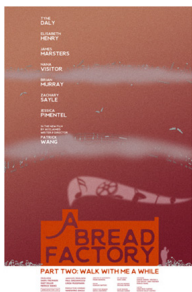


Blu-ray/DVD Roundup for October 11, 2019

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Friday, 18 October 2019 00:36



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Welcome back to another look at new releases arriving on Blu-ray and DVD. This week sees a wide variety of titles in numerous genres that encompasses everything from huge box office smashes to smaller flicks with familiar performers. 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!

Annabelle Comes Home – The latest entry in The Conjuring film franchise is this spin-off involving a creepy, supernatural doll. Paranormal investigators Ed and Lorraine Warren are forced to travel and leave their young daughter in the care of a teenage babysitter. When the kids find the title monster and release it from its case, Annabelle wreaks havoc all over the home. Reviews were more positive than negative overall for the latest series installment.

Those who didn't appreciate the film suggested that fans wouldn't see anything that they haven't witnessed before in previous entries. Still, most thought the movie looked good and had enough jump scares and action to entertain. It stars McKenna Grace, Madison Iseman, Katie Sarife, Vera Farmiga and Patrick Wilson.

A Bread Factory – Here's a curious independent effort that was released in cinemas as a pair of two-hour movies. Both have been included on the Blu-ray and DVD, meaning audiences will get four hours of quirky drama for their buck. The story involves a pair of women who transform an abandoned bread factory into a community arts space. After 40 years, the institute faces hardship after competition arises and opens a similar establishment.

The ladies must fight to maintain their funding. Both of these pictures earned excellent notices. Write-ups noted that the characters were engaging and the story relatable and intriguing, as the film examines the importance of art in even the smallest of towns. The cast includes Tyne Daly, James Marsters, Nana Visitor, Janeane Garofalo and Amy Carlson.

Deadwood: The Movie – Technically, this is a made-for-cable movie that recently aired on HBO, but it certainly deserves a mention here given its popularity. Deadwood was a western series that ran for three seasons between 2004 and 2006, detailing the violent and occasionally sordid lives of the town's early residents in the late 1800s. This includes gruff bordello owner Al Swearengen and sheriff Seth Bullock. The original cast and crew return for this film, which serves as a show coda and attempts to tidy up all of the bits and pieces that were left unresolved when the show was cancelled.

Critics were overwhelmingly positive about the movie, saying it delivered the same sharp, cutting dialog and provided a fitting and enjoyable close to the exceptional series. It features Ian

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McShane, Timothy Olyphant, Molly Parker, Paula Malcomson, John Hawkes, Anna Gunn and Brad Dourif.

Every Time I Die – This independent thriller involves a man who blacks out regularly and doesn't quite understand why it's happening. When something horrible occurs to him, he finds his own consciousness moving and entering the bodies of his various friends. The man then attempts to use these newfound powers to protect them from the danger that awaits and finally discovers exactly what happened to him. Reviews were very good for this little flick.

While most write-ups mentioned that the ultimate pay-off isn't quite as dramatic or surprising as hoped for, they did all think that the movie was well made and had good performances and thought that the cast and crew were destined for bigger and better things. Marc Menchaca, Erica Camarano and Drew Fonteiro headline the feature.

Gwen – Set in the 19th century, this UK feature involves a young girl in a mining town dealing with a multitude of troubles. Her mother has become sick, her father has disappeared, the mining company arrives threatening to take their land, and the local townspeople begin to turn on them. The youngster sets out to find out why and try to save her family home. This is another little flick that earned plenty of solid reviews.

A small percentage of the press did complain that events were so bleak, it all became difficult to believe and tired them out. Still, far more described it as eerie and unsettling, complimenting the flick for its grimness, thematic undercurrents and attempts to set itself apart from other films of its ilk. The cast includes Maxine Peake, Eleanor Worthington-Cox, Mark Lewis Jones and Kobna Holdbrook-Smith.

Kung-Fu Monster -This Hong Kong foreign-language production is set during the final years of the Ming Dynasty. When a rare and very cute little monster is given to the kingdom, a man is tasked with taming the beast. However, he instead finds it to be a kind and friendly creature. The man decides to set it free (hopefully he teaches it a bit of kung-fu before doing so).

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It isn't long before the palace decides to hunt the monster down as well as the man who released it. So far, there aren't a lot of reviews in this part of the world for the film, but those that have appeared, admittedly haven't been great. These write-ups critiqued the movie for not making the most of the concept and repeating too many of the same gags. It features Louis Koo and Cheney Chen.

Light of My Life – At the beginning of this drama, audiences are informed that a pandemic has wiped out most of the world's female population. Approximately one decade after the event, a man travels around the fringes of society with his young daughter. He attempts to protect her from the elements and the imminent danger from the now male society. Critics have mostly good things to say about this independent film.

A limited group did find it too downbeat and noted that they found it too slow-paced for their tastes. Still, the majority of reviewers were impressed, complimenting the performances as being excellent and believing that it would leave viewers with plenty to discuss. It stars Anna Pniowsky, Casey Affleck (who also directed), Tom Bower and Elisabeth Moss.

Midsommar – A young, college-age couple experiencing difficulties in their relationship are asked to join a group of friends at a remote village in Sweden for a festival. After arriving, it becomes clear that the locals are part of a cult and that there are some truly bizarre and deadly rituals are taking place on site. It seems that this film garnered a wide variety of responses, although more were complimentary than negative. Those who panned the movie couldn't relate to the motivations of the characters, found the pacing slow and stated that it didn't make as much of an emotional or intellectual impact as hoped for.

Others who praised it called it beautifully shot, unique, original, and a film that leaves one thinking about its true intentions after the credits roll. The cast includes Florence Pugh, Jack Reynor, Vilhelm Blomgren, William Jackson Harper and Will Poulter.

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Red Joan – An older woman enjoying her retirement in a quaint English village is suddenly and unexpected arrested by MI5 officials. They accuse her of being one of the most powerful and influential spies in the business. Using flashbacks, viewers travel to the 1930s, and see the lead's work at a nuclear research facility as a young woman and her love affair with a Russian saboteur, slowly unveiling the many twists and turns in her life. Unfortunately, the press was not very taken by this piece (which was apparently based on a real person).

A small contingent enjoyed the work of the cast and complimented the musical score. However, the majority called the movie routine and didn't find it very suspenseful, or feel that it offered much understanding of the figure upon which it was based. It stars Judi Dench, Sophie Cookson, Stephen Campbell Moore and Tom Hughes.

Toy Story 4 – The fourth chapter in the Pixar/Disney Toy Story series finds the toys adjusting to life with a new child and befriending a freshly created play-pal named Forky. However, when the family takes their camper on vacation and Forky and the others become separated, the gang must band together to get back to the vehicle before it leaves them behind for good. Once again, critics wrote enthusiastic about this computer--animated family feature. A few thought it was an unnecessary entry that lacks the sharpness and creativity of its predecessors, but almost everyone else admitted that it was fun, zippy and gorgeous to look at... even if it wasn't the best film in the franchise. The voice talent includes Tom Hanks, Tim Allen, Annie Potts, Tony Hale, Keegan--Michael Key, Jordan Peele, Christina Hendricks and Keanu Reeves.

Wake – This independent comedy/family drama is something of a mystery. So far, it has only played at a couple of festivals a year or so ago, and for most, its release on disc will be the first opportunity to see it. The story follows a widowed mortician who hasn't left her house since her husband died some three years earlier. On her birthday, the protagonist is given a globe--trotting trip to Russia from her daughter and mother... along with a strange, life-sized doll as a joke gift.

The main character soon becomes a bit obsessed with the bizarre doll, thinking it may somehow carry the voice and soul of her late husband. As mentioned, very few have seen this picture and so there is no consensus (or any word at all, really) on the film. Myndy Crist plays the lead role.

The Wedding Guest – A man “with a secret” decides to travel from England to India to attend a wedding. His bag consists of duct tape and a shotgun, so it quickly becomes evident that he’s planning something fairly bold and dangerous when he arrives. His plot soon spirals out of control. Taking the bride hostage, the lead traverses through the New Delhi underworld as he attempts to escape with his captive.

Indie director Michael Winterbottom (*Welcome to Sarajevo*, *24 Hour Party People*, *Code 46*, *The Trip*) helmed this effort, but response toward the film has been divided. Roughly half of reviewers thought it was an efficient neo-noir thriller with a welcome emphasis on character over action. Slightly more commented that the picture felt uneven and unbalanced, failing to make the most of its cast or story. It stars Dev Patel and Radhika Apte.

Blasts from the Past!

You can always count on Arrow Video to release some unique genre pictures and obscurities. This week, they have the drama, *Toys Are Not for Children* (1972). This effort is about an emotionally stunted woman who hasn’t gotten rid of her old childhood playthings. When her life begins to unravel, her life becomes exceptionally dark and disturbing.

Arrow is putting out the title as a Special Edition. The movie has been given a 2K restoration, and the disc bonuses include a film expert commentary, newly filmed appreciation by an historian, a video essay on the picture, the original theme song, and a trailer.

Kino has a wide variety of titles coming your way, too. *Baby Blood* (1990) aka *The Evil Within* is a strange and bloody little French horror picture about a worm-like creature that finds its way inside a woman’s belly and pressures the victim to commit murder. This is in order to provide the blood it needs to survive and ultimately be reborn in its fully monstrous form. Now, the HD restored, uncut, uncensored version has found its way on Blu-ray. You’ll also get a film historian audio commentary and both the French and English audio tracks.

If you're in the mood for something lighter, you can also pick up *Father Hood* (1993) on Blu-ray. This Patrick Swayze comedy follows a small-time criminal whose latest scheme is interrupted by the unexpected arrival of his children. It includes a trailer.

You can also pick up the Italian "Sword and Sandal" pic, *Hercules in the Haunted World* (1961). This feature was directed by horror veteran Mario Bava (*Black Sunday*, *Planet of the Vampires*, *Danger: Diabolik*, *A Bay of Blood*) and features the titular hero traveling to hell and fighting monsters. Christopher Lee plays the role of villain. The Blu-ray includes a 2K restoration of the film from the original camera negative, the European, UK and US cuts of the film, an audio commentary from a Mario Bava authority, an interview with the lead and various trailers.

Now, a personal pick. Back before he directed/co-wrote/starred in and won an Academy Award in 1997 for *Life is Beautiful*, Roberto Benigni was already a huge star in Italy thanks to the hilarious 1993 mob comedy, *Johnny Stecchino*. His follow-up was *The Monster* (1994) aka *Il Mostro*, which featured the performer as a jovial thief who is accidentally mistaken by police as being a vicious serial killer. His eccentric gesturing is interpreted as psychotic behavior and an agent is sent undercover to prove his guilt. The humor certainly falls under the category of exaggerated slapstick and you couldn't get away with a lot of it today, but the physical comedy on display is hysterical.

It features several huge laughs (the most memorable involving the lead's job interview, and an accidental trip with a knife into a populated kitchen) and shows the comedian at his best. The Special Edition Blu-ray includes a film historian audio commentary and a trailer.

And for those horror/comedy fans out there, you can also pick up the Disney--produced (through Touchstone) zombie effort, *My Boyfriend's Back* (1993). It's about a boy who dies before he can ask the girl of his dreams to the prom. Supernatural events cause him to come back from the dead to try and make things right. It isn't a classic, but has developed a cult following and features some noteworthy performers in early roles (including Philip Seymour Hoffman as the school bully and, very briefly, Matthew McConaughey).

If memory serves, supporting cast members Austin Pendleton and Cloris Leachman also deliver a few laughs. Director Bob Balaban (whose 1989 dark comedy, *Parents*, is pretty phenomenal) provides a commentary track with a couple of cast members for this Special Edition. There are

also interviews with many of the cast and crew members, and a trailer.

Criterion has the Blu-ray box set, 3 Silent Classics by Josef von Sternberg (1927–1928). Sternberg was considered one of the greatest early pioneers of cinema, frequently working with star Marlene Dietrich and utilizing the camera in new and exciting ways. This set includes *Underworld* (1927), which is considered the first gangster film ever made. You'll also get the Oscar-winning melodrama *The Last Command* (1928), and the fog-covered classic, *The Docks of New York* (1929).

If anthology horror is something you enjoy, then you might want to head over to the Warner Archive website and get a made-to-order Blu-ray of the Amicus flick, *From Beyond the Grave* (1974). It follows the owner of an antique shop (played by Peter Cushing) whose artifacts all have a dark and strange history. These items come with, as the owner puts it, "...a big novelty surprise."

Additionally, Universal is releasing and rereleasing a series of catalog titles on Blu-ray. This week, those titles include the live-action adaptation of *Dudley Do--Right* (1999) and the Robert Redford/Jane Fonda romance/western, *The Electric Horseman* (1979). You can also pick up *Primary Colors* (1998), an Oscar-nominated political drama with Emma Thompson and John Travolta that was loosely based on the life of the Clintons during their presidential run. Finally, Steve Martin takes the lead in *Sgt. Bilko* (1996), an adaptation of the popular character from the '50s hit comedy series, *The Phil Silvers Show*.

Finally, Mondo Macabro is putting out the obscure *The Killer of Dolls* (1975) aka *Killing of the Dolls*. Apparently, this Spanish flick is a lost gem for horror fans that has never been released in North America. It's about a serial killer in Montpellier, France who targets victims and wears an eerie white doll mask. The film has been given a new 4K transfer, comes with multiple audio commentaries and other bonuses. According to sources, this movie is as weird and unsettling as it gets.

You Know, For Kids!

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It looks like the Disney/Pixar hit is the only choice for families this week.

Toy Story 4

On the Tube!

And here are highlights of all the TV-themed releases.

Deadwood: The Movie (HBO)

Mystery Science Theater 3000: Volume XII – The Rebel Set, Secret Agent Spy Woman, The Starfighters, Parts: The Clonus Horror

Shazam: The Complete Live--Action Series (1974–1976) (Warner Archive)

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