

Blu-ray/DVD Roundup for February 19, 2021

By Glenn Kay

For the Sun

Welcome back to another look at new releases arriving on Blu-ray and DVD. As usual, there are a great many options coming your way in a wide variety of genres. 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 ACT OF READING: In this documentary, a moviemaker recounts his reading problems in high school. After finding success in his chosen filmmaking profession years later, he seeks to make it up to his English teacher by reconnecting with her and giving the best book report of *Moby Dick*

ever written. The crew follows his efforts, which also detail how reading itself can inspire us, help us and sharpen the intellect. It also shows what happens to current students who are struggling with dyslexia and what can be done to help them out.

This feature is debuting on disc and so right now there haven't been a lot of reviews for it in print. A few that have popped up online have been positive, saying that while the feature goes on many tangents, most of them are interesting and entertaining.

ARCHENEMY: Here's a movie that was slated for release two weeks ago but was delayed at the last minute. This science-fiction comedy follows an alcoholic bar-hopper who tells everyone

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around him that he's a superhero from another planet who has lost his powers. Naturally, locals ignore the man, except for a teenager who enjoys listening to his fantastic stories. When the youth is kidnapped by a gangster, the drunk decides that it's time to prove that he is who he claims to be.

Response toward this independent feature was upbeat. A small group thought that the movie was unfocused and at times didn't seem sure of what it was parodying. However, the majority believed that there were a lot of enjoyable story elements and stated that the movie had an infectiously rebellious spirit. It stars Joe Manganiello, Skylan Brooks, Paul Scheer, Amy Seimetz and Glenn Howerton.

BAD IMPULSE: This feature begins with a traumatic event that befalls a wife, her husband and their family. The husband decides to buy a home out in the suburbs and moves everyone out there, installing a high-end security system to protect them. However, the plan backfires as the system itself begins to reveal all of the family member's secrets, threatening to tear them apart. This independent thriller played at several film festivals in 2019 and 2020 and won a few awards.

The small number of critics who have seen it had a wide variety of reactions. Many said that the movie was pedestrian, lacked edginess and thought that its message was confused. Yet, a few complimented the feature as having an interesting concept that kept their attention throughout. The cast includes Sonya Walger, Grant Bowler, Paul Sorvino, Dan Lauria, Stephanie Cayo and James Landry Hébert.

THE BLACKOUT: Hurricane Sandy serves as the backdrop for this indie drama. A group of friends and passersby gather together at a Halloween party in a New York City apartment when the devastating storm hits. The group must endure the horrific weather together. With the power out and concern growing, various attendees reveal their hidden thoughts and intimate personal details.

Right now, it doesn't appear as though anyone has seen this feature. It will be making its debut on disc. So, while it may end up revealing interesting insights about enduring a disaster, one should still go in with expectations in check. It features Leah Henech, Hillary Anne Matthews, Tess Paras, Alexander Chard and Avi Rothman.

BOBBIE JO: UNDER THE INFLUENCE: Here's another low-budget production that is premiering on disc. It's a documentary about a unique woman whose history includes bouts of alcohol addiction and homelessness. In order to help overcome her own habit, the subject had a spiritual reawakening and has since committed her life to helping save those suffering from the same problems. The filmmakers follow her as she takes to the streets, providing assistance and inspiration to those needing it.

At present, very little is known about this feature film. No critics have seen or written about it, so anyone curious about this woman's story will have to go in without any knowledge of what transpires. While it may be inspiring, viewers might well be wise to wait a little while longer for more details to emerge about the flick.

BREAKING SURFACE: This foreign-language Swedish feature involves two half-sisters who head out to the Norwegian coastline for a winter deep dive. Naturally, their danger-seeking activity hits a big snag when a rockslide occurs and traps one of the women underwater. The other sister heads to the surface, only to find that the natural event has buried all of their equipment and left the both of them completely stranded. Terrified and alone, the two must use their wits to get themselves out of this terrifying predicament.

Response from reviewers toward the movie was excellent. All write-ups complimented the movie for focusing on the characters over the disaster-movie spectacle. They called the final results incredibly tense and engaging from beginning to end. The cast includes Moa Gammel and Madeleine Martin.

A CALL TO SPY: Inspired by true stories from World War II, this period drama involves a team of women recruited by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to help fight Nazi forces. A few volunteers are trained as spies and go undercover into France to help build a resistance force and sabotage the German occupiers. This incredibly dangerous mission puts all of their lives in jeopardy as they try to do their part in the war effort. Response toward this production was more positive than negative.

A portion of write-ups stated that while the story was interesting and the intent admirable, the execution was lacking and that the movie paled in comparison to other war movies. A few more appreciated this tribute to the figures and their remarkable work during the conflict. It stars Sarah Megan Thomas, Stana Katic, Radhika Apte and Linus Roache.

DEATH TRAP: A group of unwise partiers heads out to a remote cottage where they get themselves into trouble in this horror picture. After the foursome arrives at the scenic locale, all seems well as they partake in various social activities. But when one of their friends is found mutilated, the survivors begin to suspect that they are being targeted by strange neighbors and locals in the area. This title is making its debut on disc.

So far, only a couple of horror journalists have managed to acquire screeners of the movie. They called it impressively shot and moody, but also critiqued the narrative for taking too long to deliver the scary goods. Still, fans of do-it-yourself horror pictures may want to give it a shot. The cast includes Kelly Kay, Tatyana Olal, Garrett Johnson, Melina Trimarchi and Zoe Slobodzian.

FEAR OF RAIN: No, this thriller isn't about a character being terrified of being soaked in a sudden downpour. Instead, it follows a teenager suffering from schizophrenia and trying to distinguish reality from the disturbing visions in her head. When the lead becomes suspicious that her neighbor may be hiding a dark secret, the family dissuades her from investigating. However, another student and new friend (who may not even be real) persuades her to follow-up and find out what is going on.

This effort split the press down the middle. Half of them said that it used mental illness as nothing more than a gimmick and delivered mixed messages about the condition. Still, just as many wrote that despite its flaws, the lead was very good and the feature aimed to do a little more than the typical teen thriller. It stars Madison Iseman, Katherine Heigl, Harry Connick Jr. and Israel Broussard.

FILMWORKER: This well-regarded documentary hit theaters back in 2018, but for some reason hasn't found its way to disc until now. It tells the story of Leon Vitali, a television actor who was cast in the Stanley Kubrick film, *Barry Lyndon*. The two got on well on set, with Vitali giving up acting to work behind-the-scenes for Kubrick full time. Over the years, he worked in various capacities on *The Shining*, *Full Metal Jacket*, and *Eyes Wide Shut*.

The man describes his working relationship with the reclusive filmmaker, detailing their partnership, Kubrick's unique personality and the various adventures they had on set. The movie received raves from critics. They said Vitali's career and experiences were fascinating and that he provided further insight into the life of the very talented and eccentric Kubrick.

HORIZON LINE: A pair of exes decide to share a single engine flight to attend a friend's wedding on an island. As if that trip isn't awkward enough to begin with, after leaving, the pilot suffers a heart attack and dies mid-flight. The two have no idea where they are, where they should go or how to land the plane ... not to mention that they can see a terrible storm is closing in. The leads must come together and help each other in order to survive the ordeal.

Unfortunately, thus far reaction toward this thriller hasn't been overly enthusiastic. The majority of critics suggested that while the set up is fantastic, the characters and their personal drama doesn't work as well as it should, and will leave most viewers cold. It features Allison Williams, Alexander Dreymon, Keith David and Pearl Mackie.

THE INFORMER: A former special operations soldier works as an informant for the FBI. After arriving in New York, he's assigned to infiltrate and dismantle the Polish mafia's drug trade. Unfortunately for the protagonist, things don't go as planned and the operation goes south. Angry at the failure of the operation and his inability to save lives, the hero decides to take down and finish off the bad guys from inside prison.

Reviewers gave this flick a few more positive notices than negative ones. Those who disliked the movie said that as good as the cast was, it ultimately couldn't make up for a problematic script. Slightly more thought it delivered the necessary thrills and worked thanks to a compelling cast. Joel Kinnaman, Rosamund Pike, Clive Owen, Common and Ana de Armas headline the film.

MUSTANG SAVIORS: Those who appreciate horses may find this documentary to be of interest. According to various studies, thousands of American veterans who return from serving abroad find themselves depressed and even suicidal. This feature follows a team who tries to help the soldiers by teaming them with wild mustangs that are taken straight off the range. The veterans spend their days training the animals and talking to the crew.

Patients find their suicidal thoughts subsiding and appear to have a better chance of recovering from their experiences in battle. This feature played at a few online film festivals over the past year and won some awards. It appears to be debuting on disc, which means that there currently aren't any reviews available of the movie.

RANDOM ACTS OF VIOLENCE: A comic book writer enjoys incredible success after developing a popular character called "Slasherman." While doing a publicity tour for his latest issue with his team of assistants, those around them begin dying in the very same ways detailed in the comic. Naturally, suspicious cops begin investigating the creator, while the traveling group begins to fear for their lives. Reaction toward this genre picture was generally split.

A large group complained that the movie's characters weren't likeable and that its ultimate message seemed unclear. Slightly more suggested that the movie worked because it was memorably unsettling, didn't spell things out, and forced you to come to your own conclusions about the feature's message. It stars Jesse Williams, Jordana Brewster, Jay Baruchel and Simon Northwood.

THE SWORDSMAN: This South Korean period feature tells the story of three different swordsmen. One has lost an eye in battle and is desperately searching for his long-lost daughter. Another has walked away from his high-ranking military position after witnessing abuses of power. The third is a determined go-getter who wants to be the best in his field.

These men all cross paths, discuss their experiences and slay villains as they try to figure out how to move forward with their lives. There aren't a lot of notices in this part of the world for the movie, but the ones that have popped up have been reasonable. They call the film a stylish slow-burn and say that while there are plenty of clichés present in the predictable story, it still delivers the goods and will impress action fans. Jang Hyuk, Man-sik Jeong and Seung-Hyeon Ji headline the movie.

THE VERY EXCELLENT MR. DUNDEE: Remember in the 1980s Aussie movie sensation *Croc odile Dundee*? This fictional narrative involves the star getting into a new adventure. Actor Paul Hogan embarrasses himself in public the night before he is set to be knighted by the Queen. The

performer, now in his '80s, is reluctantly brought back into the spotlight to salvage his reputation in just a few short hours before the ceremony begins.

Sadly, critics were generally not impressed by this satirical comedy. A few said that it was a sweet film that did have something to say about typecasting and the downside of stardom. However, the vast majority stated that the movie didn't land many of its jokes and that the execution and end results were disappointingly clumsy. The cast includes Hogan, Jacob Elordi, Rachael Carpani, Chevy Chase, John Cleese and Olivia Newton-John.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST!

There are plenty of older films receiving Blu-ray upgrades this week. Kino is presenting a Blu-ray of the animated effort, *Jetsons: The Movie* (1990), which updates the famous characters from the 1960s TV cartoon. In this tale, George Jetson gets a promotion that takes his family to another part of the universe. While his wife, kids and dogs love the new opportunity, George finds the new position terrible and his experiences incredibly frustrating.

The disc includes a film historian commentary, an interview with actor Jeff Bergman (voice of George Jetson) and a trailer.

Robert Evans was a legendary and brash Hollywood film executive who produced films like *Chinatown*

,
Marathon Man

and

Black Sunday

as well as numerous other features.

The Kid Stays in the Picture

(2002) is a documentary told from his perspective about how he made it in the business. The directors of the feature provide an audio track and the Blu-ray includes numerous bonus featurettes with added tales, as well as others who tell their own, often different versions of some of the stories featured.

Man with a Movie Camera (1929) is an early Soviet experimental silent feature that used

pioneering editing and camera techniques that are still commonly used today. Kino is presenting this title on Blu-ray with a film historian commentary, a lengthy discussion about the movie's director and a video essay on the feature's groundbreaking technical accomplishments.

Steven Soderbergh (*Out of Sight*, *The Limey*, *Erin Brockovich*, *Traffic*, *Ocean's Eleven*, *Magic Mike*

Contagion

and many others) is a famous, Oscar-winning director and

The Underneath

(1995) marks a fairly early effort from the filmmaker. It's a neo-noir thriller about a gambling addict who gets himself into trouble with underworld figures after getting involved in a heist. The new Blu-ray of the movie includes a new film expert commentary and a trailer.

They also have *The War* (1994), a drama about a war veteran and a kid with issues who attempt to find some solace by building a treehouse together. It stars Kevin Costner and a young Elijah Wood. This Blu-ray arrives with a new director commentary and movie critic track, as well as a trailer.

Criterion is presenting the Senegalese feature, *Mandabi* (1968) in high definition. It's a tale about a local man who receives money from a nephew in Paris and suddenly gets hounded by neighbors who immediately pressure him for loans. The disc includes a new 4K transfer of the feature, a film scholar introduction, a conversation with a screenwriter and feminist activist about the title, a lengthy program about the movie's director including comments from fans of the movie, and other bonuses.

Mill Creek is releasing some low-priced Blu-rays, as well. This week, they have the political thriller, *Breach* (2007) with Chris Cooper, Ryan Phillippe and Dennis Haysbert. They also have the buddy action flick

The Cowboy Way (1994), starring Kiefer Sutherland and Woody Harrelson as rustlers who head to New York City to find a missing girl. And the distributor is putting out a double-feature Blu-ray of the Sandra Bullock thriller,

The Net

(1995) along with its direct-to-disc sequel,

The Net 2.0

(2006).

These titles will probably provide a laugh or two with their outdated presentation of sinister

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computer software.

Indie outfit Code Red is presenting a Blu-ray of the monster movie, *Slithis* (1978). This title follows an irradiated, aquatic monster terrorizing Venice Beach, California. The release includes a 2K scan of the original camera negative and a trailer. Scorpion has an extras-filled Blu-ray of *The Unseen* (1980).

This title involves a TV reporter (played by Barbara Bach) who finds herself stranded at a creepy farmhouse near tourist center Solvang, California. She soon learns that something, or someone is living in the ratty area. The disc specs include a 2K scan of the film negative with over 45 hours of color correction applied to the image. There's an audio commentary with the producer and co-star Stephen Furst, individual interviews with the editor, producer, cast members, make-up effects team, make-up tests, publicity materials and more.

Apparently, you can even watch the movie with a late-night horror hostess named Katarina Leigh Waters for some extra ambiance.

Paramount is bringing the Nickelodeon family comedy *Good Burger* (1997) to Blu-ray. It's about two fast food employees who attempt to save their restaurant from nasty competitors who open a site across the street. It stars Kel Mitchell, Kenan Thompson, Sinbad and Abe Vigoda. The disc also includes the original comedy sketch that inspired the movie.

Finally, Warner Archive is releasing a Blu-ray of two catalog titles. The first is the Oscar-nominated, Karl Malden drama, *Baby Doll* (1956), which is based on the work of Tennessee Williams. They also have the early disaster picture *San Francisco*

(1936), starring Clark Gable as a Barbary Coast kingpin named "Blackie" who must deal with events as the city rumbles around him. And if memory serves, he refers to himself in the third person a lot over the course of the running time.

You'll get both musical numbers and tragedy in this film, which earned Academy Award recognition and features some incredible visual effects.

YOU KNOW, FOR KIDS!

If you're looking to entertain the kids, it looks like you'll have to settle for some of the family Blu-ray releases this week mentioned earlier in the column.

Good Burger (1997)

Jetsons: The Movie (1990)

ON THE TUBE!

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

Bordertown: Season 2

Fam: The Complete Series

Harley Quinn: Complete Seasons 1 & 2

Lovecraft Country: Season 1

Masterpiece: The Long Song (PBS)

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Masterpiece Mystery!: Miss Scarlet and the Duke (PBS)

NOVA: Saving Notre Dame (PBS)

Riviera: Season 1

VISIT: WWW.CINEMASTANCE.COM

