





Welcome to another look at highlights arriving on Blu-ray and DVD. It’s an incredibly busy time with more than 20 new releases and a generous helping of older flicks arriving on disc. So if you can’t make it out to the movies this week, be sure to give one of these titles a try!

Big New Releases!

Back Roads - After a mother shoots and kills her abusive husband, she's sent to jail, leaving her three daughters in the custody of their older, poorly educated brother. The lead struggles, working several jobs to put food on the table. He then connects with a married woman, beginning an affair. His life starts to spiral out of control as complications arise. This drama earned decent reviews. It stars Alex Pettyfur (who also directed), Jennifer Morrison, Juliette Lewis and Nicola Peltz.

Ben is Back - A parent gets a big surprise when her son, a 19-year drug addict, arrives on Christmas Eve after suddenly leaving his treatment program. The mom tries to gauge whether or not her son is telling the truth about being on the mend, or is looking for a fix, putting the entire holiday under great strain. Critics appeared to appreciate this dark drama. The overall consensus was that the film was tense and exceptional performances elevated the material. Julia Roberts, Lucas Hedges and Courtney B. Vance headline the feature.

Burning - In this foreign-language mystery film from South Korea, a man bumps into an old friend from his neighborhood and agrees to look after her cat while she travels to Africa. After returning with a new significant other, a proposition is made towards the lead...one with unexpected repercussions. This effort earned raves from the press. Many described it a well-drawn, slow-burn character study of three individuals that takes viewers in unexpected and shocking directions. It features Yoo Ah-in, Jong-seo Jun and Steven Yeun.

Chokehold - When her father dies, a mixed martial arts fighter decides to leave training behind and return home to settle family matters. The protagonist discovers that her dad was murdered and becomes obsessed with finding the killers (it may have something to do with the Russian mob) while she tries to keep the family gym business operating. Online reaction hasn't been particularly strong, with most describing it as an unmemorable, direct-to-disc B-movie. The cast includes Casper Van Dien, Melissa Croden, Lochlyn Munro and Kip Pardue.

The Cloverhitch Killer - In this independent horror film, a young boy living an idyllic life in the Kentucky suburbs, becomes concerned when word spreads of a vicious serial killer in his community. Things become even more unsettling when he suspects that his father, a well-regarded and upstanding citizen, may be behind the murders. Response towards this chiller was very solid. Charlie Plummer, Dylan McDermott and Samantha Mathis take on the lead roles.

Creed II - This sequel to the *Rocky* spin-off *Creed* finds the new heavyweight champ, Adonis

Creed, juggling various responsibilities as he readies himself for another big showdown... this time with the son of monstrous Russian boxer, Ivan Drago (originally featured in *Rocky IV*). This huge challenge results in an intense struggle to retain his crown. Critics enjoyed this follow-up quite a bit. It stars Michael B. Jordan, Sylvester Stallone, Tessa Thompson, Phylicia Rashad, Dolph Lundgren and Florian Munteanu.

Dead Ant - A one-hit wonder glam-metal band from the ‘80s heads out on the reunion trail and agrees to a slot at the Coachella music festival. On the way there, the group takes a break in nearby Joshua Tree and consumes some peyote. They soon encounter a giant, ravenous ant and must battle with it in order to make the comeback gig. This comedy/horror picture earned split notices. It features Tom Arnold, Sean Astin, Sydney Sweeney, Jake Busey, Leisha Hailey and Rhys Coiro.

Don’t Come Back from the Moon - This unusual independent drama involves a scenario in which all of the men in a certain town unexpectedly decide to leave town and their families for good. Confused by their mass exodus, the wives and significant others attempt to figure out what to do next, while the community’s children act out in rebellion. Reaction was really positive towards this little feature. James Franco, Rashida Jones, Jeffrey Wahlberg and Alyssa Elle Steinacker headline the feature.

Don’t Go - A traumatized father who loses his daughter in a tragic accident, begins to experience strange, recurring nightmares about his child. He becomes convinced that the dreams are telling him how to bring her back to life. Naturally, the man’s spouse and those around him become very concerned about his mental health. Reaction towards this Irish mystery was decidedly mixed. The cast includes Stephen Dorff, Melissa George and Simon Delaney.

The Favourite - This Oscar-winning entry recently earned a trophy for Best Actress. Set in the early 18th century, it tells the story of an ill Queen Anne and the woman’s relationship with a close friend who exerts great influence over her. When a new servant arrives and also makes a big impression on the monarch, a power play ensues between the rivals, who both wish to advise the queen. Most critics gave this film exceptional marks, calling it a darkly amusing indictment of the wealthy and powerful. It stars Olivia Colman, Emma Stone, Rachel Weisz and Nicholas Hoult.

Free Solo - Alex Honnold is the subject of this non-fiction feature, which won Best Documentary very recently at the Oscars. It follows the skilled climber as he prepares for an incredibly dangerous effort that entails crawling up the 3,000-foot rock face of Mount Capitan in Yosemite National Park...without using ropes or any kind of safety equipment. A National Geographic team capture his training process, the growing anxiety felt by friends and family members, as well as the eventual undertaking. The press almost unanimously praised the film for its gorgeous photography and the nerve-wracking tension experienced.

Instant Family - A couple yearning to start a family, get off to larger start than expected in this drama/comedy. After going through adoption proceedings and discovering that they get on best with a trio of siblings, they take the plunge. Their situation changes dramatically and the new parents attempt to adjust to their chaotic new life with kids. This feature appealed to critics. The cast includes Mark Wahlberg, Rose Byrne, Octavia Spencer, Tig Notaro and Tom Segura.

Jupiter's Moon - Combining fantasy with real world drama, this foreign-language art film follows a Syrian refugee who is shot while attempting to seek refuge in Hungary. He soon learns that he has suddenly gained the power of levitation and is taken in by a doctor. The physician smuggles him out of a refugee camp and the lead does his best to avoid being caught by authorities. This work split reviewers and earned all kinds of varied reactions. It features Merab Ninidze and Zsombor Jeger.

The Mercy - This biography of Donald Crowhurst tells the story of the amateur sailor, a man who decided to single-handedly compete in a 1968 race to circumnavigate the globe. Leaving his career and family behind and setting out on an unfinished boat, the film chronicles his trip and his spouse/children as they nervously await word about his travels. Most critics called it involving and found the film to be a dramatic chronicle of a man biting off more than he could chew. The movie stars Colin Firth, Rachel Weisz and David Thewlis.

Of Fathers and Sons - Filmmaker Telal Derki travels to his homeland of Syria in this Oscar nominee for Best Documentary, and is granted remarkable access into a radical Jihadist family. Posing as a war photo-journalist, he records life in a household where the patriarch of the clan imposes his personal beliefs of creating an Islamic caliphate on his children. There is tension between family members who want to obey their parent, but would also prefer to go to school instead of being indoctrinated into a war force. The press described it as an incredibly powerful documentary that doesn't step in and judge its participants, yet makes remarkable observations over its running time.

Prospect - A teenage girl and her father land on a forested alien moon with the intention of making their fortune harvesting gems. Unfortunately, the two soon encounter other scavengers on the remote planet, who would prefer to profit off the materials themselves. The teen faces danger from all sides as her greedy parent tries to fight others off for control of the riches. This independent sci-fi flick earned very positive notices. The cast includes Sophie Thatcher, Jay Duplass and Pedro Pascal.

The Standoff at Sparrow Creek - After a shooting occurs at a police funeral, an ex-cop figures out that the responsible party is a member of his own militia. With officers closing in, he decides to quarantine all of the members in a lumber mill, find the guilty party, and turn the person over to authorities before violence erupts. This title garnered a mostly positive reception. It features James Badge Dale, Brian Geraghty and Patrick Fischler.

The Unicorn - A couple who have been engaged for four years and remain unsure of the next step, travel to Palm Springs to celebrate the wedding anniversary of one of their parents. While there, they decide to test their own bonds by engaging in a threesome. Response to this oddball independent effort was mostly positive. The cast includes Nick Rutherford, Lauren Lapkus, Lucy Hale, Beck Bennett, John Kapelos, Beverly D'Angelo and Kyle Mooney.

The Vanishing - Reportedly inspired by a real event, this thriller involves three lighthouse keepers who arrive at a remote Scottish isle to replace compatriots after a six-week term. The new arrivals find no one there, but do discover a significant stash of gold. The three debate what action to take next. As one might imagine, they disagree and start turning on each other, resulting in suspicion and eventually death. Reviews were very good for this UK production. It stars Gerard Butler, Peter Mullan and Connor Swindells.

Vox Lux - Set in two different time periods, this tale follows teenage sisters who survive a violent school shooting. The two write a song about what happened and one of them becomes a huge pop star. Nearly 20 years later, the singer mounts a new tour while dealing with the concerns of her estranged daughter, as well as her songwriter sibling. Critics were split on the end results. Natalie Portman, Jude Law, Raffey Cassidy, Stacy Martin and Jennifer Ehle headline the feature.

Welcome to Mercy - This horror/thriller involves a young single mother suffering from the marks of the Stigmata. After being sent to a convent, the lead befriends another woman living there. When they discover information suggesting that the young mother may be the Antichrist, the

two attempt to decide what to do. Press response was mixed. Those who enjoyed it said that it was a smart, above-average exorcism thriller that attempted to accomplish more than other films of its ilk. The cast includes Lily Newmark, Eileen Davies and Dainis Grube.

Blasts from the Past!

There are plenty of great older movies hitting high definition. Arrow Video has a great Blu-ray box set arriving with the *Sister Street Fighter Collection*. This enjoyable Kung-Fu series was a spin-off of the Sonny Chiba *Street Fighter* movies and features a female protagonist taking on drug lords and various criminals...and beating them to a pulp. The titles included are *Sister Street Fighter* (1974), *Sister Street Fighter: Hanging By A Thread* (1974), *Return of the Sister Street Fighter* (1975) and *Sister Street Fighter: Fifth Level Fist* (1976).

The discs include new high definition masters of all four films, an English-language dub of the first movie, new subtitles, as well as new video interviews with actor Shin'ichi Sonny Chiba, director Kazuhiko Yamaguchi, and screenwriter Masahiro Kakefuda. You'll also get the original Japanese theatrical trailers for all four films, the US theatrical trailer for *Sister Street Fighter*, plus original English opening titles to the film, the German theatrical trailer for *Sister Street Fighter*, plus original German opening titles to the film and a stills and poster gallery

Arrow Academy's art house line is releasing a Blu-ray of the film noir classic, *Phantom Lady* (1944). It is about a man accused of murdering his wife and his secretary's attempts to find a mysterious woman who can clear his name...if she can locate her in time. The movie has been transferred to disc using the original elements. Extras include an insightful archival documentary on film noir, a rare, hour-long 1944 radio dramatization of the flick, as well as publicity materials.

Arrow Academy also has a Blu-ray of the *the Prisoner* (1955) starring Alec Guinness. This

BAFTA-nominated effort follows a priest accused of treason who must defend himself against corrupt government officials. The disc comes with a new video appreciation of the film by author and academic Neil Sinyard and select scene commentary by critic Philip Kemp.

Shout! Factory is putting out a Blu-ray of the giant monster flick, *The Deadly Mantis* (1957). The title features a frozen praying mantis that is discovered and, rather unwisely, thawed out. It soon goes on the rampage, causing chaos and great damage. In addition to a new 2K transfer of the movie, there are some excellent bonuses including a new commentary with film historians Tom Weaver and David Schecter. Additionally, they've included the *Mystery Science Theatre 3000* episode of the movie, as well as a still gallery and trailers.

The Brad Pitt/David Duchovny thriller, *Kalifornia* (1993), is also arriving on Blu-ray. It's about a pair of journalists doing research on serial killer,s who find that they might actually be in the company of one. This release includes both the unrated and theatrical cuts, a new interview with director Dominic Sena (*Swordfish*, *Whiteout*), featurettes, cast interviews, trailers and TV spots.

Kino has some Special Edition titles hitting Blu-ray. First is the crime thriller, *Before and After* (1996) starring Liam Neeson and Meryl Streep. This release includes a new audio commentary by director Barbet Schroeder and editor Lee Percy along with the theatrical trailer. *The Doctor* (1991) features William Hurt as a doctor turned patient, and this disc comes with a new commentary by Director Randa Haines, moderated by filmmaker Heather Buckley and a trailer.

Kino also offers the Gwyneth Paltrow romantic comedy *Duets* (2000) on Blu-ray. Set around a national karaoke competition, the picture features all sorts of foibles that take place between the various characters. It also stars Scott Speedman, Huey Lewis, Paul Giamatti, Andre Braugher and Maria Bello and it arrives on disc with a commentary from director Bruce Paltrow and producer Kevin Jones, additional scenes, a multi-angle music video, a conversation with Bruce Paltrow, along with some publicity materials.

Speaking of rom-coms, Kino is also releasing *The Favor* (1994) on Blu-ray. This one is about a woman getting ready for a high school reunion and using unusual methods to get together with a old flame. It stars Elizabeth McGovern, Harley Jane Kozak, Bill Pullman, Brad Pitt and Ken

Wahl.

A couple of weeks back, I mentioned *Mad Dog and Glory* (1993), an enjoyable dark comedy with Robert De Niro, Bill Murray and Uma Thurman. Well, the Blu-ray was delayed but is now available. It comes with a director commentary and a making-of.

Kino is giving the high definition treatment to the romance, *Untamed Heart* (1993). This one is about a love affair forged between a waitress and a busboy with a damaged heart. The movie stars Marisa Tomei and Christian Slater and the disc includes a recently recorded director audio commentary.

Film Movement is releasing a Blu-ray of the French period comedy, *Marquise* (1997), starring Sophie Marceau. This release includes an interview with the filmmaker.

You Know, For Kids!

There’s plenty of entertaining fare for the kids, too. Here are the highlights.

Barbie Dreamtopia: Festival of Fun

Daniel Tiger’s Neighborhood: School Time Fun! (PBS Kids)

Dragons: Race to the Edge: Seasons 3 & 4

Meet the Baby Animals (Nickelodeon)

Top Wing: Eggcellent Missions (Nickelodeon)

On the Tube!

And here are the week's TV-themed releases.

All of My Heart: The Wedding (Hallmark)

The Brokenwood Mysteries: Series 5

Condor: Season 1

Dragons: Race to the Edge: Seasons 3 & 4

Fear the Walking Dead: Season 4

House of Cards: Season 6

Marrying Mr. Darcy (Hallmark)

Shakespeare & Hathaway - Private Investigators: Season 1 (BBC)

Top Wing: Eggcellent Missions (Nickelodeon)

Valley of the Boom (National Geographic)

When Calls the Heart: The Greatest Blessing (Hallmark)

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