

A DANGEROUS PLACE (2012) ♂

D: Gregory J. Corrado. Kristen Dalton, Sal Rendino, Kevin Interdonato, Hans Otto Schundler, Carol Bayruns. 124 mins. (Screen Media Films) 1/13

After 9/11, real-life Americans had to adjust to "the new normal"—anthrax scares and the Enron corporate scandal. Writer-director Corrado exploits these elements to create a thriller set in northern New Jersey in 2002. 9/11 widow and returning pharmaceutical executive Claire Scully (Dalton) has to cope with a traumatized son (Schundler), an edgy mother-in-law (Bayruns) and her own greedy colleagues. When a mail-borne tuberculosis outbreak occurs and the company just *happens* to have the antidote, the viewer smells a rat as Claire connects the dots. Co-producer Dalton gives a decent performance as Claire, but pantsuits and cleavage? Great, if you are buying this DVD as a present for Bill and Hillary Clinton. The major players are actors that you barely remember from crime dramas such as *CSI: NY* and *The Sopranos*. Newcomer Schundler's grim presence as the silent son Ryan may mean a career spent playing creepy kids in horror films, hopefully not written or directed by Corrado. On the surface, this is an assembly-line thriller; you have heard the same background music in every such film for the past few decades. Unfortunately, Corrado appears to lose control in the middle and ends this production in sentimental hokum. He does have a talent for location shooting—even Newark looks appealing. This means that this release belongs in Mayor Cory Booker's home, not in yours.

—Ronald Charles Epstein

THE DISCO EXORCIST (2011) ♂♂1/2

D: Richard Griffin. Michael Reed, Sarah Nicklin, Ruth Sullivan, Alexander Lewis, Rich Tretheway, Brandon Luis Aponte. 80 mins. (MVD Visual) 6/12

If all the films recently produced as "lost" cult films from the '70s and '80s had actually been made then and remained lost, we might be better off. Trying to recapture a certain time period and style when producing a period piece is one thing. Trying to then make it play as if it were actually made in that period is something else. *The Disco Exorcist* tries like Hell, literally! '70s swinger and disco king Rex Romanski (Reed) romances Rita Marie (Sullivan), a voodoo priestess. When he meets porn starlet Amoreena Jones (Nicklin) and tosses Rita aside, Rex learns that Hell might not have as much fury as a woman scorned, but that Rita has the powers of Hell at her command. When Rex stands in for Amoreena's usual on-camera porn stud, Rita sends demons to possess her and two other starlets, killing the director and camera crew. Only her love for Rex prevents

Amoreena from killing him. Rex goes to his brother, a priest, for help, but Father Romanski (Lewis) thinks Rex is mocking him. When disco janitor Angel (Tretheway) relates how he took part in a Brazilian exorcism that went horribly wrong, Rex is conflicted—just not conflicted enough to pass up his best friend's regularly scheduled orgy! With Amoreena in attendance, Rita decides to conjure a few flesh-eating she-devils for a bacchanal of death at the disco. When sex leads to carnage, it's up to Rex, Angel, and deejay Manuel (Aponte) to end Rita Marie's curse. Like *Grindhouse* (VS #65) and its other imitators, *The Disco Exorcist* has been given the aged, poorly-preserved look of genuine '70s sleazefests. And, in truth, it's no worse than quite a few such films of that period. It replicates the bad acting, cheesy music and awful haircuts of the day. The copious nudity is also present, which was a surprise—that's one area where the bigger-budget retro flicks always remain lacking. The gore effects are about on par with the period, too. Gags are lifted from *Carrie*, *The Stepford Wives*, *Scanners* and even *Saturday Night Fever*, but there aren't any really obvious steals from *The Exorcist*. Extras include director's commentary, deleted scene, teasers, and trailers. While it has some laughs and a few memorable scenes, *The Disco Exorcist* just didn't make me boogie oogie oogie 'til I just can't boogie no more.

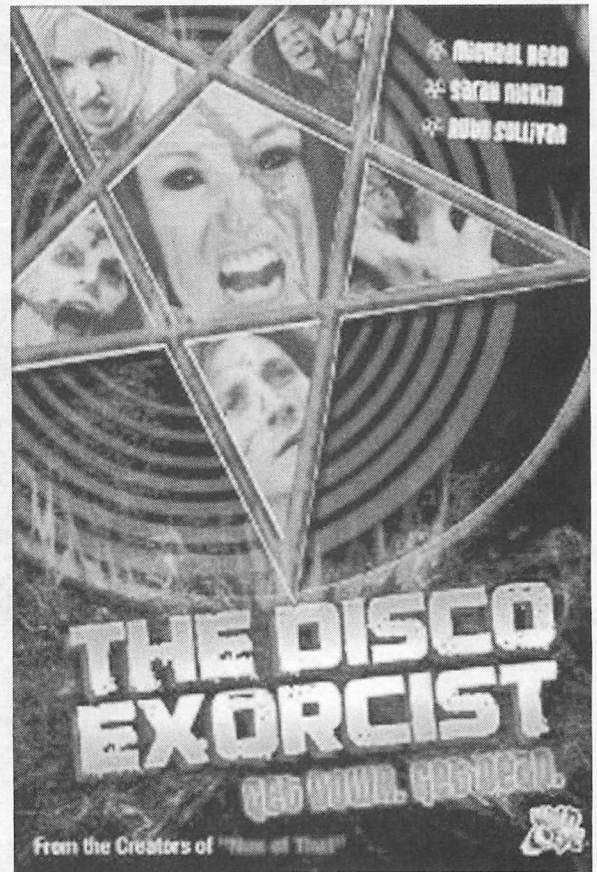
—Dan Cziraky

DUST UP (2012) ♂♂

D: Ward Roberts. Amber Benson, Jeremiah Birkett, Aaron Gaffey, Al Burke, Devin Barry, Travis Betz. 92 mins. (Breaking Glass Pictures) 11/12

Dust Up is a modern western that quickly overstays its welcome. The story concerns Jack (Gaffey), an ex-vigilante who comes to the aid of Ella (Benson) and her druggie boyfriend. The boyfriend owes money to a cannibalistic drug lord named Buzz (Birkett) and his snake-faced, tattooed and forked-tongued henchman Mr. Lizard (Burke). Gaffey is fine as Jack, sort of a David Carradine-like stranger who can kick ass but prefers to find a more peaceful means to an end, though he's usually forced to take hands-on action. Unfortunately, the story gets tedious. We have a gag about a creaking floor in Ella's house that just goes on way too long, while the general camp acting of the rest of the players, not to mention some gross moments, left a bad taste in my mouth. In the end, it's just *The Wild Bunch* Lite and really offers nothing original. I'm giving *Dust Up* till high noon to get out of town.

—Dwight Kemper



GHOUL (2012) ♂♂1/2

D: Gregory M. Wilson. Nolan Gould, Trevor Harker, Jacob Bila, Andrea Frankle, Mattie Liptak, Crystal Rivers. 82 mins. (Image Entertainment) 1/13

No, this isn't the classic, once-lost Boris Karloff film (available on DVD) or the 1970s Peter Cushing film (which needs a DVD release). The new *Ghoul* was produced by the Chiller Channel, the NBC-Universal-owned cable outlet which completely abandoned the vast Universal horror library in favor of direct-to-DVD drek. With that in mind, I was a little hesitant about watching *Ghoul*. The film is somewhat better than the reputation of its channel. Set in 1984, it stars *Modern Family*'s Gould as a comic-book fan who, together with his best buds, slowly discovers a terrifying secret in the local cemetery. There are mysterious disappearances and an occasional murder, but *Ghoul* has a surprisingly low body count for a film of this type. Gore, while present, is minimal. Shot in a desolate area of Louisiana, *Ghoul* has plenty of atmosphere, coupled with decent acting. There are two very disturbing subplots, one involving spousal abuse, the other touching upon child sexual molestation. The wife-beating is connected to the secret in the graveyard. The child sex abuse comes out of left field, is sickening, and is never resolved. While atmospheric, *Ghoul* isn't particularly scary. The story never really takes off, and the sex-abuse subplot leaves a bad aftertaste. Image's disc includes a making-of documentary.

—David-Elijah Nahmod