

FEATURE

'Annie' so-so on the screen

NEW YORK (CNS) — The following are home videocassette (VHS format) reviews from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Office for Film and Broadcasting. Theatrical movies on video have a USCCB classification and Motion Picture Association of America rating and indicate the appropriate age group for the video audience.

'Annie'

Although John Huston's direction of the screen version of the popular stage musical is somewhat cynical and disappointing, it does preserve much of the exotic ambience of the comic strip about the little orphan (Aileen Quinn) and Daddy Warbucks (Albert Finney). With awkward dance numbers, some coarse dialogue and Carol Burnett's mean-spirited characterization, the film's appeal is somewhat limited beyond uncritical viewers. The USCCB classification is A-I — general patronage. The MPAA rating is PG — parental guidance suggested. (Columbia TriStar)

'King of the Jungle'

Fragmented drama set in Harlem about a mentally challenged young man (John Leguizamo) who, after witnessing the murder of his social activist mother (Julie Carmen), roams the streets looking for the killer, attempting to take justice into his own hands. Writer-director Seth Zvi Rosenfeld's film initially works well as a character study but succumbs to melodramatics. A live-in lesbian relationship, some bloody violence, fleeting drug use and much rough language and profanity. The USCCB classification is A-IV — adults, with reservations. The MPAA rating is R — restricted. (Warner Home Video)

'Slackers'

Dreadful college campus comedy about a geeky undergraduate (Jason Schwartzman) who blackmails three cheating students (Devon Sawa, Jason Segel, Michael C. Maronna) into setting him up with the popular girl (James King) he's obsessed with. Waffling between creepy and comedic, first-time director Dewey Nicks' sorry film regurgitates familiar gross-out humor and sexual jokes. Several vulgar sexual situations, some nudity, brief drug use, intermittent toilet humor, rough language and profanity. The USCCB classification is A-IV — adults, with reservations. The MPAA rating is R — restricted. (Columbia TriStar)

'Tell Me Something'

Gruesomely violent thriller set in Seoul about a police detective (Han Suk-gyu) investigating the mysterious appearance of black garbage bags filled with the various chopped remains of three men, all of whom were former boyfriends of a beautiful and enigmatic young woman (Shim Eun-Ha). Director Chang Youn-Hyun's well-crafted yet disturbing tale of obsession is overwhelmed by brutal, blood-drenched images and a sordid subplot. Subtitles. Excessive gory violence including dismembered body parts, implied incest, full frontal nudity and brief rough language. The USCCB classification is O — morally offensive. Not rated by the Motion Picture Association of America. (Kino)

Scooby-Doo, where are you? In movies!

By Anne Navarro
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — Zoinks! The Mystery Inc. gang reunites to solve the baffling events taking place at Spooky Island in the intermittently amusing comedy "Scooby-Doo" (Warner Bros.).

"Scooby-Doo" can be entertaining in a silly way, remaining true to its cartoon roots while poking fun at the characters' distinctive trademark features. The funniest moments come when the film acknowledges what Scooby-Doo fans may have been thinking all along about Fred's narcissism, Daphne's vanity and inability to defend herself, Velma's contempt for Fred and what is in those Scooby snacks. It has the hallmarks of a classic Scooby-Doo mystery: a haunted amusement park, a villain in disguise and, most importantly, a bunch of meddling kids.

However, parents may be dismayed at the film's unnecessary inclusion of cleavage-revealing outfits, rude humor and innuendoes that vaguely reference pot smoking and sexuality. These quite mild jokes will go over the heads of youngsters. However, this PG-rated film is aimed at a younger audience which doesn't need to be exposed to this material.

All the groovy crime-solving cohorts from the Hanna-Barbera animated TV series are well and accounted for. The leader is Fred (Freddie Prinze Jr.), who inevitably takes credit for all the work. The real brains behind the outfit is Velma (Linda Cardellini), who is usually eclipsed by her mystery-solving companions.

Redheaded fashion plate Daphne (Sarah Michelle Gellar) is the damsel in distress, inevitably whisked away by the bad guys. Rounding out the crew is gangly Shaggy (Matthew Lillard), Scooby's best buddy, whose constant junk-food cravings are matched by Great Dane Scooby's (voiced by Neil Fanning) insatiable hunger for Scooby snacks. Shaggy and



Warner Bros. Pictures/CNS

Matthew Lillard and a computer-animated Scooby star in the live-action comedy "Scooby-Doo." The movie, at times silly but amusing, is true to its cartoon roots.

Scooby are ready to run away from any and all danger while the rest of the team looks for clues.

The film's skimpy, sometimes confusing, story follows a formulaic path from setup to final discovery of who's behind the caper. Two years after the Mystery Inc. gang has gone their separate ways because of jealousies and resentments (which allows director Raja Gosnell to inject a bit of good-natured satire into the film by poking fun at each of the characters' vanity spots), the team is reunited at Spooky Island, a haunted house theme park and popular spring break spot for college coeds.

The resort's owner, Emile Mondavari-ous (Rowan Atkinson), claims that supernatural forces have been transforming the

upbeat coeds into sober, straight-laced students.

The scary scenes involve cartoon-like running and bumbling about without anyone really being hurt. The computer-generated effects are top-notch. Live action is seamlessly blended with animation as actors convincingly interact with the computer-generated Scooby.

Lillard stands out as the scrawny Shaggy. He brings Shaggy to life, as if he leapt off the animated page onto the screen.

Due to some scary sequences and puerile humor, and a few crass expressions and innuendoes, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

'Bourne Identity' is a solid action flick

By Anne Navarro
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — "The Bourne Identity" (Universal) is a well-crafted thriller that takes such timeworn elements as amnesia and clandestine CIA operations and whips them up into an engaging character study with a fast-paced espionage yarn to back it up.

Adapted from Robert Ludlum's 1980 novel, director Doug Liman provides suspense with ongoing chase scenes and chilling close calls that deflect attention from the film's predictable spots. It is a basic spy story that's been intelligently updated without switching story for gadgetry.

Matt Damon stars as Jason Bourne, an ambiguous character who is a CIA agent highly trained to be a killing machine.

The dramatic opening scene has Bourne's body fished out of the Mediterranean Sea by some Italian fishermen who treat the two bullet wounds in his back and discover a capsule encoded with a Swiss bank account embedded in his hip. Aside from his physical wounds, Bourne can't remember who he is or what he would be doing with a Swiss bank account. The only thing he has to go on are his instincts when the boat docks and he heads for Zurich.

The audience, however, is clued in quickly to his real identity. Back at CIA headquarters in Langley, Va., Ted Conklin (Chris Cooper), the CIA chief of a top-secret, cloak-and-dagger operation, is trying to do damage control for the operation Bourne botched. Bourne had been sent to kill a former African leader who had been blackmailing the agency. Conklin's orders are clear: he wants Bourne dead, pronto.

In the safe-deposit box in the Swiss bank, Bourne finds several passports, including

an American one identifying him as Jason Bourne, a sophisticated gun and loads of cash in varying currencies. Loading the money and passports into a red sack, Bourne heads for the American consulate, assuming it's his best bet. But word already has gotten out that he is a wanted man, and he is greeted by security goons, whom he narrowly escapes by paying a down-and-out, attractive German woman, Marie (Franka Potente), \$10,000 for a ride to Paris.

Bourne is baffled by his uncanny ability to fight off several men at once using highly effective fighting techniques. Once in "his" apartment in Paris (which doesn't trigger any memories), he also can't figure out why someone would burst through his window to try to kill him. As the film progresses, Bourne begins to discover who he is and what he does.

Tension builds inside him as well as in the movie. A CIA agent being hunted by his own kind creates an intriguing conflict for the audience: On whose side should the viewer be? As the film's hero and central figure, it would be natural to sympathize with Bourne. But in reality he is no different from the assassins coming after him, even if he's temporarily forgotten that.

Inevitably, a romance stirs up between Bourne and Marie, but it remains a sidebar with the action front and center. All the elements of an action thriller are firmly in place, from a daredevil car chase to bone-crushing fight sequences. These scenes can become quite intense, especially since the sound effects are so prominent. The impact of a punch is piercing as is the sharp noise made when a furious kick makes contact with bones. Viewers sensitive to this type of violence may be put off by its ferocity.

With Bourne a bigger-than-life charac-

ter and Marie his sidekick, the other characters remain in the background. Brian Cox plays Conklin's supervisor under pressure from Congress to get to the bottom of things. But Cox just paces and looks anxious. Clive Owen, as another CIA operative, spends the majority of his screen time silent, looking ultra-serious from behind a gun. He speaks only a few lines in his final scene, which offer Bourne additional clues to his own identity. And Julia Stiles' character, a computer hacker who keeps track of the French police's movements in a lonely safe house, does little more than frown and complain.

Damon, however, distinguishes himself by allowing Bourne's conflicts and complexities to boil just below the surface. He still looks like the boy next door, but this boy can take down two beefy German police officers without any trouble. Damon is also convincing as he slips in and out of other languages, particularly French and German. Potente works well with Damon; she is restrained and believable as she embarks on this wild cross-country escape, clearly signaling that she has nothing more in her life.

With locations from Paris to Italy to Prague (which doubled as Zurich), director Liman shows off his chosen spots to their best advantage. The energetic camera work keeps pace with the narrative's quick twists and turns, and for the most part the action doesn't let up.

Due to recurring harsh violence and some profanity with an instance of rough language, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops classification is A-IV — adults, with reservations. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.