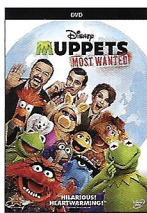
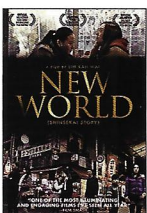


globe-trotting crime caper featuring Jim Henson's fuzzy fellows, beginning with the Muppets on Hollywood Boulevard celebrating their reunion. Across the globe, however, nefarious forces are at work. An evil Kermit lookalike named Constantine (voiced by Matt Vogel) has concocted a diabolical scheme with Dominic Badguy (Ricky Gervais), a talent manager whose surname is pronounced "Bad-jee." Dominic convinces the Muppets to go on an international tour in which—coincidentally—every European theater they're booked into just happens to be near a bank or museum that can be robbed. When the Muppets arrive in Berlin, Kermit (Steve Whitmire) is kidnapped and shipped to Siberia, where his Gulag is commanded by musical comedy-obsessed Nadya (Tina Fey). Disguised as Kermit, Constantine woos Miss Piggy, fostering her fantasy of a lavish wedding at the Tower of London. On their trail are bumbling Interpol agent Jean-Pierre Napoleon (Ty Burrell) and Sam Eagle. Will the real Kermit be able to save the day? Co-scripted by Nicholas Stoller and director James Bobin, *Muppets Most Wanted* is reminiscent of 1981's *The Great Muppet Caper*, as the felt-covered friends frolic with numerous celebrities, including Lady Gaga, Celine Dion, Sean Combs, and Salma Hayek. Most memorably, Ray Liotta, Danny Trejo, and Jemaine Clement sing, while Christoph Waltz waltzes. While not "quite as good" as the last Muppets movie, this is a swift-paced, smart, and fun spoof. Recommended. (S. Granger)



### New World ★1/2

MVD, 93 min., in Japanese & Putonghua w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$17.95



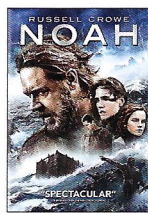
A dramedy revolving around a Chinese subculture of students, business people, and gangsters operating in Japan, *New World* is a frivolous tale of a spoiled party girl from Beijing named Coco (Shi Ke), who wants to spend Christmas in Osaka but ends up at a crummy hostel in a crime-ridden area of the city. Unhappy about the arrangements, Coco pouts up a storm but then becomes embroiled in a tangled web of intrigue involving a missing mother, a young man begging for a loan from a dismissive gangster, a latchkey kid, several hapless barmaids, and a dangerous-looking fixer. Writer-director Lim Kah-Wai employs some imagination and humor here, but the script's many coincidences ultimately simply beggar belief. Not recommended. (T. Keogh)

### Noah ★★★

Paramount, 137 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99, July 29

The biblical story of the flood—the original

apocalypse tale—is creatively re-interpreted by filmmaker Darren Aronofsky in this timely, resonant film with an ecological doomsday message. Beginning with a revised line from Genesis: "In the beginning, there was nothing," the movie introduces Noah (Russell Crowe) as a righteous vegetarian, a man who is also the recipient of "visions" from the Creator. After conferring with his grandfather, Methuselah (Anthony Hopkins), Noah works with his wife (Jennifer Connelly), sons (Douglas Booth, Logan Lerman, Leo McHugh Carroll), and an orphaned girl (Emma Watson) to build an Ark—assisted



by the Watchers, or Fallen Angels (voiced by Nick Nolte, Frank Langella, and Mark Margolis). Noah's nemesis is pagan Tubal-cain (Ray Winstone), who murdered Noah's father. As the rains pour down for 40 days and 40 nights, drowning the rest of humanity, deeply-conflicted Noah wrestles with inner demons while trying to respect and obey the commands of the Creator (the word "God" is never mentioned). Aronofsky, co-scripting with Ari Handel, boldly breaks away from old-fashioned biblical epic storytelling to create this unconventional spectacle that is rich in character and subplots. Combining time-lapse photography with montage editing, the cinematography adroitly blends live-action with awesome computer-generated imagery,

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Rise Up Black Man is an exploration into Christian values and the challenges of life faced by 20-somethings in contemporary America.

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