

By Glenn Kay

For the Sun

Welcome back to another article detailing new films that are arriving on Blu-ray and DVD. This edition is filled with a lot of noteworthy, quirky little titles and some nifty high-definition upgrades of classic titles. So, since you can't, or likely shouldn't be going out to the movies yet, be sure to give one of these titles a try!

BIG NEW RELEASES!

ADVERSE: The plot of this crime thriller involves a rideshare driver who learns that his sister has gone missing. Knowing of her ties to a local drug dealer and crime boss, the lead attempts to locate her. He soon determines that the only way to get to the truth is to become an official driver for the sinister organization. After gaining employment with the organization, he gets up close and personal with each suspect one by one.

As of right now, this feature is premiering exclusively on DVD. There aren't many reviews available for the flick, but one that did pop up online called it a decent little movie with some solid performances. It stars Thomas Ian Nicholas, Mickey Rourke, Lou Diamond Phillips, Penelope Ann Miller, Sean Astin and Kelly Arjen.

AMERICAN SKIN: Here's another movie that is going will be arriving on DVD only. It's an independent film about a divorced, African-American Marine veteran working as a janitor at a local school while trying to rebuild a relationship with his teenage son. When the boy is shot by a cop during a traffic stop, the protagonist is stunned to learn that the officer won't stand trial for the offense. Furious, he decides to mete justice out himself.

Critics weren't overly impressed with this drama. A small group thought the importance of the themes being addressed made it a worthwhile endeavor. However, the majority suggested that

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despite the movie's best efforts, the end results were notably melodramatic and preachy. The cast includes Nate Parker, Omari Hardwick, Theo Rossi and Beau Knapp.

ANTIGONE: This French-language feature from Canada is a modern adaptation of the Greek tragedy. The plot follows a straight-A student who decides to fight back against powerful authorities and help her brother escape from prison. The process puts her in direct conflict with the police and lawmakers as she fights for her own sense of justice. Response towards this drama from reviewers was almost entirely positive.

Only one person complained that the movie emphasized sensationalism and didn't grab them. All other notices called it a phenomenal update of the original play that effectively critiqued the modern justice system. They also complimented the cast and performances on display. Nahéma Ricci, Rawad El-Zein and Antoine DesRochers headline the film.

CROCK OF GOLD: A FEW ROUNDS WITH SHANE MACGOWAN: For those who aren't familiar with the band *The Pogues*, they were an exceptional live act mixing punk and traditional Irish music (they also recorded the minor hit, "Fairytale of New York"). The life of the group's principal songwriter is chronicled in this documentary from Julien Temple (music video director and creator of the *Sex Pistols* documentary, *The Filth and the Fury*). It details MacGowan's early life, the formation of the band and his hard-drinking lifestyle. Besides new interviews with the subject, the film also offers appearances from the likes of Johnny Depp, Bono (from *U2*), Nick Cave and Bobby Gillespie (lead singer of *Primal Scream*).

The press loved this documentary, writing that it was a detailed portrait of a fascinating if extremely flawed and addiction-suffering artist. This title is initially coming out exclusively on DVD, but hopefully a Blu-ray will follow in the near future.

IP MAN: KUNG FU MASTER: Boy, it seems like there's a new *Ip Man* film coming out of China

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almost every other month. This particular title marks the third in a series starring Dennis To. The plot follows the legendary hero taking a position as a police captain in the Foshan region. While serving the community, he must fend off a gangster out for revenge and help stop invading Japanese forces.

This martial arts sequel wasn't as well received as some of the other films in the series, receiving more negative reviews than positive ones. Those who enjoyed the movie said the fight choreography was so great that it made up the flick's narrative lapses. Slightly more couldn't quite get past the wooden acting and run-of-the-mill plot. The movie also features Michael Wong, Xin Wanliruo and To Yu-Hang.

ON-GAKU: OUR SOUND: A trio of bored and frustrated teenage delinquents decides to start a rock band in this animated feature from Japan. As they start to play together, their energy and passion begins to find an outlet in the music. After finding a singer to perform with them, the new group decides to play a local festival, much to the surprise of adults and their own classmates. This foreign-language feature was adapted from a cult manga comic and earned high marks from critics.

In fact, there aren't any negative write-ups thus far in this part of the world. Everyone said the film was simply animated but unique and unusual, doing an excellent job of focusing on its quirky characters and their growing interest in rock music. Many write-ups also appreciated the feature's deadpan sense of humor.

THE PALINDROMISTS: For those unfamiliar with the term palindrome, it is the moniker for a word or phrase that reads the same way forwards and backwards. You wouldn't think that this subject would necessarily lend itself to a feature documentary, but apparently it has. Viewers will learn all about the history of palindromes, as well as meet those who study the phenomenon and even write new ones. The filmmakers also attend the World Palindrome Championship, in which various competitors are judged on their creative wordplay.

Linguists will probably be amused by the non-fiction feature, but they'll have to check it out with little or no other information on the title. It is debuting on disc and at present has yet to be reviewed by the press.

QUEER JAPAN: This documentary details the LGBTQ+ community in Japan and the advancements that members have been making in recent years. The filmmakers spent more than three years capturing the country's pride celebrations and show some of the celebrations. They also speak with more than 100 trailblazers, including everything from a gay comic book artist to Japan's first transgender elected official. All of the subjects explain the various projects and work to help create a spirit of positivity and inclusion.

Response was very upbeat towards this feature. They all suggested that the film was fun, informative and filled with excellent discussions paying tribute to the people who have helped change the attitudes of many in the country. For the time being, this feature is a DVD only release.

THE REASON I JUMP: Here's another well-regarded documentary arriving on store shelves this week. Titled after and inspired by the popular autobiographical non-fiction book by Naoki Higashida, the film details what it is like living with autism. Specifically, the movie uses narrative passages from the author and follows five other nonspeaking young people on the spectrum, chronicling the positive experiences and daily challenges they all face. The press was very positive about this movie.

There was only one critic who complained that the mix of readings and footage didn't prove to be insightful. All others stated that the project was thoughtful and introspective, offering viewers insight that would change some of their preconceived notions about autism.

RENT-A-PAL: Set in the 1980s, this is a tale of lonely adult man caring for his sickly mother. He finds himself cut-off from society and unable to maintain a relationship. One day, the lead discovers a VHS tape offering friendship via recorded conversations with an actor. However, as time passes the figure on the video begins influencing his decisions and causing him even more problems.

This independent horror feature earned more positive notices than negative ones. Those who disliked the movie thought it had serious pacing issues and didn't offer much insight beyond the obvious fact that technology can negatively influence our psyche. Slightly more thought the film was unusual and anxiety-provoking, offering a dark and chilling portrait of a man's slow mental collapse. It stars Wil Wheaton, Brian Landis Folkins and Amy Rutledge.

ROAD TO DAMASCUS: The press release for this independent film describes the lead character as a debt-ridden figure struggling with child support and bills as he attempts to maintain sobriety. When his roommate suddenly goes missing, the protagonist does his best to find her. In the process, he uncovers dark secrets about the woman's past and finds himself entering her private world of terrifying allegiances with criminal figures. Little else is known about this title at present.

It appears to be making its debut on disc and hasn't played at many film festivals over the past year (perhaps due to the pandemic). So, interested parties will have to go into this story with no background information. The cast includes Frank Red, Becky Killerson, Denzel Moore and Anthony G. Perkins.

ROCK CAMP: Also known as *Rock Camp: The Movie*, this documentary follows attendees at what



sounds like a fantastic music-learning experience. It originated 25 years ago and continues to this day. A group of students attempt a special camp, where they are taught tools of the trade and play together with rock legends like Sebastian Bach, Jeff Beck, Jerry Cantrell, Alice Cooper, Roger Daltrey, Lita Ford, Sammy Hagar, Meat Loaf, Gene Simmons, Slash, Nancy Wilson and countless others. The majority of reviewers enjoyed the film.

One or two complained that it didn't offer any deep insight into the participants or the learning

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process and called it an extended ad for the camp. Still, almost all of them admitted the flick was very entertaining and inspiring, making them wish they were attending the program themselves.

RUSSIAN RAID: A former Russian sniper operative is told by his criminal employer to incapacitate a local factory's security team so that the company will fire their own staff and hire them. It's an elaborate way to drum up business and the plan quickly backfires when the hero learns that the factory is owned by a warlord with connections to the Russian military. As events progress, we learn that the lead has his own complicated history with the villain that leads to an action-packed showdown. There aren't a lot of reviews available for the flick, but those that have popped up suggest that the movie seems inspired by *The Raid* series and favors and includes admittedly well-orchestrated elaborate fight and action scenes over character development.

It features Ivan Kotik, Ilya Antonenko, Nikita Kologrivyy and Vladimir Mineev.

RUTH: JUSTICE GINSBURG IN HER OWN WORDS: Using archival audio alongside photographs and animated reenactments, this documentary details Ruth Bader Ginsburg's life and career, as well as her time serving on the Supreme Court. It shows how the woman managed to fight for her position against those who discounted her because of her gender, as well as being a mother and a woman of Jewish descent. Most write-ups for the movie were positive. There was a small contingent who didn't think this effort was as strong as other non-fiction features about her life and said it didn't present any new information.

Still, most called the movie inspiring and thought that it showed that great change takes time and comes through making small steps forward. Presently, this film is being released exclusively on DVD.

TWO BY TWO: OVERBOARD!: This animated kid's flick comes from Ireland and Luxembourg and is also a sequel to the 2015 feature, *Two by Two aka Oop s, Noah's Gone!*

This time out, a trio of animals floating in the middle of the sea on Noah's ark become concerned as hungry carnivores onboard begin seeing them and other herbivores as potential meals. After accidentally being washed overboard onto a nearby desert island, the heroes try to save locals from an imminent volcano eruption and protect the animals on the ark who are about to be eaten. Critics in Europe weren't especially taken by this follow-up.

They suggested that while it was well-animated, promoted co-operation and had more humor than the previous installment, the two storylines didn't cut together well and that the film felt routine and unmemorable. The voice cast includes Max Carolan, Ava Connolly, Tara Flynn and Mary Murray.

VANGUARD: This action/comedy stars Jackie Chan as the head of a security firm dedicated to providing protection for their various clients. When an important accountant is kidnapped before he can testify in a trial, the heroes must put their martial arts skills to the test in order to save the man from the bad guys. Alas, more members of the press panned this feature than praised it. There were a few who suggested that despite not making a lick of sense, there were some good stunts on display and called the flick fun.

However, most said that the screenplay wasted too much time on the various supporting cast members and lacked the spark of Chan's earlier efforts, leaving the movie's charismatic star in the background with little to do. It also features Yang Yang, Muqi Miya, Jackson Lou and Zhengting Zhu.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST!

There are some very interesting older features also coming your way on Blu-ray this week. Kino have a Special Edition disc containing *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* (1974) from director Sam Peckinpah (*The Wild Bunch*

, *Straw Dogs*

, *The Getaway*

). Warren Oates stars as a piano player in need of cash who decides to hunt down and collect a bounty on a Mexican underworld figure. The disc includes a 2017 HD master from a 4K scan of the camera negative, a commentary with the co-writer/co-producer, a second track with film historians and a ton of publicity materials.

The Choirboys (1977) is a black comedy about the daily life of members of a metropolitan Los Angeles police unit. Charles Durning, James Woods, Louis Gossett Jr. and Perry King play just

a few members of the team. The Blu-ray includes a film historian audio commentary, an interview with co-star Don Stroud, radio spots and a trailer. The distributor is also premiering the mob film, *The Don is Dead* (1973), with Anthony Quinn.

This Blu-ray also includes an audio track with a critic and a trailer.

And they are putting out a Blu-ray box set called, *Little Fugitive: The Collected Films of Morris Engel & Ruth Orkin*. It includes the *Little Fugitive* (1953), *Lovers and Lollipops* (1956), *Weddings and Babies* (1958) and *I Need a Ride to California* (1968). These are all well-regarded independent flicks and a few of them even earned Academy Award nominations during their original releases. The set also comes with documentaries on the filmmakers, earlier shorts and TV commercials from the pair and other bonuses.

Discount Blu-ray distributors Mill Creek are releasing more Blu-rays with packaging emulating old VHS boxes. This week, the titles include the Babe Ruth baseball drama, *The Babe* (1992) and the family flick, *Gold Diggers: The Secret of Bear Mountain* (1995). The latter feature stars Anna Chlumsky and Christina Ricci as a city girl and country girl who team up to solve a mystery. You can also pick up a Blu-ray of the Dian Fossey biopic, *Gorillas in the Mist* (1988).

If you're a collector of not-so-great movies, you can also purchase *Stop! Or My Mom Will Shoot* (1992), which is making its Blu-ray debut. This flick marked an early comedy for action star Sylvester Stallone, teaming the performer with Estelle Getty (from the TV series, *The Golden Girls*), who plays his mom. If memory serves, it's absolutely terrible but might provide an unintentional chuckle or two for those in the right mood.

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Additionally, Mill Creek are releasing a double-feature Blu-ray of *My Girl* (1991) and *My Girl 2* (1994), also starring Anna Chlumsky. If memory serves, the first film is a pretty decent family feature that addresses loss and grieving from the perspective of a young girl.

Criterion is presenting a new restoration of *Touki Bouki* (1973) aka *Journey of the Hyena*. The story follows two students from Senegal yearning to leave their homeland and make a new start in Paris. This release delivers a 2K restoration of the movie, a 2013 introduction to the movie from director Martin Scorsese, a 2013 interview with the director, another program about the feature that aired in 2012, a short film by the moviemaker and more extras.

Best Buy has decided to put out an exclusive Steelbook of Lionsgate's *Dredd* (2012). The release delivers 4K image quality and presumably comes with all of the bonuses from previous editions (no word on whether it contains the impressive 3D version of the film). For those who haven't seen it, this is an excellent action flick set in a violent future world. Karl Urban plays the comic book anti-hero Dredd, as he and a trainee set out to take down the leader of a criminal ring who distribute a powerful, hallucinogenic drug.

Code Red has a Special Edition Blu-ray of *The Forest* (1982), a low-budget slasher about a cannibal in the woods stalking a group of campers. The disc includes two audio director commentaries. In one track, the filmmaker behind the movie is joined by the movie's star and in the other, he discusses the feature's technical challenges with the cinematographer. Also included is a making-of and a trailer.

If you're looking for more genre fare, check out the new Blu-rays from Mondo Macabro. They're putting out a Blu-ray of the Spanish Paul Naschy flick, *Panic Beats* (1983). It's about the descendant of a knight who plots to murder his wife ... as well as those who get in the way of his ambitions. An ancient force soon returns from the dead and gets involved in the proceedings.

The disc features a 4K transfer of the movie from the original negative, two interviews with Naschy himself, a commentary track from fans of the actor/director and some additional previews. They also have a high-definition presentation of the dark, gothic fairy tale, *Queens of Evil* (1970).

This Italian/French horror picture arrives on disc with a new 4K transfer, an interview with the star, a critic commentary, alternate sequences, a trailer for the flick and other previews.

Those in the mood for some war classics also have a few new options arriving via Film Movement. The first is the WWII flick *The Dam Busters* (1955), which follows members of the British Royal Air Force flying dangerous missions into Germany. This Blu-ray includes a lengthy making-of, a documentary on one of the real-life figures depicted in the movie, interviews with members of the actual squadron the story is based on and actual bomb test footage. In addition, you'll get publicity materials and a short on the restoration of the film.

The same distributor is also releasing a Blu-ray of *Dunkirk* (1958). Like the recent 2017 Academy Award-nominated production, this earlier film is a narrative about British forces retreating from France while being hunted down by Nazi soldiers. This disc comes with newsreel footage of the actual evacuation, an interview with a cast member, home movie footage shot by a co-star, a short film about young war veterans and some other bonuses.

Ice Cold in Alex

(1958) is a more character-based piece about a WWII ambulance driver taking a sergeant and nurses across enemy lines through the North African desert.

This Blu-ray includes some home movie footage taken during the production, a clip on the movie from a war film documentary, an interview on the film with a critic and more.

Finally, Warner Archive is giving Blu-ray upgrades to some of their catalog title. The first on the list is the science-fiction TV-movie *The Bermuda Depths* (1978), which involves strange paranormal events in the Bermuda Triangle. You'll get 4K restorations of the TV-cut of the movie and an extended theatrical version that played in cinemas internationally, as well as a new film historian audio commentary and a trailer. And you can purchase a Blu-ray with a 4K restoration of the Oscar-nominated musical,

Damn Yankees

(1958).

The Great Caruso (1951) is another musical from the studio which stars Mario Lanza. Apparently, it was the 4th biggest box-office grossing film the year it was released. This disc includes a 4K restoration, a documentary on star Lanza and a trailer.

YOU KNOW, FOR KIDS!

Blu-ray/DVD Roundup for March 12, 2021

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This is a quieter week for kid's titles, but one of the more unusual novelties hitting DVD is a Menudo concert film from the early '80s that features a young Ricky Martin (who was a band member as a child).

Menudo: Menudo Explosion (live concert DVD) available March 12th from Lightyear Video

Two by Two: Overboard!

ON THE TUBE!

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

Europe's New World (PBS)

Follow Me to Daisy Hills (Hallmark Channel)

VISIT: WWW.CINEMASTANCE.COM