

HANNA (PG-13)

★★★★☆

That the same person could have made both "Atonement" and "Hanna" makes Joe Wright my new favorite director. The premise of this thriller is flawed and Cate Blanchett's villain has an otherworldly accent that sounds like she's imitating Faye Dunaway, but the cinematography, direction and editing are first-rate and the Chemical Brothers' score propels the film over any narrative humps. Saoirse Ronan plays Hanna, the genetically enhanced teenager who was raised near the Arctic Circle by Erik (Eric Bana) and trained to be a killing machine. She may speak several languages and know the contents of Wikipedia by heart but she's never had any social interaction. Still she transitions easily from snow and ice to concrete and steel when she ventures into the outside world, where she and her father are targeted by Erik's former CIA colleague, Marissa (Blanchett). Later revelations could make you wonder if you're rooting for the right side, but Hanna's just defending herself and it's not hard to make the CIA look bad. The Wright touch in the numerous action sequences keeps you from dwelling on moral questions while the "Fasten Seat Belts" light is on, which it is from first frame to last.

—Steve Warren

MIRAL (R)

★★★★☆

This film illustrates the difficulty of making a movie about a living person. It's compounded by having the subject (Rula Jebreal) write the screenplay based on her semi-autobiographical book and further by having her in a relationship with the director (Julian Schnabel) so he doesn't dare change her vision of herself. For having all that working against it, Miral isn't as bad as it might have been, perhaps because Jebreal's principal concern is a tribute to her mentor, Hind Hussein (Hiam Abbass). A title HIND fills the screen in the opening sequence, in 1948, when she turns her father's home into a boarding school for Palestinian war orphans. The title character, representing Jebreal, gets a MIRAL title after she's born in 1973, but two far lesser characters receive the same treatment, creating false expectations of their importance. Miral is sent to Hind's school at the age of five. When she's 14 (now played by Freida Pinto of Slumdog Millionaire) Hind sends her to a refugee camp as a teacher. Miral wants to be an activist but Hind warns her that will halt the Israelis' tolerance of the school. The personal stories weave through half a century of history in a fragmented fashion that's hard to follow, as if there will eventually be a director's cut of miniseries length. For what it's worth, Miral may be the best pro-Palestinian movie ever made and distributed by Jews.

—Steve Warren

THE GREATEST MOVIE EVER SOLD (PG-13)

★★★★☆

I have a healthy interest in documentary films, so I intended to scrutinize Morgan Spurlock's latest with as much objectivity as possible. But this film had me thinking and laughing from beginning to end, and any film that manages to teach me something and humor me while doing it is a winner in my book. When Spurlock directed Super Size Me, I took note of his willingness to put himself in "harms way" to bring to light an issue that affects all of humanity. In The

Greatest Movie Ever Sold, Spurlock stays true to his tactics by showing us how the film business, and indeed every industry, is driven by ad revenues, product placement, and marketing. From start to finish, he showed us how he signed on sponsors for his film with seemingly ridiculous bargaining deals between the production and corporations. Pretty soon, I began to realize the major role product placement has played in my own life and what implications it has for my future. After leaving the theater, all I could think about was my own personal brand and how my brand is being marketed to potential clients/buyers. Buyers? Did he mean to tell me that I'm being objectified on a daily basis? I'm pretty sure this was Spurlock's intention, which begs the question: Is Morgan Spurlock a brand and no longer just a regular guy who makes films? If he is, I'll buy into it!

—Kalena Smith

PROM (PG)

★★★★☆

An opening narration about the categories high school students fit into is your first clue that this film intends to be John Hughes: The Next Generation. Set during the three weeks before the senior prom at Brookside High, the main story concerns Nova (Aimee Teegarden, an actress of pleasantly human proportions, as opposed to Hollywood's usual stick figure role models), class president and prom organizer, who's been crushing on the wrong guy and ignoring the right one, "bad boy" Jesse Richter (Thomas McDonell). There are at least five subplots involving other couples, triangles, quadrangles - and one solo guy who can't catch a break. For a novelty the school's big sport is lacrosse, although we never see it played. An actor who's a ringer for the young Ralph Macchio is another '80s throwback, but if you don't go back that far think of Prom as a sanitized 10 Things I Hate about You. There's not an original bone in its body but it's capably done and the target audience may not have seen it before.

—Steve Warren

SCREAM 4 (R)

★★★★☆

Bloody, fun, and a bit ridiculous. While it's not all that scary, *Scream 4* is very entertaining. The 4th installment of the popular horror serious opens wonderfully with misdirection after misdirection that sets the tone for the whole film. The town of Woodsboro is abuzz with the return of Sydney Prescott (Neve Campbell), who is back home to promote her best selling novel. We run into old favorites, Dewey (David Arquette) and Gale (Courtney Cox), who are now seemingly up-happily married. We meet a new crop of bold, yet defenseless teenage victims whose knowledge of horror movies barely compares to their ability to effortlessly get chopped up like sushi. And of course, what would the party be like without our favorite ghost faced killer there to terrorize them all? Sydney sets out to protect her teenage cousin from falling victim to the killer, Dewey fumbles around town being Dewey, and Gale attempts to rejuvenate her career by finding the killer herself. Meanwhile a bunch of teenagers get chopped up. The great lengths at which Craven goes to misdirect the audience into horror are admirable and occasionally unsuspecting. At times, they are ridiculous. And maybe that is the point. Self-aware ridiculousness. The *Scream* films are already self aware in a sense, and horror movies have come a long way since the original. So what is more? A horror film that is not only self-aware of the specifics of its genre, but is also self-aware of the ridiculous limits it

can stretch itself within that genre. And *Scream 4* does that. The times that it gets ridiculous, you love that is and wouldn't have it any other way. As entertaining as *Scream 4* is, it does raise a question. What is next for the horror genre? *Scream 4* is bloody, and it may make you jump, but it does not instill horror. Craven does it as good as any, but misdirection in horror has come to be expected and causes more of a brief shock than it does fear. Perhaps a transition back to the type of horror that people actually think could happen to them? All in all *Scream 4* does what a film is supposed to do. It's entertains its audience.

—Bret Love

THERE BE DRAGONS (PG-13)

★★★★☆

If you wonder why a new film by Roland Joffé (*The Killing Fields*, *The Mission*) doesn't have the backing of a major studio, you only have to see *There Be Dragons* for your question to be answered. It's not because it deals with questions of faith and everyone in Hollywood is a heathen; it's because the movie is a beautifully photographed, lifeless bore, and it doesn't help that the main Spanish characters are played by an Englishman, an American and a Scot. Add Joffé to the list of filmmakers trying to work out their own daddy issues on screen. Manolo Torres (Wes Bentley) and Josemaría Escrivá (Charlie Cox) grow up together in Spain. They're both sons of manufacturers but Manolo's more distant father is more successful and targeted by unions at the time of the Spanish Civil War. Manolo joins the Fascist army as a spy and infiltrates the leftist forces. He falls in love with a Hungarian woman (Olga Kurylenko) but she's drawn to their leader (Rodrigo Santoro). Meanwhile Josemaría has become a priest and founded Opus Dei,

the controversial lay priesthood demon in *The Da Vinci Code* and elsewhere. wrestles daily with God the Father. The st is told in flashbacks by a dying Manolo his estranged son Robert (Dougray Sc a journalist writing a book about Escr Since the theme of the movie is forgive I'll forgive it...but I won't recommend it.

—Steve Wa

YOUR HIGHNESS (R)

★★★★☆

Crudeness in the pursuit of comedy is vice, but when the first two intended lau in "Your Highness" come from witless use four-letter words it's a clear indication i this movie is aimed at adolescent boys low intelligence. If you think James Fra was bad hosting the Oscars, check him as perfect Prince Fabious, whose your brother Thadeous (Danny McBride) is medieval equivalent of a slacker. They t up to rescue Fabious' fiancée Bellado (Zoey Deschanel) from evil wizard Lec (Justin Theroux), aided by Isabel (Nat Portman), whose kick-ass behavior is n un-maidenly for the period. If you th Portman was dramatic in "Black Swan," until you see her here. Apparently no one her they were making a comedy and when saw nothing funny in the script she jum to the obvious conclusion. Having see laughs with "Pineapple Express," which funny until it tried to be an action mo director David Gordon Green lays on weed jokes and proves the law of diminsh returns. "Your Highness" might have m me giggle when I was as old as 14, but th was a socially retarded kid.

—Steve Wa

VIDIOTS

UPCOMING DVD RELEASES AND REVIEWS

BY B. LOVE, JOHN B. MOORE & MATT GOLDBERG

NO ONE KNOWS ABOUT PERSIAN CATS – Filmed on the sly across Iran, the director and cast of this indie documentary draw from their experiences on how to get fake permits/passports and how to hold concerts and rehearsals without getting arrested. The film (which won the Special Jury Prize at Cannes) centers on Ashkan and Negar, musicians just released from prison for playing music, who are trying to put together a band and leave for London. The two connect with a part-time hustler and music lover, who takes them across Tehran scouting for potential band members and helping them obtain forged paperwork to leave the country. Definitely worth a look.

HISTORY LESSON PART 1: PUNK ROCK IN LOS ANGELES IN 1984 – The Meat Puppets, the Minutemen, Redd Kross and Twisted Roots all played a defining role in the mid-'80s L.A. punk scene. Though documented rather crudely, *History Lesson Part 1* is a great primer on the aforementioned bands, and offers a perfect snapshot of the scene in LA before it was chased shadows by the glam metal movement. The documentary includes interviews with Minutemen cofounder Mike Watt, brothers Chris and Curt Kirkwood (Meat Puppets), brothers Jeff and Steve MacDonald (Redd Kross), and Paul and Hellin Roessler (Twisted Roots). Sure, the songs could be a little more polished and the footage a little cleaner, but that just wouldn't be punk rock, would it?

HARRY POTTER & THE DEATHLY HALLOWS, PART 1 – Harry (Daniel Radcliffe) must find and destroy five "horcruxes" – which hold pieces of the soul of

Voldemort (Ralph Fiennes) – in order to defeat him and save the world. This task is made more difficult by the fact that the wizarding world is falling to Voldemort's army of Death Eaters, who are hunting Harry and infiltrating the government. Ron (Rupert Grint) and Hermione (Emma Watson) join Harry in his dangerous mission, but their search puts the trio's friendship to the test. Despite minor missteps, Part 1 is a triumph, eschewing the safety the series has brought so far in both story and tone.

INTO THE COLD – This amazing documentary follows nature photographer/eco-advocate Sebastian Copeland as he and partner Keith Heger embark upon a 2-month, 400+ mile trip on foot to the North Pole. An official selection of the 2011 Environmental Film Festival, the film offers rare and breathtaking views of the unforgiving Arctic wasteland, where temperatures frequently drop below -50°F, pressure ridges of ice crash together, and the ever-shifting "Arctic treadmill" sometimes causes them to lose a mile while they sleep. Along the way, Copeland consistently reinforces the notion that he's taking this arduous journey to draw attention to the fact that the polar ice is disappearing at an alarming rate and, if global warming isn't reversed soon, may disappear.

BOB DYLAN REVEALED – With Bob Dylan turning 70 this month, now is an opportune time to check out this stellar doc spanning his 5-decade career. Featuring plenty of never-seen-before footage and pics, what really sets this doc apart is the interviews with those who were closest to Dylan in the early years. Members of his backing band, folk musician/tour-mate Ramblin' Jack Elliott, boxer Rubin "Hurricane" Carter (the subject of Dylan's song "Hurricane") and even the pastor that turned Dylan onto Christianity are all interviewed on *Revealed*. It's a great portrait for die-hard Dylan fans and newcomers alike.

