

## HOTTEST DVDs FOR SPRING

Daniel Halloway, film critic for Metro newspapers, discussed the most anticipated DVD releases for spring on *The Early Show* on Friday, April 17, 2009:

(the following information is from [Amzaon.com](http://Amazon.com)):

### "Mall Cop"

Attention, shoppers: Former King of Queens star Kevin James makes the successful leap to big screen leading man with this Die Hard meets Home Alone slapstick comedy produced by Adam Sandler. In his most empathetic role since his endearing scene-stealing turn in Hitch, James (who also co-wrote the script) stars as biggest loser Paul Blart, a 10-year veteran of the West Orange, New Jersey shopping mall, where he gets no respect from taunting kids who pelt him with ball pit orbs, or a senior who brazenly violates Blart's strictly enforced speed limit in his motorized wheelchair. The film is slow to get rolling as it lays on the pathos as thick as the peanut butter the lonely, overweight and socially awkward Blart spreads on his pies ("Food fills the cracks in he heart," he tells his mother). But then, a band of cycling, skateboarding thieves presumably recruited from the X games take over the mall on so-called Black Friday, the busiest holiday season shopping day. Blart is "untrained, unarmed, and presents a huge target," but, like a plus-size John McClane on a Segway, he is the wild card determined to stop them and rescue his unrequited crush (Jayma Mays) who has been taken hostage. James carries the film on his massive shoulders (the supporting cast is strictly discount outlet, with comedian Adam Ferrara as a sympathetic cop and Bobby Cannavale from Will & Grace and Third Watch as a bullying SWAT team leader the most familiar faces). He proves himself to be an impressively agile physical comedian and he's game for every body slam, pratfall, and tumble. Rated PG for mild violence, a few profanities, and a couple of gross-out gags, Paul Blart: Mall Cop is less crude than previous Sandler productions, more The Benchwarmers than Deuce Bigalow.

### "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button"

The technical dazzle of The Curious Case of Benjamin Button is a truly astonishing thing to behold: this story of a man who ages backwards requires Brad Pitt to begin life as a tiny elderly man, then blossom into middle age, and finally, wisely, become young. How director David Fincher--with makeup artists, special-effects wizards, and body doubles--achieves this is one of the main sources of fascination in the early reels of the movie. The premise is loosely borrowed from an F. Scott Fitzgerald story (and bears an even stronger resemblance to Andrew Sean Greer's novel The Confessions of Max Tivoli), with young/old Benjamin growing up in New Orleans, meeting the girl of his dreams (Cate Blanchett), and sharing a few blissful years with her until their different aging agendas send them in opposite directions. The love story takes over the second half of the picture, as Eric Roth's script begins to resemble his work on Forrest Gump. This is too bad, because Benjamin's early life is a wonderfully picaresque journey, especially a set of midnight liaisons with a Russian lady (Tilda Swinton) in an atmospheric hotel. Fincher observes all this with an entomologist's eye, cool and exacting, which keeps the material from getting all gooey. Still, the Hurricane Katrina framing story feels put-on, and the movie lets Benjamin slide offscreen during its later stages--curious indeed.--

### "The Wrestler": Mickey O'Rourke's "comeback film" -- he was nominated for best actor Oscar for it

The mystery of Mickey Rourke's career comes to a grungy apotheosis in The Wrestler the much-battered actor's triumphant return to the top rope. He plays Randy "The Ram" Robinson, a heavily scarred and medicated battler who's twenty years past his best moment in the ring. But he still schleps to every second-rate fight card he can get to, stringing out the paychecks (more likely a fistful of cash) and nursing what's left of his pride. His attempts to adjust to a more normal kind of life form the most absorbing sections in the movie, whether it's flirting with a stripper

(Marisa Tomei is in good form, in every sense), establishing a bond with his understandably angry daughter (Evan Rachel Wood), or working behind the deli counter at a nondescript megastore. Rourke is commanding in the role; he obviously spent hours in the gym and the tanning salon, and his ease with the semi-documentary style adopted by director Darren Aronofsky allows him to naturalistically interact with the colorful real-life wrestlers who crowd the movie's ultra-believable locations. All of which helps distract from the film's overall adherence to ancient formula. You might find yourself waiting for the scene where the risk-taking Aronofsky (Requiem for a Dream) pulls the switch and reveals his true motives for pursuing this otherwise sentimental story, but there's no switch. The Wrestler is an old-fashioned hoke machine, given grit by an actor who doesn't seem to be so much performing the role of ravaged survivor as embodying it.

### **Hotel for Dogs**

Everyone deserves a loving family, but foster kids Andi (Emma Roberts) and Bruce (Jake T. Austin) have been placed with a flaky couple who care more for their aspiring rock careers than their foster children. Even though Andi and Bruce's mischievous tendencies repeatedly get them into trouble, the siblings are essentially good kids who care deeply for one another and their secretly adopted dog Friday. After a close call with the local pound, the kids end up searching for Friday in an abandoned old hotel where they find several stray dogs seeking shelter. The kids' compassion for the homeless dogs compels them to begin caring for the strays and they soon join forces with three other local kids to take in strays from across the city. Bruce is a clever inventor whose innovative gadgets ensure top-notch care and constant entertainment for all the dogs (as well as a multitude of laughs from the audience). Unfortunately, Bruce's and Andi's devotion to the dogs eventually causes them to pass up what may be their last chance for a better foster home. When the police storm the hotel and take all the dogs to the pound, the kids make a daring attempt to rescue the dogs that will likely land them in separate group homes. Can social worker Bernie (Don Cheadle) somehow convince the authorities, and perhaps a loving family, that the children were just doing what was right? Hotel for Dogs is a funny family film based on Lois Duncan's book of the same name and is appropriate for most ages 5 and older in spite of its PG rating for mild thematic elements, language, and some crude humor.