


FUNAN
the new people


SANTA FAKE
This Christmas, You Better Watch Out





It's time for another look at highlights arriving on Blu-ray and DVD. There are all kinds of interesting arrivals vying for your attention, including independent fare and big studio pictures. 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!

Battle of Leningrad - Also known as *Saving Leningrad*, this Russian foreign-language title is set during WWII. It follows a young couple evacuated during the Siege of Leningrad and placed aboard a barge. As it attempts to escape the battle, the overstuffed ship encounters a storm and begins sinking. Enemy planes arrive and the pair does its best to survive the terrifying ordeal.

Reaction toward the film was mixed. According to a few online sources, the movie is well-intentioned and has some tense moments. However, a group suggested that the limited funding doesn't allow for the most convincing visual effects and thought the movie wouldn't linger in the brain long after the credits. It features Andrei Mironov-Udalov and Maria Melnikova.

Funan - Set in 1975, this French, foreign-language animated feature tells the story of a family attempting to survive in Cambodia after the rise of the Khmer Rouge. Two parents and their relatives are exiled from their home and their children are separated from the group. As time passes, the adults do all they can to sneak away from their work camps, find their kids and escape. Reportedly, the filmmaker was inspired by tales told to him by relatives.

Reviews for the movie were excellent. Only one or two complained that the writing honed in on one family's struggle and didn't go into details about the regime itself. All others praised the feature as a beautifully animated, harrowing and authentic tale of survival that wouldn't be soon forgotten.

Santa Fake - This independently produced, holiday-themed family musical-comedy is about an immigrant from Ireland who arrives in New York City and is immediately taken in by a crime boss. After making a mistake while delivering a package for his employer, he ends up in Santa Fe, New Mexico and takes a position there as a department store Santa. Of course, authorities and the mob are soon after him and the white-bearded figure must try to evade capture. Little is known about this feature and there aren't any write-ups available, so one might want to exercise some caution before seeking it out. At least it has an interesting cast that includes Damian McGinty, Jeff Fahey, John Rhys-Davies, Heather Morris, Judd Nelson and Tony Amendola.

Semper Fi - A police officer who also serves as a Marine Corps reservist is forced to deal with his wild and uncontrollable brother after the sibling kills a man in a bar fight. After the family member is sent to prison for the crime, the protagonist is sent to Iraq and experiences some horrific events. The protagonist changes his views upon his return and decides to break his brother out of jail. This gritty independent effort didn't make an impression on reviewers.

While a couple of them appreciated the work of the stars and the film's attempts to deal with family bonds, most found it to be unconvincing and felt it suffered from an increasingly preposterous story. It features Jai Courtney, Nat Wolff, Finn Wittrock and Leighton Meester.

Blasts from the Past!

It's a busy week for older releases.

There is a Special Edition of the well-regarded sci-fi title, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1972). Based on the novel by Kurt Vonnegut, this is a mind-bending, time travel story. The movie has received a 4K restoration and includes a critic commentary track, a video appreciation with another film expert, an interview with actor Perry King, as well as discussions with a film music historian, producer Michael Crawford (who was a production assistant on this title), and the son of the

executive producer. Looks like an impressive Blu-ray.

And the Cohen Media Group is releasing a Blu-ray of two French films made together. The first is *Joan the Maid I: The Battles* (1994), and the second movie on the disc is *Joan the Maid II: The Prisons* (1994), which together presumably tell the entire saga of famous historical figure, Joan of Arc.

You Know, For Kids!

Here are some releases that may appeal to children.

Sesame Street's 50th Anniversary Celebration

She-Ra and the Princesses of Power: Seasons 1-3

Teen Titans: The Complete Series (2003 - 2006)

Teen Titans: Trouble in Tokyo (2006) (Warner Archive)

On the Tube!

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

A Christmas Solo (TV movie)

Christmas on Holly Lane (TV movie)

Doc Martin: Series 9

Doctor Who: Colin Baker: Complete Season 2 (BBC)

Game of Thrones: The Complete Series

Game of Thrones: Season 8

Great Performances: Now Hear This (PBS)

A House Divided: Season 1

Masterpiece: The Durrells in Corfu: Season 4 UK Edition (PBS)

Mister Rogers' Neighborhood: Mr. Rogers & Making Mistakes (PBS)

Sesame Street's 50th Anniversary Celebration

By Glenn Kay
For the Sun