

[Reviews] film DVDs and books

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THE ORPHANAGE

Belen Ruenda, Fernando Cayo, Roger Princep
Director: Juan Antonio Bayona



The Orphanage (El Orfanato) closed the Spanish Film Festival this year and is now on general release. The film won eight Goyas (the Spanish equivalent of the Oscars) and was Spain's top-grossing film of 2007. There have been many significant Spanish films focusing on children that have been understood as commentaries on Spain's traumatic political past under Franco. See if you think this is one of them. *The Orphanage* is a gothic thriller about Laura (Belen Ruenda) who returns to the now abandoned orphanage she lived in as a child to start up her own home for children with disabilities. The house is haunted and Laura's young son, Simon (Roger Princep) develops a disturbing invisible friend and a dangerous game of hide and seek. Simon's involvement with the house's dark past ultimately leads Laura on a quest to discover its secrets.



MONGOL

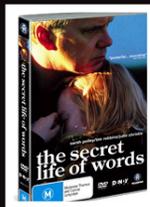
Tadanobu Asano, Honglei Sun, Khulan Chuluun
Director: Sergei Bodrov



We have come to associate Kazakhstan with a certain Borat Sagdiyev. *Mongol* may change that. It was Kazakhstan's official submission for the Academy Awards this year and was nominated for the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film. At the same time, this is also a very international film. *Mongol* is told in the Mongolian language, directed by an award-winning Russian director, stars a celebrated young Japanese actor and was shot in Chinese Inner Mongolia and Kazakhstan. The film recounts the early life of Genghis Khan who was a slave before going on to conquer half the world including Russia in 1206. This is a stunning historical epic with lots of blood and some harrowing battle scenes. This is the first instalment of a proposed trilogy of films about the life of Genghis Khan developed from leading historical accounts. The performances are strong, particularly from Asano Tadanobu, and Bodrov's direction is typically assured.

By Megan Carriy

THE SECRET LIFE OF WORDS



Sarah Polley,
Tim Robbins



Hanna migrates from Bosnia to the UK where she takes on a job looking after a burns victim on an oil rig. At first she refuses to reveal personal details but as time goes on, she opens up to him about her horrifying ordeal. Great performance from Polley.

RUNNY GRANNY RUN

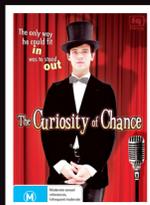


Doco by Marlo Poras



A wonderfully inspiring and entertaining film about Doris Haddock (Granny D) who at the age of 90 walked across America to protest against big money in elections, before running for the US senate in 2004 at the age of 94. Very highly recommended. Available from grannyd.com.

THE CURIOSITY OF CHANCE



Tad Hildenbrink,
Twyla Tiller



This colourful high-school comedy, set in the genderbending '80s has a queer twist. It sees openly gay Chance Marquis team up with a flamboyant drag queen and a sexy jock to fight the bullies who've been bugging him. Chance learns the only way to fit in is to stand out.

WENDY O WILLIAMS & THE PLASMATICS

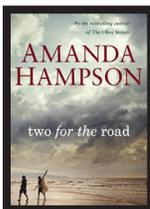


Wendy O Williams,
The Plasmatics



Fascinating 'rockumentary' of Wendy O Williams who made the Sex Pistols look mellow. Challenging gender stereotypes and authority got this punk/metal, risk-taking feminist into trouble, but still she kept pushing the envelope. Highly recommended. Available from amazon.com.

TWO FOR THE ROAD



Amanda Hampson



Cassie Munro returns from London to her home town of Bilkara after she learns her husband has cheated on her and her father has been badly beaten up by people working for a rival tow truck firm. As she takes on the task of rescuing her dad's business, she's forced to confront her guilty secret.

DADDY'S RULES



Rachel Sontag



With a mother on medication and a cruel father who forced her to look in a mirror and recite, 'I am worthless, I'm stupid' and other self-deprecating comments, Rachel Sontag's childhood was a difficult one. An enjoyable, if not riveting, memoir of one woman's journey to heal her life.

THE Q GUIDE TO BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER

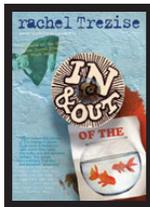


Gregory L Norris



This one is for the hardcore *Buffy* fans who can't get enough of the show about the kick-ass vampire slayer. Gregory L Norris takes us behind the scenes of the hit TV show where we find out all kinds of tidbits on *Buffy* and its spin-off *Angel*. Available from eevolution.com.au.

IN AND OUT OF THE GOLDFISH BOWL



Rachel Trezise



The first novel from this award-winning author from Wales sees Rebecca trying to grow up amid parental abuse and neglect. She drinks, takes drugs and has sex, but it's only when she discovers writing that her life starts to make sense.