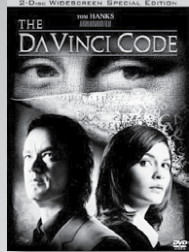


THIS WEEK IN DVD'S

by Mike Restaino



newly-reunited live presence—it allows Daniel Lanois' score to envelop you like a fog bank.

You also hear Steve Albini's favorite joke in the deleted scenes section (worth the price of admission on its own), and while a band commentary would have been a fanboy dream come true, as it stands, this is still *the* music DVD of the year.

Shot for \$11,000 on DV and starring a cast of unknowns, everyone's favorite Dumbo-eared redhead, Ron Howard, had decided at long last to make his debut foray into feature films with *The Da Vinci Code* (Sony), and, as expected, it's everything an indie film by a young and vivacious director should be. Yeah, right—Sony probably spent \$11,000 on Audrey Tautou's dog's bottled water allowance alone.

Love it or hate it, *The Da Vinci Code* is a perfect snapshot of Hollywood filmmaking at its most panoramic. Trillions of dollars were spent here—from author Dan Brown's rights sale to the pretty penny charged by the Louvre for location fees—and it shows: This is one *expensive-looking* movie.

Mockery aside, though, this regal visual palette is why this DVD is so cool. On a big, expensive TV, *The Da Vinci Code* looks exquisitely film-like. Even the bonus features on this 2-disc set were filmed in high-def.

For techies, this disc is unbeatable. All others: Run screaming.

We *Exorcist*-lovers have a choice: We can either spend twenty bucks on the first film's DVD or spend fifty on *The Exorcist: The Complete Anthology* (Warner Bros.), which includes the original and the "Version You've Never Seen" of *The Exorcist*, *Exorcist II: The Heretic*, *Legion: Exorcist III*, and both Renny Harlin's and Paul Schrader's versions of the *Exorcist* prequel (*The Beginning* and *Dominion*, respectively).

But there's nothing new to this edition—if you bought a copy of each film already, you're screwed. And "Freakin'" Friedkin's freakin' commentaries on both of his *Exorcists* are dull as dirt. Even Harlin's and Schrader's commentaries on their dueling prequels have no bite (for all the movie's Hollywood gossip, you'd think there'd be at least one mini-catfight here). The only good news is that transfers and mixes here are pretty solid, with the exception of *Exorcist II* (which looks and sounds about as well as it's written...SNAP!).

Just buy the original. ☞

Like a bastard incarnation of *Jackass* made by the joker geeks in your high school A/V club, *MXC: Most Extreme Elimination Challenge—Season One* (Magnolia) takes episodes of an actual Japanese reality/challenge show and adds dumbass voiceover to make the weirdos participating in bizarre competitions here seem even weirder—and, yes, funnier.

Call it *Bong Rip Funniest Home Videos*.

The three audio commentaries included on this set are a bit much—when the series itself is already a commentary, what's the point?—but the original sales presentation of the show here is hilarious (who *wouldn't* think this show was a great idea?), and you'll watch the "Most Painful Eliminations" montage in a drunken haze at least ten times before it stops being ridiculously funny.

Get it on!

It's worth watching an episode of *Everybody Loves Raymond: The Complete Seventh Season* (HBO) just to see how extensively Ray Romano extends his deadpan non-smirk—especially with zany family members like Doris Roberts and Brad Garrett (as Ray's Paul Bunyan-sized brother) flailing about as donkeys on parade.

Raymond is past its prime in this seventh season, so only die-hard fans will make it through this set unscathed. However, the commentaries with co-creators Phil Rosenthal and Romano—as well as a cast of gypsies (Chris Elliott's here, for God's sake!)—are a blast, and the show's Anamorphic widescreen transfers are some of the best on DVD.

Fasten your eyes on Kim Deal drinking an O'Doul's! And is that Charles Thompson (aka Black Francis) at an aquarium with his wife and stepkid? Egad!

This relative normalcy juxtaposed with the still-volatile histrionics of the Pixies' music makes *loudQUIETloud: A Film About Pixies* (MVD) a uniquely engaging experience. And the 5.1 mix here doesn't merely do justice to the band's

Almodóvar returns with *Volver*

by Lindsay Kuhn

VOLVER

★★★★★
(4 out of 4 stars)

DIRECTED BY PEDRO ALMODÓVAR
STARRING: PENÉLOPE CRUZ,
CARMEN MAURA, BLANCA PORTILLO,
YOHANA COBO, ANTONIO DE LA TORRE
121 MINUTES, RATED R

Minus one prosthetic posterior, Pedro Almodóvar's newest film, *Volver*, is intoxicatingly genuine. Influenced by the common man voice of the works of Italian Neo-Realism, *Volver* is an inspirational pass into a world most entirely made of women—three generations of them—who survive the natural elements of life, including wind, fire, and even death. Like most Almodóvar films, *Volver* bravely crosses genres, lending itself more to a not-always conventional simulation of life.

"It is part of my nature to combine themes," Almodóvar has said of his film, referring to the way *Volver* effortlessly oscillates between genres, particularly between tragedy and comedy. "Life is like that."

The patchwork of dark and light moments gives *Volver* its pulse, brings it to full life; because of these moments, the characters, and thus, the netting of small towns and cities depicted in the film are tenderly flawed and sympathetic. Even though reality, somehow, is revealed when blemishes are juxtaposed with great vibrancy, Almodóvar moves among these moments and genres cautiously and with great care.

Almodóvar, apparently comfortable in risk-taking, took a chance when he once again ventured into the women's realm with *Volver*. One of the great marvels of this film, in fact, is the way Almodóvar so acutely captures the women's perspective and portrays the secret language of women with such incisive acumen. He manages to infiltrate this world completely.

In *Volver*, Penélope Cruz gets the chance to showcase her dexterity as an actor, at once embodying the strength and frailty of her character, "Raimunda." The film takes place in a working-class community in "white" Spain, and follows a migrant family from the village to the city in search of a fresh start and prosperity. Raimunda moves to the city for these reasons, and raises her teenage

daughter with her unemployed husband. Cruz demonstrates her devastating range, depicting diametric emotions from one scene to the next, and sometimes within the same shot.

Said the director: "Working with Penelope, to begin with, we are good friends and this is an advantage for an actor. And it's also an advantage for me that she has complete confidence in me. You have to be careful with this, because the actor is naked in front of you, but the key is I know her, and she is completely generous with me"

Cruz has a disarming beauty in person and on film, and Almodóvar makes the most of it; her cleavage in *Volver* is nearly a supporting character. In one scene, Raimunda washes a knife over the kitchen sink, and the camera zeroes in on her cleavage from above her head.

"Penelope has got one of the most spectacular cleavages in world cinema," noted Almodóvar.

While satisfied by her attributes from the chest on up, Almodóvar thought Cruz was too slim for the role of Raimunda. Inspired by Dustin Hoffman's character in *Tootsie*, Almodóvar dressed Cruz in a prosthetic behind—despite rumors, Cruz denied keeping this as a keepsake.

"She took it very naturally," Almodóvar said. "Of course." ☞



Lola Dueñas as Sole, Yohana Cobo as Paula, and Penélope Cruz as Raimunda in *Volver*.

Borat is make good best movie

BORAT: CULTURAL LEARNINGS...

★★★★★
(3 1/2 out of 4 stars)

DIRECTED BY LARRY CHARLES
STARRING: SACHA BARON COHEN,
KEN DAVITIAN, PAMELA ANDERSON
82 MINUTES, RATED R

Anyone familiar with Sacha Baron Cohen's HBO television series, *The Da Ali G Show*, already knows about Borat, a reporter from the nation of Kazakhstan who's utterly politically incorrect. And in this film, as the title clumsily reveals, Borat is going to visit the United States to learn something. What he does is make us laugh...a lot. *Borat* is one incredibly funny quasi-mockumentary. I say "quasi" because parts of it appear

by Jonathan W. Hickman

to be true, at least, true in a staged *Punk'd* or reality program-sense.

The story is told as though a Kazakhstani film crew has captured Borat's journey. Borat often talks directly to the camera. The film starts in Kazakhstan where Borat shows us around his village. In Borat's country, women are treated terribly and personal hygiene isn't a priority. Sex is constantly on his mind. He even touts his sister's status as one of the top prostitutes in the country. And Borat's been selected by his government to travel to America to learn something perhaps of its culture. Given Borat's complete politically incorrect identity, we are

see *BORAT* on p.18