

DVD Round Up, Jan. 27, 2009: ‘Moonlight,’ ‘College,’ ‘City of Ember’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on January 27, 2009 - 10:19am

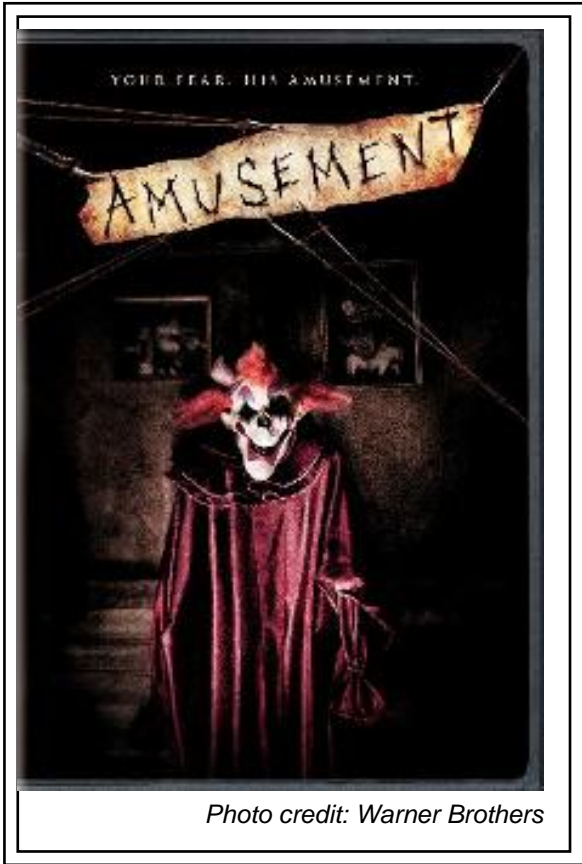
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CHICAGO – We apologize to the people behind these four titles but the star power is a little dim in this edition of HollywoodChicago.com’s DVD Round Up. When a canceled vampire series is arguably the biggest release in a four-pack of titles, it’s a weird edition of the Round Up. Prepare yourself.

“[Amusement](#) [3],” “[City of Ember](#) [6],” “[College](#) [7],” and “[Moonlight](#) [12]”. A straight-to-DVD horror movie, a TV series cancelled after one year, and two movies that *barely* opened in theaters and made a COMBINED \$13 million in domestic gross. These titles are for specialized audiences but that’s why we love the Round Up. Enjoy.

“Amusement,” “City of Ember,” and “Moonlight: The Complete Series” were released on January 20th, 2009. “College” was released on January 27th, 2009.

“Amusement”



“Amusement” is one of those movies that you pass at the video store and wonder, “What the heck is that?” The creepy clown on the cover is intriguing. Horror fans will probably be interested in the title alone and we’re *all* looking for that rare straight-to-DVD gem that outshines the junk that this genre usually produces in the multiplex every year. More than any genre, horror fans love to be able to say they saw the cult hit first. Will “Amusement” be the cult hit in your group of friends?

Clearly designed to be a rental, as it has been released with both widescreen and full-frame formats on one disc and with zero special features, “Amusement” delivers under 90 minutes of product for your hard-earned dollar. The film is about three women forced to deal with a seemingly innocent incident from their school days when it comes back to seek vengeance. Sounding loosely like a “Saw” movie, “Amusement” features a stone-walled chamber of prison cells and mechanisms of doom in which the three women and other victims are forced to fight to survive. It’s all for someone’s amusement. Is it yours? The film was written by Jake Wade Wall (the remakes of “The Hitcher” and “When a Stranger Calls”) and directed by John Simpson (“Freeze Frame”).

“City of Ember”



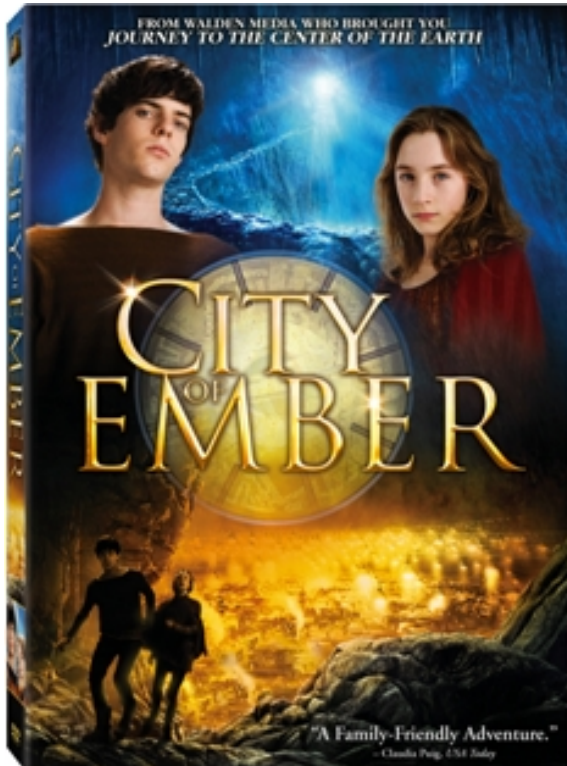


Photo credit: Fox

Gil Kenan ran face first into the sophomore slump with the massively underperforming “City of Ember,” a well-intentioned but disastrously designed slice of family entertainment. Reportedly budgeted around \$55 million, the special effects extravaganza limped into theaters, opening in 11th place in its first weekend of release and grossing less than \$17 million worldwide. With Tim Robbins, Bill Murray, and Saoirse Ronan (“Atonement”) and the backing of Walden Media (“Journey to the Center of the Earth,” “Bridge to Terabithia”), everyone thought “City of Ember” would make more of a dent. It probably will find a curious family audience on the home market.

That audience will find a mostly disappointing film with a few decent performances and interesting ideas and a DVD shockingly light on features. In fact, Fox was so frustrated with the results of “City of Ember” that they didn’t even release it on Blu-Ray. Ouch. A \$55 million not in HD? That’s rare. The film is based on the best-selling novel by Jeanne Duprau. For centuries, the residents of the underground City of Ember have flourished in an amazing world of glittering lights and quiet contentment. But when the City’s massive power generator begins to fail, the street lamps start to fade - along with the hopes and dreams of the townspeople. Now it’s up to two courageous teenagers to follow a trail of clues left by the ancient Builders and find a way out of Ember before their world is plunged into darkness forever.

“College”

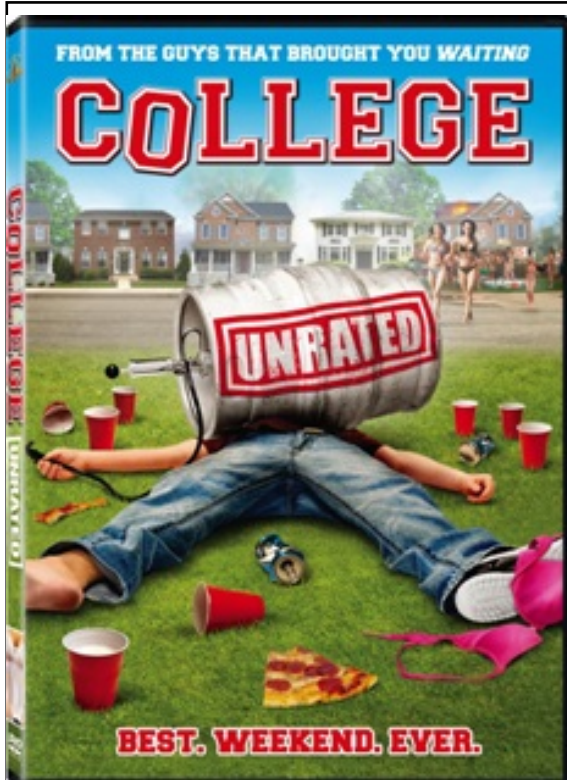


Photo credit: Fox

Another month, another teen sex comedy. As long as kids are still trying to get drunk and get laid, someone will make movies about it. The latest is Fox’s “College,” another film with a few unknowns that barely registered when it was released in theaters late last summer but will probably find an audience on DVD. Any movie with a big keg and the word “Unrated” on the cover draws an audience at the video store. The DVD for “College” includes both widescreen and full screen versions with a 5.1 Dolby track and a gag reel. Oooh, a gag reel.

Drake Bell, Kevin Covais, and Andrew Caldwell star in “College” as three high school friends who visit a local college campus as prospective freshmen looking for the best weekend of their lives in the world of kegs, sorority girls, and all-night parties. They go to the rowdiest fraternity on campus and are recruited as pledges by the frat’s resident jock (Nick Zano). The boys deal with endless humiliation just to get close to drunk girls on the frat party scene. They are made to look like idiots. You’re supposed to laugh. Good luck.

“Moonlight: The Complete Series”



Photo credit: Warner Brothers

It's a little weird that "Moonlight" couldn't be saved by the CBS juggernaut but "The Ghost Whisperer" is still on the air. When the show debuted, the pilot episode landed first among total viewers and adults 18-49 for the night. Of course, the ratings for this "Angel" rip-off dropped a bit, but you would think that the young demo of the audience and an average rating of 7.57 million viewers a week might keep it on the air. According to Wikipedia, "Moonlight" might have been a casualty of the writer's strike. In early December, CBS was claiming a second season would come. When production shut down in the middle of that month, only four more episodes would run in the '07-'08 season and the show was cancelled in May. How ironic that a poorly written show got the axe because of the writer's strike.

"Moonlight" features some groan-inducing dialogue, but will surely have an audience interested in it just because of the vampire craze currently gripping the nation. Alex O'Loughlin plays Mick St. John, an L.A. private eye who also happens to be a blood-sucker. He has a friend played by Veronica Mars' Jason Dohring and his memories of the alluring ex-wife (Shannyn Sossamon) that turned him into a creature of the night. He has a modern relationship with a woman (Sophia Myles) who he feels drawn to protect and maybe fall in love with. Mick knows a vampire-human romance is eternally dangerous. The 2008 People's Choice Award for Favorite New TV Drama comes home in a widescreen presentation and, shockingly, without a single special feature.



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