Brat Camp 7-9pm, ABC

Brat Camp follows nine "out of control" teenagers sent to a wilderness therapy program when their parents couldn't affect their behavior. Watching 14- to 17-year-olds complain, weep, complain more and hike around might not sound like fun, but seeing the transformation from abhorrently cruel drug addict to generically moody teenager is more than a little satisfying. We were giant fans of the British series, which was rerun on ABC Family earlier this year; how often does a reality show genuinely try to solve problems? Not often. This go-round, the American kids take

drugs, have sex, are the victims of molestation, pull knives on family members, shout obscenities at their parents, drop out of school, run away—you name a behavioral problem, one of the nine kids on this show has exhibited it. Calling them "brats" doesn't seem quite accurate (ahem, *Princes of Malibu*)—these are some troubled, scarred kids who need therapy. Expect loads and loads of crunchy hippie bullshit.

Thursday 14

Hooking Up 8-9pm, ABC

If Internet dating is so mainstream, why do we need a whole miniseries to "examine" it? Whatever, watching other people go on shitty first dates is the new national pastime. We'd completely discount *Hooking Up* except that its producers also made *Hopkins 24/7*, one of the most fascinating TV documentaries we can remember. So here goes nothing. Producers followed 12 single women in Manhattan—first person to make a *Sex and the City* joke gets stabbed—and their quests for love via online dating. The women range in age, profession, attractiveness, levels of commitment, but they're all looking for the same thing: A little action. Oh, wait, sorry, love.

DVDs

★=Recommended or notable

New releases

A Very Long Engagement

Dir. Jean-Pierre Jeunet. 2004. R. 133mins. Warner Home Video. Available Tue 12 (\$29.95). Audrey Tautou. A lush, gruesome vision of World War I from the director of *Amélie*, this French epic follows a young woman's search to find her lover, a soldier who may have died in battle. No doubt Tautou (*Amélie*) is a real cutie; and as Mathilde, the bereft fiancée and polio survivor who walks with a limp, she's about as endearing a figure as possible. But director Jeunet's inventive mix of whimsy, macabre and wild plotting lacks the heart that made *Amélie* such a sentimental favorite. The film's early scenes, set in the trenches of WWI, are its most breathtaking: Evoking an expressionistic painting, the camera sweeps across the front lines to reveal the hollowed faces of soldiers and the corpse of a horse hanging from a tree. (Deservedly, *Engagement* was nominated for cinematography and art direction Oscars.) But when the story switches over to the exploits of Mathilde, the film loses its way in eccentric supporting characters (a man with a wooden hand, a seductive vamp bent on revenge, Jodie Foster) and special-effects-laden set pieces (an early 20th-century train station, a zeppelin explosion). The filmmakers, apparently, had quite a thing for this zeppelin eruption: The DVD features a documentary called *Before the Explosion*. There's also another doc on Paris in the 1920s, a making-of featurette and audio commentary from director Jeunet.—Anthony Kaufman

MC5: Kick Out the Jams

Dirs. Leni Sinclair and Cary Loren. 2005. N/R. 35mins. Music Video Distributors. Available Tue 12 (\$14.95). In 1990, the sole release by the late '60s Detroit rockers the MC5 still in print was a ROIR cassette compilation. Today, there are probably a half-dozen CD collections and almost as many DVDs on the market (or held up in litigation) documenting the Detroit band's revolutionary rock-meets-soul-power sound and image. This strange DVD collects footage shot by Leni Sinclair, wife of the band's political propaganda

officer-manager John Sinclair, and matches it with audio recordings of the band that only roughly approximate a live show. The disc gets a heavier psychedelic remix treatment as it plays on, and shots of Vietnam, war protests and freaky lights sometimes overwhelm. There's no commentary, and everyone but hard-core fans will be bored senseless. But concert/club/festival shots of the windmilling, stars-and-stripes-clad rockers in auto-destructo mode explain why the band's visual style is still romanced as much as its music.—John Dugan

Million Dollar Baby

Dir. Clint Eastwood. 2004. PG-13. 133mins. Warner Home Video. Available Tue 12 (\$29.95 or \$39.95). Clint Eastwood, Hilary Swank, Morgan Freeman.

Counting ourselves among those whose cold hearts refused to break at the sight of gruff old Eastwood euthanizing his feisty young boxing protégée (Swank) before heading off to get some lemon meringue pie, we wonder how well this picture is going to stand up to repeated home viewings. More specifically, we wonder if folks who loved it in theaters won't gradually begin to feel there's something, oh, maybe just a little bit grotesque about its shameless melodramatic manipulations. This is, to cite just one example, a picture that pits a virtuous, sexually chaste American girl boxer against a German girl boxer who's so comprehensively evil that she used to be a prostitute! Boo! Hiss! (Are we alone in feeling there might be something admirable about that particular career trajectory, even for a German?) Anyway, those who concur with Roger Ebert that the film plumbs "the deepest secrets of life and death" are presented with a cornucopia of philosophical extras, including two featurettes, a roundtable seminar with the cast moderated by that unctuous freak James Lipton, and—with the more expensive deluxe edition—a CD of the soundtrack music, composed by Clint himself.—Cliff Doerksen

Prozac Nation

Dir. Erik Skjoldbjærg. 2001. R. 95mins. Miramax Home Entertainment. Available now (\$29.99). Christina Ricci.

Thank God this painfully shoddy adaptation of an admittedly scattered book was never widely released.



FRENCH BLISS Audrey Tautou liberally applies sunscreen before stepping outside in *A Very Long Engagement*.