

By Glenn Kay

For the Sun

Welcome to another look at new releases coming your way on Blu-ray and DVD. As always, there's an eclectic mix of features from all genres, meaning that there's probably something out there for everyone. So, since you can't or likely shouldn't go out to the movies this week, be sure to give one of these titles a try!

BIG NEW RELEASES!

THE ADVENTURES OF THOMAS AND FELIX: Also known as *Into the Who Knows!*, this family feature follows a young boy with an imaginary friend who happens to look like a fox. The boy's parents would rather he make real friends, so they send him to a summer camp. However, the child struggles to fit in. He decides to escape and search for an elusive and mythic forest creature with his make-believe projection.

This is an independent production that played at a few film festivals in 2017 and 2018 and nabbed a couple of prizes. However, it took a while for the flick to land a distributor and is only now making its debut on disc. There are no official reviews for the film at present, so at this point it's difficult to gauge just how effective the feature is. It features Bryce Gheisar, Delaney Wingrove, Lee Eddy and Macon Blair.

BATMAN: SOUL OF THE DRAGON: The latest entry in DC's direct-to-disc animated superhero film series (which consists of 40 titles) is a new and original story set in the 1970s. It begins with Bruce Wayne aka Batman receiving martial arts training from a brilliant sensei. When a mysterious force arrives and the teacher disappears, the superhero and his fellow students must team up to stop the sinister force responsible for the kidnapping. The press gave this effort high marks.

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While one or two complained that the story wasn't particularly memorable, most called it an enjoyable and well-animated effort that effectively melded comic books and kung-fu flicks together into a pleasing whole. The voice cast includes David Giuntoli, Mark Dacascos, Kelly Hu, Michael Jai White and James Hong.

BORN A CHAMPION: This independent action picture involves a former Marine and jiu jitsu fighter who is lured into a match in Dubai with a less-than-honest competitor. After the opponent cheats and wins, the frustrated hero retreats into anonymity. Years later, the victor's nasty methods are revealed and the lead is approached to take part in a rematch. He agrees, becoming obsessed with righting past wrongs.

However, he begins putting a strain on his personal life in the process. This feature looks to be debuting on disc, so there are only a couple of online write-ups. They seem to be reasonably appreciative of the movie, saying that the acting is above average for a martial arts flick and that the fight scenes are well-handled. It stars Sean Patrick Flanery, Dennis Quaid, Katrina Bowden, Currie Graham and Costas Mandylor.

COME PLAY: A lonely young tot with no friends becomes more and more reliant on his cell phone and tablet. While online, he befriends a mysterious figure named Larry. As it turns out, Larry is a monster using smart phones and mobile devices to connect with victims. The child's parents soon learn about the threat and try to stop the creature before he finds a way to manifest himself in the real world.

This horror picture earned split notices from critics. Almost half suggested that the movie couldn't find the right tone and was little more than a series of jump scares. However, slightly more were pleased that this genre flick focused on characters over gore and called it an effective chiller. It features Azhy Robertson, Gillian Jacobs, John Gallagher Jr. and Winslow Fegley.

EDDY'S KINGDOM: Eccentric Eddy Haymour is the subject of this documentary. The film introduces viewers to this barber, entrepreneur, psychiatric patient, kidnapper and eventual kidnapper. A controversial character, he has been called both a madman and visionary. Viewers witness Haymour's obsession with creating an island theme park in Kelowna B.C., Canada, which culminated in a hostage-taking in Lebanon. The crew also follows the man as he confronts the current B.C. government in an attempt to get the island back in his possession.

This picture is debuting on disc, but it did play at a few independent film festivals over the past year and earned nominations in various categories. If you're intrigued by watching an obsessive man attempt to make his unique dream a reality, you might want to give the film a try.

FATMAN: Those looking for belated holiday entertainment may be intrigued by this dark tale about Saint Nicholas. Still living at the North Pole, but struggling to keep his operation going, Santa faces new challenges after a wealthy young sociopath decides to punish the gift-giver for leaving a lump of coal under the tree. The boy sends a hired killer out to assassinate the holiday icon, leading to a showdown between good and evil. Reaction from the press for this feature was split.

Nearly half commented that the cast was entertaining and that the exaggerated and gruesome movie was an odd, but intriguingly unique little fable. Slightly more said it took too long to find the right tone and didn't make the most of its exciting concept. It features Mel Gibson, Walton Goggins, Marianne Jean-Baptiste and Chance Hurstfield.

GHOST LIGHT: If you've ever been around actors, you'll know that there are plenty of superstitions behind the curtain. This comedy/horror picture involves a disgruntled summer stock performer working on a production of Macbeth. He decides to break acting tradition and utter the title of the play in front of other cast members (which you should never do). When things start going terribly wrong, those on stage begin to wonder if a curse really has been unleashed upon them.

Reviewers generally liked this little feature. A small percentage felt that the movie didn't make the most of its concept and thought it over-emphasized lengthy dialogue exchanges. Still, most believed it delivered plenty of chuckles and was an entertaining supernatural comedy. It stars Roger Bart, Shannyn Sossamon, Cary Elwes, Danielle Campbell, Carol Kane and Scott Adsit.

HOT MONEY: Here's a documentary that has arrived on the scene rather suddenly. The distributor has released a synopsis that asks if viewers are confused by the foundations of our economy, stocks, derivatives, cost of energy and taxes? This movie promises to untangle the complicated realities of the global financial system and its profound relationship to government, politics and climate change. With the help of international experts and all the humor of a New Yorker cartoon, the filmmakers promise to "out" the whole charade that could lead to societal

collapse.

This movie features Jeff Bridges (who also is the executive producer) and discussions with former NATO Supreme Allied Commander General Wesley Clark and his son Wes Clark Jr., who provide some analysis and perspective on the subject.

IMPETIGORE: This Indonesian chiller is about a young woman who inherits a house in her ancestral village. When she arrives to take stock of the property, she encounters some very strange locals. The protagonist soon learns that she is the physical embodiment of a curse that has negatively impacted the community for years. She discovers residents are readying to kill her in order to end their own suffering.

Critics found this foreign-language horror picture remarkably effective. There are currently only a couple of negative write-ups in this part of the world, which say that while the start and finish are impressive, the tale lags in the middle. Everyone else called the movie wild, atmospheric and terrifying, saying it was one of the best Asian genre pictures in recent years. The cast includes Tara Basro, Ario Bayu and Marissa Anita.

MAGIC MAX: Here's a title being granted an unexpected release on disc without a lot of fanfare. The story involves an 11-year-old boy who is suddenly orphaned. The only family member who can possibly step in to take care of the child is his uncle, an irresponsible and immature second-rate magician. While the two initially find little in common and struggle to get along, as time passes the youth starts to inspire his guardian to become a better person and parental figure.

This feature did play at a lot of film festivals over the past year and earned some appreciative notices from attendees. However, there haven't been any official reviews for the movie released at this time. It features Ivan Sergei, Parker Bates, Barry Corbin, Sally Kirkland and Joe Estevez.

PRINCESS OF THE ROW: A 12-year-old girl in foster care struggles as she bounces around from home to home. When she is told that the next family taking her in lives some 10 hours away, the youngster decides to find and stay with her military veteran father, who is homeless and living on the streets of Los Angeles due to a brain injury. As social services searches for her, she makes a desperate last attempt to locate her dad and escape with him.

Response was very positive toward this drama. A few write-ups criticized the movie for having a predictable story that didn't offer any surprises. Still, the majority thought the cast was excellent and the movie was touching and managed to deal with some serious issues effectively. It stars Tayler Buck, Edi Gathegi, Martin Sheen, Jacob Vargas and Ana Ortiz.

RESPITE: This independent crime thriller is about a down-and-out private eye who is hired by the parents of a missing college student to locate their son. The trail leads to several bodies, until the investigator begins to believe that he may actually be pursuing a serial killer targeting Muslim men. As the story progresses, the lead also uncovers a child sex trafficking ring that may be connected to the case. The film played at an online film festival a month or two ago, but is otherwise premiering on disc.

As a result, there haven't been any articles about the movie and little more is known about it. Curious parties will have to go into the low-budget feature without any background information. The cast includes Monte Bezell, Donald Paul, Karina Bezell and Guillermo Iván.

SYNCHRONIC: Two New Orleans paramedics are called to the scene of a series of bizarre and violent accidents. They quickly determine that an unknown drug found on the scene may be responsible for the events, potentially causing psychedelic hallucinations. As they learn more about the substance, the daughter of one of the men disappears, taking the heroes on a strange odyssey as they attempt to get to the bottom of both mysteries. Critics were upbeat about this science-fiction thriller.

One or two were disappointed by the story and said that it only served as an excuse to create some surreal situations. Yet the rest thought that the two leads were charismatic and that the movie had some wild ideas that kept them engaged throughout. Anthony Mackie, Jamie Dornan, Katie Aselton and Ally Ioannides headline the film.

TALES OF THE UNCANNY: Severin Films is a distributor typically associated with releasing older genre films on Blu-ray. Apparently, a featurette being shot as a bonus feature for a release turned into this feature-length documentary examining the history of the horror film. Various filmmakers talk about the subgenre and share their favorite segments from movies through the history of cinema. According to online sources, it's a superb and detailed documentary that features great information and excellent interviews that will inspire viewers to track down

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several titles.

Apparently, the disc also contains some extras, including the little seen 1919 German feature *Eerie Tales* (one of, if not the first anthologies ever produced) and the 1949 French effort, *Unusual Tales*

. Interview subjects include Roger Corman, Joe Dante, Ernest R. Dickerson, Larry Fessenden, Mick Garris, Greg Nicotero, Eli Roth, Tom Savini, Richard Stanley, Brian Trenchard-Smith, Brian Yuzna and many more.

TRAFFICKED: A PARENT'S WORST NIGHTMARE: Also known simply as *A Parent's Worst Nightmare*, this tale begins with a teenager celebrating her 16th birthday. After the girl is kidnapped, her parents find authorities to be of little assistance and hire a private investigator willing to go to any length to solve the case. He determines that after befriending a boy on social media, the teen was taken and sold into a human trafficking ring. The detective and the girl's parents race to recover the youngster before she disappears forever.

This drama is only being released on DVD, so those wanting a Blu-ray will have to wait for the time being. There are also no reviews available, suggesting that one should not expect too much from the feature. It stars Kristy Swanson, Dean Cain and Sophie Bolen.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST!

It's another busy week if you're looking to pick up older features in high definition. Arrow Video is presenting the new Special Edition Blu-ray box set, *Gamera: The Heisei Era* (1995 -2006). This franchise about a heroic giant turtle saving Japan from various foes began in the 1960s. However, in many ways the newer films actually outdid the originals in terms of quality — the first two titles in this series are particularly strong ... and there are just as many out there who love the later titles just as much.

The set contains four movies, including *Gamera, Guardian of the Universe* (1995), *Gamera: Attack of the Legion* (1996),

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Gamera 3: Revenge of Iris

(1999) and

Gamera the Brave

(2006). Each of the flicks contains a new introduction and commentaries from film historians. You'll also get a documentary on this particular era of giant turtle movies, as well as other featurettes and bonuses. Looks like a great set!

And if you want more Gamera afterwards, remember that you can also purchase sets from Arrow containing titles from the earlier era in the franchise's history.

The distributor is also releasing a 2-disc Limited Edition Blu-ray of the cult film, *Southland Tales* (2006). This effort from Richard Kelly (

Donnie Darko

The Box

) features a group of characters dealing with an impending economic and environmental disaster. Despite a cast that included Dwayne Johnson, Seann William Scott, Sarah Michelle Gellar and Justin Timberlake, the flick baffled a lot of viewers during its original release at theaters (this odd movie even contained an out-of-the-blue musical number in it). However, in the years following, it has developed a fan following.

The disc includes a 2K restoration of the 145-minute theatrical cut and 160-minute Cannes version, a director audio commentary, an in-depth retrospective on the film, archival featurettes on the production, an animated short set in the universe of the movie ,and publicity materials.

AGFA is putting out *The AGFA Horror Trailer Show* on Blu-ray. This is a nearly 90-minute compilation disc of the weirdest and wildest drive-in horror movie trailers that the distributor could locate, all newly scanned in 2K. In addition, the release contains a bonus movie containing archived trailers for low-budget, direct-to-video flicks. Extras also include a commentary from the AGFA team and a short described as a found-footage horror experiment.

Sounds like a lot of fun for genre movie fans.

Paramount has added another title to its Paramount Presents line. This Blu-ray is the 13th in the

series and contains the Danny Kaye comedy, *The Court Jester* (1956). It follows a court jester in a castle who ends up usurping an evil ruler who has overthrown the kingdom's rightful ruler. To celebrate the movie's 65th anniversary, the studio has remastered the flick from a 6K transfer of the original negative.

The disc also includes a featurette with critic Leonard Maltin who talks about the production, along with a theatrical trailer.

If you're looking for low-budget genre flicks, Vinegar Syndrome has a trio of Blu-ray releases arriving. The first is the Mexican chiller, *Don't Panic* (1988), about an evil force that attacks some teens after they celebrate a friend's 16th birthday by contacting spirits on a Ouija board. The movie has been described as an amusingly "bonkers" knock off of

A Nightmare on Elm Street

. Besides a new 4K presentation of the movie from the original camera negative, it arrives with a commentary track and interview with the filmmaker, a second commentary featuring genre fans,

The Hysteria Continues!

, as well as other bonuses.

They also are putting out a Blu-ray of the cult film, *Fade to Black* (1980). It tells the story of a movie fan who works at a 35mm print depot. He slowly loses touch with reality and goes on a murderous rampage, using classic films for inspiration in his acts. The movie has been newly scanned in 4K from the 35mm camera negative.

It comes with a commentary track with star Dennis Christopher, a film historian audio track, and a third commentary with genre fans *The Hysteria Continues!* Bonuses also include an interview with Christopher, as well as one of his co-stars, discussions with the executive producer, the make-up effects artist, the editor, the score composer, the film's hair stylist, an audio interview with the female lead, a still gallery, and the trailer.

Additionally, Paramount has a Blu-ray 2-disc set of *Silent Madness 3-D* (1984). This horror picture, about a maniac who escapes from a mental institution and hunts down college coeds, came at the height of the '80s 3-D craze. The new presentation features the film newly scanned and restored in 4K in both 2-D and 3-D. In fact, you'll get two pairs of anaglyph 3-D glasses and have the ability to watch the 3-D cut in either the anaglyph or in digital 3-D (for those who have the proper TV set-up).

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There's a director introduction to the movie and multiple commentary tracks, as well as a 45-minute making-of documentary, several cast and crew interviews, and other bonuses.



Severin is presenting the worldwide premiere of *Family Portraits: A Trilogy of America* (2003), an anthology of disturbing short films from Douglas Buck (who also directed the 2006 remake of *Sisters*)

about the dissolution of the American family. It comes with director and film critic commentaries on all three productions contained, as well as some other bonuses. They also have

The Theater Bizarre

(2011), a multi-national horror anthology film with a segment from Buck and other bits directed by Tom Savini (the 1990 remake of

Night of the Living Dead

), Richard Stanley (

Hardware

,
Color Out of Space

) and other genre veterans.

For those looking for arthouse fare, you can also pick up *The Ascent* (1977) on Blu-ray courtesy of Criterion. This is a Russian WWII movie about two men trudging through harsh, snowy

conditions to get much needed supplies to a unit of soldiers in Nazi-occupied Belarus. When they're captured by enemy forces, they must choose between dying for their cause or turning in the men they are trying to help. The film has been given a new 4K digital restoration and the disc includes an introduction from the son of the director, a short from the filmmaker, a selected-scene commentary with a film scholar, an interview with a cast member, two documentaries about the director's work and more extras.

Famed Japanese writer/director Hayao Miyazaki is considered a pioneer in animated film, having made features like *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988), Best Animated Film Oscar-winner *Spirited Away* (2001) and *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004). Discotek Media has decided to release his debut film this week on Blu-ray and in 4K. It's called *Lupin the 3rd: Castle of Cagliostro* (1979) and is an adaptation of a Manga comic series that was later made into a hit 3-D animated film in 2020 (that title came out on Blu-ray from Shout! Factory two weeks ago). This earlier version tells the story of a dashing thief who helps rescue a princess from an evil count.

The feature received raves upon its release 40 years ago and won an award in its homeland. This new Blu-ray includes Japanese audio with multiple English subtitle tracks, a film historian commentary, interviews and other bonuses.

And finally, Warner Archive has a number of new made-to-order Blu-rays arriving this week. The titles include *After the Thin Man* (1936) with William Powell, Lyrna Loy and James Stewart, as well as the comedy/musical, *Good News* (1947). They are also premiering the Doris Day musical, *The Pajama Game* (1957) and the Cary Grant comedy, *Room for One More* (1952). They are also making DVDs available of catalog titles including *There Was a Crooked Man* (1970), featuring Kirk Douglas and Henry Fonda, *The Princess and the Pirate* (1944) with Bob Hope and the Elvis Presley musical, *Speedway* (1968).

YOU KNOW, FOR KIDS!

Here are some kid-friendly releases coming your way.

Sabrina, the Teenage Witch: The Complete Series

Shimmer and Shine: Magic Mischief

ON THE TUBE!

And you'll find all of the week's TV-themed titles listed below.

4400: The Complete Series

Bordertown: Season 1

Doom Patrol: Season 2

Nature: Primates (PBS)

Rebecca Martinsson: Series 2

Ride with Norman Reedus: Season 2

Blu-ray/DVD Roundup for Jan. 29, 2021

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Sabrina, the Teenage Witch: The Complete Series

Snowpiercer: Season 1

Taxi: The Complete Series

You: Season 2 (Warner Archive)

VISIT: WWW.CINEMASTANCE.COM