



Shared Darkness

A Communal Life in Film and DVD, Examined

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4/13/2010**Final 24 Series***This entry was posted on 5/1/2010 7:00 AM and is filed under [DVD](#) [Reviews](#).*

**We live in tawdry times**, when news of Starlet X's latest underwear malfunction makes its way to the splashy top "folds" of the Huffington Post or CNN's web site. In that context, perhaps it's no surprise, the DVD bow of *Final 24*, a Canadian-mounted project billed as a compelling hybrid drama/documentary series that unlocks "the hidden secrets, psychological flaws and events that resulted in the tragic deaths of global icons." **Slick, well-produced and more than a bit morbid**, these DVDs — both individually and in aggregate — offer up a tabloid-style re-visitation of the last single day in the lives of its subjects, complemented by talking head interviews that range from dubious merit to surprisingly candid and revelatory.

One of the series' debut entries focuses on [Nicole Brown Simpson](#), the ex-wife of murdering hack-golfer football legend [O.J. Simpson](#), so right off the bat one has to wonder a bit about the whole "global icon" thing. Still, the rest of its debut slate hews a bit more closely to its stated focus, including peeks at the untimely deaths of [Gianni Versace](#), [Janis Joplin](#) and [Keith Moon](#), an eclectic trio to be sure. (Entries on Sid Vicious, John Belushi, [Anna Nicole Smith](#) and David Koresh loom on the horizon for June, meanwhile, and River Phoenix, Marvin Gaye, Hunter S. Thompson, John Kennedy and Tupac Shakur are scheduled to get the same treatment later this fall.)

While Danny Wallace's narration — a constant on all the titles — too often strikes the chords of doomsday melodrama, and it's **stupendously weird and unsettling** to mix real pictures of the deceased with murky reenactments and still photographs of the same actor-participants, *Final 24* is undeniably well put together, however exploitative, sleazy or yawningly rehashing one may find its areas of inquiry. Producers Katherine Buck and John Vandervelde have done a great job of corraling interviewees that extend beyond the range of the usual suspects.

The Nicole Brown Simpson title is a perfect illustration of this. Once you get past the cursory descriptive inanities ("She was a diamonds-and-pearls gal, but very spiritual"), Tanya Brown (i.e., the Brown sister that wasn't in the media every day for two or three years in the wake of [the Brown-Goldman murders](#)) has **some genuinely affecting revelations** about her sister's relationship with Simpson. So, too, does David LeBon, a close friend from Nicole's teenage years, who recounts the then 30-year-old Simpson — and at the time married, with two kids and a third on the way — hitting on the then 18-year-old restaurant hostess, and renting his new mistress an apartment because he was jealous of Nicole's (platonic) relationship with LeBon, a roommate. In other words, there's stuff here that's new or interesting, even if it's not always flattering for the subjects (a high school teacher recounts Nicole's stated career objective to "marry someone famous"). Occasionally, the chats tip into downright uncomfortable territory; Dr. Susan Forward, billed as Nicole's therapist, talks generally about the **"Swiss cheese conscience" of domestic batterers**, but also delves rather specifically into Brown and Simpson's history, which feels a bit unnerving. And yet it's that level of real and personal detail that gives these titles their pop. One can't quite completely look away... even if on some level they would like to.

Housed in regular plastic, white Amaray cases featuring cover photos of the reenactment participants, with a unifying stamp of "Final 24: A Dramatization" stuck in the lower righthand corner, all the *Final 24* titles come on region-free discs, and run right around 48 minutes apiece. There are **no accompanying bonus materials**, so an audience member must bring to each title their own level of pre-gauged interest and historical contextualization. **B+ (Movies) D+ (Discs)**








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