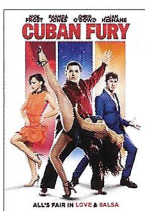


## Cuban Fury ★★★½

Entertainment One, 98 min., R, DVD: \$24.98, Blu-ray: \$29.98, July 29



Filmmaker James Griffiths' *Cuban Fury* stars Nick Frost as Bruce, a chubby corporate milquetoast who revisits his childhood interest in salsa dancing with the aim of attracting the interest of his pretty boss, Julia (Rashida Jones). But Julia has also caught the eye of leering office lothario Drew (Chris O'Dowd), which leads Bruce to seek out his erstwhile dancing coach, Ron (Ian McShane), for some emergency help in getting back into shape. *Cuban Fury* suffers in comparison to outstanding dance comedies such as the Japanese charmer *Shall We Dance?* and Australian *Strictly Ballroom*, partially because of the bland lead characterizations, which don't give Frost and Jones much to work with. And while McShane is delightfully irascible, O'Dowd's Drew is more creepy than amusing—and the culminating face-off between Bruce and Drew (meant to be the movie's comic highlight) is merely peculiar, since Frost is never convincing as a master dancer. The music shines—with lots of Tito Puente numbers—but it's not enough to rescue a film that is in every sense simply routine. Optional. (F. Swietek)

## Devil's Knot ★★★½

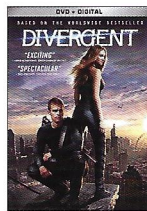
Image, 114 min., not rated, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$34.98



The notorious case of the West Memphis Three—Arkansas teenagers charged with killing three young boys in 1993, supposedly as part of satanic rituals—has been the subject of multiple documentaries, most notably the HBO-aired *Paradise Lost* trilogy. Filmmaker Atom Egoyan's docu-drama *Devil's Knot* focuses on the initial trials that resulted in the youths' convictions (and only sketches later events—including the men's eventual release from prison—in a text coda). Although the film does evoke a sense of loss—especially during a haunting sequence in which the dead boys' bodies are lifted from a creek and tenderly placed on the bank—the focus here is on defense investigator Ronald Lax (Colin Firth) and victim's mother Pam Hobbs (Reese Witherspoon), which effectively shunts the three accused teens into the background. While the major dramatic message—that the police and prosecutors created a case virtually out of whole cloth—is certainly convincing, this stately, somber, earnest film doesn't differ much from a good cable-TV movie, despite the starry cast. Coming from such a talented filmmaker, this feels disappointingly prosaic, and it lacks the power of the documentaries. Optional. (F. Swietek)

## Divergent ★★★

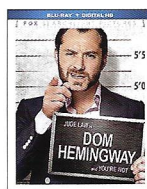
Lionsgate, 139 min., PG-13, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$39.99, Aug. 5



In a futuristic, dystopian world, 16-year-olds are divided into five factions, based on tests that determine their dominant personality trait. There's Dauntless for the brave, Abnegation for the selfless, Amity for the peaceful, Candor for the honest, and Erudite for the intelligent. Those who are not born into or choose any of these groups are abandoned to survive on their own. In post-war Chicago, Beatrice "Tris" Prior (Shailene Woodley), daughter of Abnegation parents (Tony Goldwyn, Ashley Judd), doesn't fit into just one category: she's a Divergent, a fact she must keep secret since the government is determined to eliminate Divergents, who are perceived as threats to the organized social order. Although Tris's twin brother (Ansel Elgort) joins the Erudites, Tris opts for Dauntless. Befriended by Christina (Zoë Kravitz) and mercilessly taunted by Peter (Miles Teller), Tris works with initiate instructor Four (Theo James), who admires her grit. That trait will come in handy as Tris faces her most formidable adversary, Jeanine Matthews (Kate Winslet), the ambitious, power-hungry Erudites leader. Based on the first novel in Veronica Roth's YA trilogy and directed by Neil Burger, *Divergent* is so burdened down by the necessary exposition to set up a franchise that, despite some betrayals and surprises, a sense of excitement and urgency just doesn't kick in until it's too late. Optional. (S. Granger)

## Dom Hemingway ★★★

Fox, 94 min., R, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$27.99, July 22

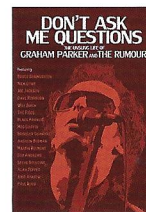


In this insufferable British black comedy/drama, Jude Law stars as the titular hot-tempered, self-destructive London safecracker who gets into trouble as soon as he's released from a 12-year stint in prison. Because he refused to rat on his Russian boss, Dom expects a generous reward. After relishing three days of debauchery with his meditative mate (Richard E. Grant), the pair take the train to the south of France to pay a visit to the countryside villa belonging to Mr. Fontaine (Demián Bichir), who gives Dom 750,000 pounds in cash. Predictably, disaster strikes—in the form of a nighttime Rolls Royce car accident and an exotic femme fatale (Romanian model Madalina Diana Ghenea)—launching this crime-caper tale that is interwoven with scenes chronicling Dom's attempts to establish a relationship with his estranged, struggling singer daughter (Emilia Clarke, unrecognizable from her role as Daenerys Targaryen in *Game of Thrones*). Writer-director Richard Shepard is clearly aiming for a redemption saga, but

this is certainly not as compelling as other gangland dramas, such as *Sexy Beast* or *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*. Still, normally handsome Law does gain weight, grease and comb back his hair, sport a mutton chop beard, and spew crude, vulgar profanities in a Cockney accent—and obviously enjoys impersonating this abrasively loquacious, lowlife lout. Optional. (S. Granger)

## Don't Ask Me Questions: The Unsung Life of Graham Parker and the Rumour ★★★½

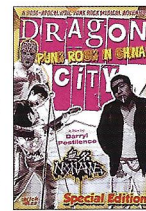
Virgil, 95 min., not rated, DVD: \$19.99



Long a cult favorite, Graham Parker has enjoyed a career resurgence with a new record and a role in Judd Apatow's *This Is 40*. A reunion here with his former band, The Rumour, provides opportunities for reflection. Parker grew up in Surrey, which he recalls fondly, although educators steered him towards factory work, which put him off. He credits pirate radio for turning him on to rock 'n' roll. Parker's manager, Dave Robinson, remembers that label offers rolled in quickly once the musician started to get airplay. Parker predicted that his first album would be a hit, but sales never kept pace with critical acclaim. Parker attracted high-profile fans like Bruce Springsteen, who praises his songwriting, and Nick Lowe, who cites Parker's genuine "soul" in an era filled with phonies. Unfortunately, the pub rock crowd found him too aggressive and the punk crowd thought he was too traditional. In 1980, Parker fired The Rumour, but continued to record and tour, both solo and with other outfits, such as The Figs. His former band mates continued to play music, except for bass player Andrew Bodnar, who became a librarian, but he returned for the recording of 2012's *Three Chords Good* (drummer Steve Goulding and keyboard player Bob Andrews also flew in from the U.S.). Aside from a few words from Parker's daughter, however, there is little here about the man's personal life, which may be by design, but still leaves the film feeling incomplete. A strong optional purchase. (K. Fennessy)

## Dragon City ★★★

MVD, 75 min., not rated, DVD: \$12.95



One would not expect the so-called "first Chinese punk rock movie" to be a technically superior product with polished acting and a professional script, but the overall primitivism of *Dragon City* is so extreme that it conjures up bad videotaped late-night cable access shows and embarrassing high school film class productions. Ostensibly, this is a post-apocalyptic, dystopian punk-rock tale



about the not-so-adventurous adventures of a Chinese punk band called No Name (sounding like some sort of infernal morphing of Motorhead and Green Day), who must save themselves from cannibals stalking the Earth. The band just happens to befriend an annoying American hippie—a '60s-throwback whose character is obviously modeled on Dennis Hopper in *Apocalypse Now*—who owns a recording studio/performance space, and he invites No Name to perform for the last few remaining non-cannibals in the land. The bulk of this throwaway movie consists of No Name showcasing their merely competent Western-punk rip-off songs in a live setting. Although it's heartening to see this sort of feisty DIY spirit coming out of China, *Dragon City's* only true redeeming quality is its merciful brevity. Not a necessary purchase. (M. Sandlin)

### Everyday ★★

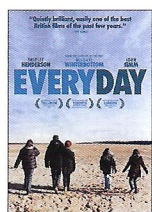
MPI, 90 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.98

British director Michael Winterbottom opted to shoot *Everyday*—centered on a Scottish family coping with the absence of an incarcerated father—during two-week periods over a five-year stretch. Unfortunately, the experimental back story is the only genuinely interesting aspect of this otherwise mundane drama. Ian (John Simm) is serving time for a drug charge (the specifics are unclear), leaving his wife, Karen (Shirley Henderson), with the tough task of raising their four children (all played by real-life siblings). In order to keep the family intact, Karen is forced to work a series of menial jobs. Occasional prison visits illustrate how Ian's relationship changes with his wife and children, and when Ian is allowed to make a trip home (late in his sentence), he witnesses the permanent disruption created by his absence. The film's slow pacing and low-key approach lend it a sense of documentary-style realism, but the heavy Scottish accents are often indecipherable and the acting is too restrained to make any genuine emotional impact. While *Everyday's* heart may be in the right place, many viewers will need to muster a lot of patience before reaching the mild payoff. Optional. (P. Hall)

### Frankie & Alice ★★

Lionsgate, 101 min., R, DVD: \$26.98, Aug. 12

Academy Award-winner Halle Berry stars in this all-too-familiar melodrama about a troubled woman with multiple personalities. What makes this tale unique is that one of her personas is a bigoted, white, Southern female. In 1973, bright, articulate Frankie Murdoch (Berry) works as a go-go dancer in a seedy Los Angeles strip club, explaining to

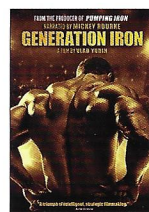


a newbie that she survives by "distancing" herself from what she does. Frankie's erratic behavior baffles not only her devoted mother (Phylicia Rashad) and resentful sister (Chandra Wilson) but also her boss, who sums Frankie up saying: "Good moves, great tits, but pure psycho." On more than one occasion, Frankie cannot remember where she is or how she got there. Winding up in an ER, she meets Dr. Joseph Oswald (Stellan Skarsgård), a researcher/teacher who is able to perceive her different personas: confused, defensive Frankie; the brilliant but terrified youngster, dubbed "Genius," who protects Frankie; and "Alice," an imperious Southern belle who believes she's white and is openly disdainful of Frankie, whom she considers to be a promiscuous tramp. Despite skeptical derision from his cohorts, Dr. Oswald is determined to help Frankie cope with her dissociative identity disorder by tapping into repressed memories. The cliché-riddled script is apparently assembled from a true case history, but director Geoffrey Sax's formulaic, unevenly paced *Frankie & Alice* suffers when compared to better, similarly-themed films such as *Sybil* and *The Three Faces of Eve*. Optional. (S. Granger)

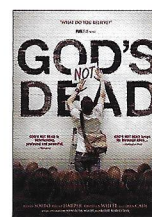
### Generation Iron ★★★

Anchor Bay, 107 min., PG-13, DVD: \$24.98

From the producer of the classic 1977 documentary *Pumping Iron* comes this muscular follow-up centered on a handful of determined bodybuilders hoping to win the 2012 Mr. Olympia competition. Director Vlad Yudin gets to know these athletes and their disparate backgrounds, training regimens, allies, and aspirations, as well as unique obstacles they've had to face in their lives and careers. We meet Phil Heath, a former champion whose belief in good genes and natural talent borders on arrogance, while his opposite—the hard-luck loner Kai Greene—maintains that hard work trumps so-called natural ability. Family man and fast talker Branch Warren overcomes a leg injury that could have ended his career, while Ben Pakulski takes a scientific approach to training that involves state-of-the-art technology. Along the way, there are also some real non-competing characters, including an elderly Dutch woman named "Grandma," who is known as the trainer from hell, and various other colorful mentors. All of this leads to the big contest, where the drama builds. Narrated by Mickey Rourke, and featuring brief appearances by Arnold Schwarzenegger and Lou Ferrigno, this is recommended. (T. Keogh)



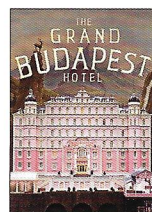
lin melodrama, Shane Harper stars as Josh Wheaton, who is enrolled in a philosophy class taught by arrogant Professor Radisson (Kevin Sorbo). As Radisson outlines the atheistic philosophers they will be studying, he insists that each student sign a pledge asserting that "God is dead." (Reality check: no teacher at a legitimate academic institution would ever make that demand, or tie it to a threat of failing the course.) As a devout Christian, Josh naturally cannot comply, despite protests from his girlfriend (Cassidy Gifford, daughter of Kathie Lee and Frank). When Professor Radisson demeans religion as "primitive superstition," Josh decides to defend his principles in a mock trial with fellow students as the jury. While Josh's support of God's existence is intelligent and thought-provoking, little time is spent on actual theology since the film is hell-bent on portraying the non-Christians as loathsome and self-centered, including a corporate exec (Dean Cain) who ditches his cancer-stricken girlfriend (Trisha LaFache) and refuses to visit his mother who is suffering from dementia; and a Muslim father who banishes his daughter (Hadeel Sittu) for her beliefs. Directed by Harold Cronk, this contrived and amateurish melodrama—featuring a cameo by *Duck Dynasty's* Willie Robertson—is not recommended. (S. Granger)



### The Grand Budapest Hotel ★★★

Fox, 100 min., R, DVD: \$29.98, Blu-ray: \$39.99

Set in 1932 in an opulent Alpine spa in the fictional Republic of Zubrowka, Wes Anderson's imaginative, impressionistic caper revolves around the eloquent, esteemed concierge, M. Gustave (Ralph Fiennes), and his protégé lobby boy, Zero Moustafa (Tony Revolori). Apparently, elderly Countess Céline Villeneuve Desgoffeund-Taxis—aka Madame D. (Tilda Swinton)—left an invaluable treasure to M. Gustave instead of her own villainous offspring, and this tale-within-a-tale is told through flashbacks. *The Grand Budapest Hotel* begins with a contemporary prologue as an aging author (Tom Wilkinson) recalls an evening in 1968, when his younger self (Jude Law) dined with elderly Mr. Moustafa (F. Murray Abraham) in the once-majestic hotel, and learned about a life-changing incident that took place 50 years earlier. When Madame D. dies, legendary lothario M. Gustave becomes the prime suspect in her murder—according to Madame's devious son (Adrien Brody), his henchman (Willem Dafoe), and a policeman (Edward Norton)—launching a whimsical, madcap romp to discover whodunit, which only intensifies after Madame's executor



### God's Not Dead ★1/2

Pure Flix, 115 min., PG, DVD: \$24.99, Aug. 5

In this forgettable but also unlikely maud-