

Annie (Scarlett Johansson) and Mrs. X (Laura Linney) in *The Nanny Diaries*



Lifestyles of the Rich and Thoughtless

Diaries doesn't add up to much

THE NANNY DIARIES: Written and directed by Shari Springer Belman and Robert Pulcini. Based on the novel by Emma McLaughlin and Nicola Kraus. Cinematography, Terry Stacey. Music, Mark Suozzo. Starring Scarlett Johansson, Laura Linney, Paul Giamatti, Nicholas Reese Art, Alicia Keys, Chris Evans and Donna Murphy. The Weinstein Company, 2007. PG-13. 105 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

Miles separate the less-affluent suburbs of New Jersey and the posh Upper East Side of Manhattan — physical miles, financial miles, cultural miles. *The Nanny Diaries*, based on the bestselling 2002 novel by Emma McLaughlin and Nicola Kraus, is certainly aware of this, but the flighty film never makes as much of it as you might expect. Like a slightly more class-conscious version of *The Devil Wears Prada*, *The Nanny Diaries* takes a young girl out of her comfort zone and into a world of thoughtless privilege in which the lass is terribly put-upon by a cold-hearted employer who might not be quite as bad as she seems.

But where *Prada's* devil, Meryl Streep, might have had unusual and interesting reasons for being so steely (the sexism of the workplace, the way it takes a different kind of effort for women to remain socially relevant and in power than it does for men), *Nanny's* Mrs. X (Laura Linney) is a more familiar character: a trophy wife, caught up in fussing, fretting, plotting and bossing in desperate hope of regaining the attention of her cheating husband (Paul Giamatti, being as nasty as he wants to be). As Mrs. X imperiously makes unreasonable demands of Annie the nanny (Scarlett Johansson) and ignores her child, a glimmer of humanity shows through in Linney's eyes — but you'll still want to sit her down and give her a good talking-to. Which, eventually, is what beleaguered Annie does — though she does it through the lens of a "nanny cam" in a teddy bear's eye. Whether you can stomach what comes next without at least an

eye-roll or two depends, I suppose, on your ability to believe that when faced with an angry ex-employee rattling off your worst failings, you'd be inclined to take their every word as gospel as opposed to, say, at least taking a moment to get defensive.

As for Annie, her story comes wrapped in a hit-and-miss conceit involving the anthropology minor's "case study" of the Upper East Side residents. From time to time, the anthropological angle almost works, but it's tangled up with misplaced flights of fancy and an apparent unwillingness on the part of the filmmakers to have much to say about anything. The film's initial awareness of class grows more and more awkward as it becomes clear that Annie, who narrates her case study in voiceover, is actually making a study of herself, her reactions to this strange world, her growing certainty about what she wants to be. That's all well and good, but it runs contrary to the anthropological introduction and waters down Annie's character. It also allows the movie to brush over some of the more interesting things a more observant Annie might have noticed — like that she herself, with her ability to quit and go back to school, has considerably more privilege than the other nannies, or that even she seems inclined to blame Mrs. X for being cruel and heartless without looking at the effect Mr. X's thoughtlessness has on his wife and son.

Johansson does a decent job as Annie, somehow muting her beauty and her gravelly voice until she almost seems like any other coltish, uncertain 21-year-old girl. But what she's doing in this suburban fairy tale (complete with Prince Charming) is anyone's guess. *The Nanny Diaries* takes an easy, bland path to Annie's unsurprising self-discovery, peeking at but quickly dropping some complex ideas along the way. It's harmless, but depthless as well — an almost satire lacking either bark or bite.

EW

OPENING OR RETURNING:

Balls of Fury: Y'know, there are a couple of scenes in this movie's trailer that involve Christopher Walken and are actually kind of funny. The rest of it is a bunch of ball jokes. Plot? Super secret underground ... ping pong tournament! PG13. 90 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Death Sentence: Kevin Bacon stars as a man whose life is changed when he witnesses something horrible and then decides he'll go to any length to protect his family. Directed by James Wan, the creator of *Saw*. R. 110 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

1408: This adaptation of a Steven King short story, which stars John Cusack as a man alone in a horribly haunted hotel room, is getting surprisingly good reviews; *Entertainment Weekly* said it's "reassuringly old-school gothic." With Samuel L. Jackson, directed by Mikael Håfström. PG13. 94 min. Movies 12.

Frank Zappa: Zappa and the Mothers live in Stockholm in 1973 screens with a 1970 German documentary featuring footage from the Fillmore. Not rated. Bijou LateNite.

Halloween: Rob Zombie directs this remake of John Carpenter's 1978 film, but opts to take a peek into the past that created Michael Myers. R. 109 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

I Know Who Killed Me: Oh, Lindsay, Lindsay, Lindsay. Tear yourself away from La Lohan's tabloid escapades with this thriller about a young woman who, after escaping from a serial killer, insists that things aren't what they appear. R. 105 min. Movies 12.

License to Wed: Robin Williams stars in this silly little summer fluff of a romantic comedy about love and marriage, the best thing about which I can find to say is that the theater is probably air conditioned. With Mandy Moore and John Krasinski. PG13. 90 min. Movies 12.

Mr. Sean's Cartoon Club: Crazy, weird and old cartoons featuring Betty Boop, Felix, Superman and more. Noon-1:30 pm Sept. 2. Bijou. \$4.

Talk to Me: The usually reliable Don Cheadle makes a slight misstep with Kasi Lemmons' new film, the story of Detroit DJ Ralph "Petey" Greene and the radio station programming manager (Chiwetel Ejiofor) who thinks he can become a national name. Set against the social upheaval of the 1960s, the film can't quite find its footing or tone. R. 118 min. Bijou. See review this issue.

Films open the Friday following EW publication date unless otherwise noted. See archived reviews at www.eugeneweekly.com

CONTINUING:

Becoming Jane: Anne Hathaway (*The Devil Wears Prada*) stars in this heavily imagined look at Jane Austen's early years — a love affair, an inspiration. It's sweet and the cast is a delight, but the movie can't quite connect Jane's two passions: her writing and her interest in dashing Tom Lefroy (a wonderful Jame McAvoy). PG13. 120 min. VRC Stadium 15. ★★☆☆☆ (8/16)

Bourne Ultimatum, The: "I remember everything," says Matt Damon's Jason Bourne in this film's action-packed trailer. Director Paul Greengrass and the major players (Joan Allen, Julia Stiles) return to the series' satisfying third installment, which finds Bourne hunting down his past in stunning locations. PG13. 111 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15. ★★☆☆☆ (8/9)

Death at a Funeral: Frank Oz directs a cast of mostly Brits (and one *Serenity* pilot) in the farcical story of a family facing love, secrets and lies at the funeral of a loved one. Starring Matthew Macfadyen, Rupert Graves, Keely Hawes, Peter Dinklage and Alan Tudyk. R. 90 min. Bijou.

Evan Almighty: Steve Carrell takes the starring role in this sequel to *Bruce Almighty*. Now, God (Morgan Freeman) wants Evan (Carrell), a former newscaster turned Congressman, to build an ark. Boy, that's gonna involve a lot of critters. PG. 90 min. Movies 12.

Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer: Reed Richards, Ben Grimm and Sue and Johnny Storm face off with the shiny guy who rides an equally shiny surfboard — and leaves destruction in his wake. PG13. 92 min. Movies 12.

Hairspray: Based on John Waters' 1988 cult classic, *Hairspray* is about teenagers on a local Baltimore dance show — especially one short, plump, cheery girl who loves to dance. With John Travolta in drag. PG. 117 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15. ★★☆☆☆ (7/26)

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix: The Ministry of Magic is in denial about the return of Lord Voldemort, Hogwarts get a nasty new teacher and Harry ... Harry's in one kind of trouble or another throughout the mostly successful and only slightly disappointing fifth HP film. It's not quite *Prisoner of Azkaban*, but it's getting there. PG13. 138 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15. ★★☆☆☆ (7/19)

I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry: Adam Sandler and Kevin James star as a couple of firefighters who, for various bureaucratic insurance reasons, claim to be domestic partners — all fun and games until the news gets hold of the story. I'm sure all related issues are dealt with thoughtfully. Um, right. PG13. 110 min. Cinemark.

Invasion, The: In their first pairing of the year (they'll appear again together in *The Golden Compass*), Daniel Craig and Nicole Kidman star in this remake of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* as the only people who can stop the creepy, emotion-stealing virus. Directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel, with a few pointers (according to *Entertainment Weekly*) from the Wachowski brothers. PG13. 93 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Knocked Up: Judd Apatow follows *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* with a sweet yet still raunchy comedy about the unwanted pregnancy that occurs when up-and-coming journalist Alison (Katherine Heigl of *Grey's Anatomy*) has a one-night stand with slacker Ben (Seth Rogen). R. 129 min. Movies 12. ★★☆☆☆ (6/7)

Live Free or Die Hard: Justin Long — yes, he of the Mac ads — joins Bruce Willis for this fourth chapter in the *Die Hard* franchise, in which a baddie attacks the U.S.'s infrastructure over the 4th of July weekend. PG13. 130 min. Movies 12.

Mr. Bean's Holiday: Good old Mr. Bean (Rowan Atkinson)! You either adore him, or you find him not at all funny. Here, a French vacation turns out to be full of mishaps and mistaken identity. Is Mr. Bean a kidnapper, a filmmaker or neither? G. 87 minutes. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Nanny Diaries, The: Jersey girl Annie (Scarlett Johansson) is at odds with her mother as to what she should do with her life when an unexpected opportunity arises: She'll become a nanny for a wealthy family on NYC's Upper East Side. Working for the very rich turns out not to be quite the escape from real life that she expected. With Laura Linney and Paul Giamatti. PG13. 106 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15. See review this issue.

Ocean's 13: The formula doesn't change much for the third *Ocean's* outing: suave stars have a grand old time concocting heists, executing plans and looking good in suits. But the charm is wearing thin. With George Clooney, Brad Pitt, Matt Damon and a bunch of other folks. PG13. 122 min. Movies 12. ★★☆☆☆ (6/14)

Once: John Carney's movie takes "lyrical" to a different level with the gentle, engrossing story of two musicians who find an unexpected connection on the streets of Dublin. Threaded with lovely songs composed by the movie's leads, Glen Hansard and Marketa Irglova, *Once* is an exceptional accomplishment of intimate filmmaking. R. 85 min. Bijou. ★★☆☆☆ (7/26)

Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End: Captain Jack and crew are back for the third — and what one might hope is the final — *Pirates* movie (which has something to do with saving Jack from the Land of the Dead and facing off with the Dutch East India Company). A warning to soda buyers: It's two hours and 48 minutes long. PG13. Movies 12.

Ratatouille: The latest animated film from Pixar is directed by Brad Bird (whose *The Iron Giant* is too often overlooked) and concerns a big-dreaming rat who wants to be a chef. When he makes a deal with a garbage boy, the culinary world of Paris gets far more than it ever imagined. G. 110 min. VRC Stadium 15. ★★☆☆☆ (7/12)

Resurrecting the Champ: Samuel L. Jackson and Josh Hartnett star in this tale of a one-time boxing champion and the young sportswriter who finds him living on the street. But is it really the champ whose life needs changing? PG13. 113 min. VRC Stadium 15.

Rush Hour 3: Did I forget this one when I made my list of this summer's needless sequels? Did I mention I blame director Brett Ratner for the murky mess that was last year's *X-Men 3*? Does it matter? Jackie Chan, Chris Tucker, questionable jokes and action humor: you know what you're getting. PG13. 90 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Shrek the Third: When Shrek's father-in-law kicks the bucket, the ogre finds himself the reluctant king of Far Far Away. His only hope of getting out of the job? His wife's slacker cousin. PG. 92 min. Movies 12.

Simpsons Movie, The: Well, our Springfield didn't get the premiere, but in the film maybe we'll still see some hints that we are the *real* Simpsons Springfield? Still no idea what it's about, but does it matter? PG13. 87 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Stardust: Matthew Vaughn (*Layer Cake*) takes a firm and steady hand to the many plot threads of this adaptation of Neil Gaiman's novel. The result is wicked and charming, sweet and sly, with a stellar cast (Claire Danes, Michelle Pfeiffer, Robert De Niro) and a superb sense of humor. Oh, the story? A young man promises a young lady he'll fetch her a falling star — but he's not the only one searching out the young woman who fell from the sky. PG13. 128 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15. ★★☆☆☆ (8/9)

Superbad: Judd Apatow and Seth Rogen both have fingers in this pie, as co-producer and co-writer, respectively. It's the story of two high school friends, Evan (Michael Cera, *Arrested Development*) and Seth (Jonah Hill), who are trying — well, in classic teen movie fashion, they're trying really hard to get laid. They're about to go off to college; what do you expect? Here's hoping the film is as funny and charming as the trailer. R. 114 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15. ★★☆☆☆ (8/23)

Surf's Up: The young, talented, possibly misguided Shia LaBeouf voices Cody Maverick, a teenage penguin surfer entering his first pro competition. A documentary crew's filming his every move, which might — sort of — explain that "based on a true story" joke in the preview. PG. 85 min. Movies 12.

Transformers: It wouldn't be summer without a Michael Bay film, right? Hot on the heels of those other '80s toys the Ninja Turtles, the Transformers arrive, bigger and flashier than ever. Earth, it seems, will be the battleground for the war between the Autobots and the Decepticons. With Shia LaBeouf (*Holes*) and Megan Fox. PG13. 144 min. Cinemark.

War: Jason Statham plays an FBI agent fixated on getting his revenge against the infamous assassin (Jet Li) whom he suspects murdered his partner and family. But the story is more complicated than that, and involves a bloody battle between Asian crime gangs. R. 91 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.