



Hubert Selby, Jr. — It'll Be Better Tomorrow • MVD

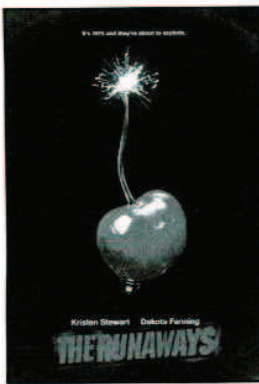
Hubert (or Cubby, as he preferred to be called) Selby Jr. has long been one of my favorite writers, and this tell-all documentary is long overdue. Assembling an impressive array of fans and industry insiders (including Henry Rollins, Lou Reed, Nick Tosches and narrator Robert Downey, Jr.), *It'll Be Better Tomorrow* is a well-made overview of an underappreciated author.

From his turbulent early days as an angry young man (health issues and drug abuse plagued Selby for years), to his senior status and eventual role as a college professor, *It'll Be Better Tomorrow* offers a varied portrait. Interviews with the cast and crew of Selby's most popular film adaptations (*Last Exit To Brooklyn* and *Requiem For A Dream*) are especially insightful, with Ellen Burstyn's tearful admiration of Selby hitting home the strongest.

Several of the talking head interviews seem to have been assembled from various sources, so the consistency of the footage varies greatly. Rollins' material, for example, was taken from a tribute to Selby after his death, with Hank dimly lit behind a podium, and an interview with *'Permanent Midnight'* author Nick Tosches looks as if it were recorded on a hi-eight camera by a college student.

Still, all technical gripes aside, *It'll Be Better Tomorrow* is a fitting tribute to Selby, and the interview footage of his insightful thoughts is worth its weight in gold. Never one to think highly of himself, it's ironic to think that Cubby would scratch his head as to why anyone would want to watch *It'll Be Better Tomorrow*...which is exactly why you should.

JT Habersaat



The Runaways • Sony

After the crap-fest that the recent *Germes* movie turned out to be (the 'produced by MTV' tag should have been a clue), I had my doubts that *The Runaways* would deliver more than a cliché-ridden, made-for-tv plotline peppered with a enough profanity to push it into theaters. Fortunately, this is one punk rock biopic that, much like the film's namesake, defies the odds.

Based on vocalist Cherie Currie's tell-all book *'Neon Angel'*, *The Runaways* does a fairly accurate job of portraying the band's formation and individual back stories. Several key scenes surrounding Joan Jett are right on the money (she's told me as much), including a combative battle over *'On Top of Old Smokey'* with her first guitar teacher.

Michael Shannon is pitch-perfect as the glam-ed out egomaniac Kim Fowley - record producer, hooch hound and Runaways-assembler. His scenes far surpass the usual 'sleazy manager' typecast, instead calling to life a character that would have been right at home in the cluttered-yet-still-great *'Velvet Goldmine'*.

Much of the film's success can, in fact, be attributed to the casting; *'Twilight'* phenom Kristen Stewart nails it as Joan Jett, alternating



between leather-clad she-panther and emotionally-twisted leader of the group, while Dakota Fanning (yes, that one) has never made jail bait more believable than with her portrait of Currie. Hell, even the chick playing Lita Ford looks like freaking Lita Ford, so hats off to whoever was in charge of sitting through the audition tapes.

The film is shot well, taking stylized approaches that work perfectly because the producers don't rely on them to carry the entire film (Stewart and Fanning's tripped-out, Stooges' soundtracked roller rink makeout session is hot stuff), and the plot keeps up a quick enough pace that the film never drags. All in all, *The Runaways* does a snarlingly solid job of portraying a band ahead of their time, at their peak, and barely 16. Get some.

JT Habersaat



White Stripes • Under Great White Northern Lights • Reprise

Shot during the dynamic duo's 2007 tour behind *'Icky Thump'*, *'Under Great White Northern Lights'* takes a classic, Bob Dylan-ish approach to the concert film. Documenting Meg and Jack White's traversing of Canada via plane, range rover and, in some cases, foot, the producer's use of stark

black and white footage gives the whole affair a vintage feel that works perfectly.

"Having never done a tour of Canada, Meg and I thought it was high time to go whole hog...from the ocean to the permafrost," says Jack White in an early scene. "We wanted to play out of the way towns that don't usually get shows... the shows are better, it's better for the people, it's a better experience, it's way more unique, something interesting is going to happen...hopefully."

Thus, the band is shown rolling into town, rocking the locals and then packing up again. The live shows themselves are riotous; how in the hell they can make so much awesome noise as a duo is beyond me, but they pull it off with seeming ease. The Stripes make 'surprise' mini show appearances in every city as well, ranging from a town square to a bowling alley, sometimes playing to people who have no idea who they are.

These scenes, combined with the intimate behind-the-show moments (the pair walking across the frozen tundra while their school days tribute "We Are Going To Be Friends" plays is a particularly great capture) push *'Under Great White Northern Lights'* beyond the scope of a typical rock n-roll biopic. Essential viewing for fans of the White Stripes, and heartily recommended even if you're from the Yukon and have never heard of them.

JT Habersaat