

MediaMix

A Quick Take on New Releases

	TITLE	BASIC STORY	SAMPLE GRAB	WHAT YOU'LL LOVE	WHAT YOU WON'T	GRADE
BOOK	The Freedom Manifesto By Tom Hodgkinson Harper Perennial \$13.95	The subtitle says it all: "How to Free Yourself From Anxiety, Fear, Mortgages, Money, Guilt, Debt, Government, Boredom, Supermarkets, Bills, Melancholy, Pain, Depression, Work, and Waste."	"It is wise to reject utterly as a piece of bourgeois propaganda the oppressive aphorism 'jack of all trades and master of none.' No: you can do lots of things." — <i>From the chapter "Reject Career and All Its Empty Promises"</i>	Though the British journalist's anarchistic rants on how to regain control over our lives may seem like an overzealous call to arms, much of his advice is surprisingly valid.	A downside of many books of this ilk: The message sometimes gets buried by a relentless dose of anti-society mumbo jumbo. — Reviewed by Alexis Burling	B+
BOOK	Hand of Evil By J.A. Jance Touchstone \$25.95	The prolific suspense writer delivers her latest intertwining murder mystery, set in the lonely wildlife preserves and suburbs of Phoenix.	"Apprehensive about the coming confrontation, a combination of fear and rage swept through her. Ali's heart sped up. Her hands began to cramp. A few minutes later, the Explorer was back." — <i>The protagonist regrets her decision to entrap a violent predator</i>	Au courant plot devices — in the form of writerly blog posts and text-message-obsessed teens — give the story a freshness it might otherwise have lacked.	It takes ages for the story's various thin threads to come together, and readers who aren't already fans of Jance's recurring characters will feel as though they're getting only half the story. — Sara Cardace	D+
CD	Growing Pains Mary J. Blige Geffen \$13.98	Another album of anguished R&B? Thankfully, the often ornery Blige counters her habitually blustery mix with moments of genuine pop sunshine.	"Feelin' great because the light's on me / Celebrating the things that everyone told me / Would never happen but God has put his hands on me / And ain't a man alive could ever take it from me" — <i>Blige tells another tale of triumph in "Work That"</i>	"Just Fine" is a jumpy jolt of soul that'll lift your spirits — and probably sell a few iPods, too. (It was featured in a recent Apple television ad.)	Blige still lets her crankiness get the best of her. Check out the grating monologues of "Roses." Or better yet, don't. — Chris Richards	B-
CD	Alone: The Home Recordings of Rivers Cuomo Rivers Cuomo Geffen \$13.98	From a frantic Ice Cube cover to a rough draft of "Buddy Holly," this collection of demos from Weezer's resident nebbish/frontman feels highly confessional.	"Blast off! Up to the stars we go / And leave behind everything we used to know" — <i>"Blast Off!," a song from Cuomo's unfinished rock musical about astronauts (i.e., rock stars) surviving the isolation of space (i.e., fame)</i>	A few uber-emotive songs are accompanied by liner notes describing the messy breakups that inspired them. Gawk on!	Unfortunately, the tunes aren't as juicy as this disc's voyeuristic thrills. Bigger hooks would have made them actual Weezer songs, right? — C.R.	B+
COMIC	Fearless No. 1 By Mark Sable, David Roth and PJ Holden Image \$2.99	Hamstrung by crippling phobias, Adam Rygert battles lawbreakers in high-tech armor that administers a cocktail of anti-anxiety medication.	"One day, this secret will have to be yours alone." — <i>Adam's biochemical benefactor ponders his own mortality</i>	The core concept cleverly pokes at the fragile membrane that separates adrenaline-addicted vigilantism and crusading altruism.	The creators struggle to get past the most basic trappings of a superhero story, making the most intriguing ideas feel undernourished. — Evan Narcisse	C+
DVD	Once Rated R 20th Century Fox \$29.99	John Carney's little indie musical — the biggest surprise of the year — portrays an Irish street musician (the Frames' Glen Hansard), a recent immigrant (Markéta Irglová) and the songs they write together.	"Take this sinking boat and point it home / We've still got time / Raise your hopeful voice you have a choice / You've made it now" — <i>The main characters fall into a duet, "Falling Slowly"</i>	Hansard and Irglová give lovely, understated performances that open up beautifully with each tune. The extras include commentaries on the songs and the film.	You might have a little trouble seeing the screen, what with all the tears in your eyes. — Greg Zinman	A
DVD	The Simpsons Movie Rated PG-13 20th Century Fox \$29.99	The famous animated family makes it to the big screen, and Homer (voiced by Dan Castellaneta) sets off an environmental catastrophe that results in the doming of Springfield.	"I've spent my entire life doing nothing but collecting comic books, and now there's only time to say . . . LIFE WELL SPENT!" — <i>Comic Book Guy (Hank Azaria) prepares to meet his maker</i>	The animators take advantage of the widescreen format to load the frame with sight gags, as when Bart skateboards in the nude. The extras include a number of commentaries and deleted scenes.	The movie is only about as funny as a standard "Simpsons" episode, which means it's a missed opportunity. And where is Apu? — G.Z.	B-
GAME	Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles Wii Rated Mature Capcom \$49.99	It's the CliffsNotes version of the entire Resident Evil saga, presented as a first-person shooting gallery, for which you need impeccably good aim.	The game gets a more visceral feel when you use the Wii Zapper controller (sold separately), which you hold pistol-style.	Zombies and monsters pop up in hordes by the second; you certainly can't fault the pacing.	The Zapper also doubles as your knife, and slashing and stabbing with your "gun" feels ridiculous. — Christopher Healy	C+

MARY J. BLIGE BY JASON REDMOND — REUTERS