

Blu-ray/DVD Roundup for July 30, 2021

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By Glenn Kay

For the Sun

Welcome back to another look at highlights arriving on Blu-ray and DVD. This edition includes a massive hit and some interesting indie films, as well as plenty of notable older features getting a high-definition upgrade. So, if you can't, or shouldn't be heading out to the movies this week, be sure to give one of these titles a try!

BIG NEW RELEASES!

EVERY BREATH YOU TAKE: A psychiatrist's career heads into a tailspin after one of his clients commits suicide. In an attempt to work through the awful situation, he meets with the surviving brother of the deceased and invites the person to stay with his own family. It turns out to be an ill-advised move as the figure slowly begins causing a divide between the protagonist and his wife and daughter.

The press was not particularly taken by this psychological thriller. A small number suggested that the cast members were so good that they helped cover the story's narrative lapses. However, the majority called it predictable and complained there was a heavy-handedness to the proceedings that nullified the dramatic impact. It stars Casey Affleck, Michelle Monaghan, Sam Claflin and Veronica Ferres.

THE GOD COMMITTEE: Five doctors are brought together at a New York City hospital after a donor heart arrives. With only an hour to spare, the medical practitioners have to determine who will receive the life-saving transplant. Debate rages between the group members as a result of their own personal interests, as well as outside factors like bribes from families of potential recipients. This drama earned a generally positive reception from critics.

There was a contingent that found the film melodramatic and suggested that it introduced too many unbelievable twists into the plot. Regardless, the general consensus was that the feature was suspenseful and did make several interesting points about these types of scenarios. The cast includes Kelsey Grammer, Julia Styles, Janeane Garofalo, Dan Hedaya and Colman Domingo. This film is being released exclusively on DVD for the time being.

THE LAST CHAMPION: After his mother dies, a man chooses to return to his hometown. He gets a less-than-welcome reception from locals. It seems that the protagonist was once a promising young wrestler who was expected to compete in the Olympics. Unfortunately, bad decisions and a major scandal shattered his career.

After enduring some tense exchanges, the figure becomes determined to atone for his mistakes and win back the respect of those around him. This faith-based drama hasn't been seen by many who aren't in the film's target demographic. Religious websites seem very positive about the feature and its values, but there is no word from other sources as to how effective the film is and if those with different views will find it relatable.

The movie features Cole Hauser, Sean H. Scully and Annika Marks.

MIDNIGHT IN THE SWITCHGRASS: In this thriller, a pair of agents from the FBI crosses paths

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with a state cop investigating a series of slayings involving women. The individuals team up and decide to mount an undercover operation to lure and catch the murderer. However, it goes horribly wrong when the psychopath gets the upper hand. The heroes must race to retrieve one of the agents before more deaths occur.

Response toward this feature was generally poor. A few reviewers stated that while the story wasn't original, there was enough mood and atmosphere to keep them intrigued. However, everyone else thought the pacing was poor and that the story was too clichéd to earn it a recommendation. Megan Fox, Emile Hirsch, Lukas Haas, Colson Baker and Bruce Willis headline the film.

A QUIET PLACE PART II: The big release this week is this chilling sequel to the Oscar-nominated smash hit "A Quiet Place." The story picks up after the events of the previous film. After learning how to fight back against the alien force terrorizing Earth, the remaining family members from the first picture attempt to find civilization and pass along the information. However, the route is extremely dangerous and new terrors arise as they venture out from their home.

Write-ups were very strong for this horror picture. A few notices did state that while the film had its moments, moving the characters away from the original claustrophobic locale killed some of the suspense. All others wrote that it was excellent, stating that the performances were strong, the movie was tense and the end result was as good as one could hope for from a follow-up. It stars Emily Blunt, Cillian Murphy, Millicent Simmonds, Noah Jupe, Djimon Hounsou and John Krasinski.

SHIVA BABY: This independent feature was slated to arrive on store shelves a month ago, but was delayed and is only arriving now. The tale follows a college student attending a wake with her parents, only to cause chaos when she runs into her "sugar daddy" and ex-girlfriend at the event. Critics were impressed with this independent comedy. There were only a few negative notices that said the central character was unlikable and that the concept had been stretched out to an interminable length.

The vast majority called the movie extremely sharp and clever. They stated that they were impressed by the performances and darkly humorous examinations of jealousy and other complicated aspects of relationships. It was also described as a memorable debut film for the writer/director and lead actress. The cast includes Rachel Sennott, Molly Gordon, Polly Draper

and Danny Deferrari.

SO LONG BILLIE: Also known as “Pompéi”, this is a French-language international co-production between Belgium, France, and Canada. The story involves a young man and his brother. The two have been deserted by their father and spend their days with other vagrants near an archeological site, searching for food scraps. The young man forms a personal connection with a new female arrival and must decide whether or not to remain in the group as his younger sibling comes of age.

So far, there aren't many write-ups for the film in this part of the world. Reviews from other nations have been decent, but not exceptional. They all say that the movie looks gorgeous, but describe it as a cold and chilly tale that fails to engage viewers on an emotional level. The cast includes Aliocha Schneider, Garance Marillier and Vincent Rottiers.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST!

Arrow Video gets the week off to an impressive start with a 4K Blu-ray release of “The Bird with the Crystal Plumage” (1970). It's an Italian “giallo” (which signifies a very violent murder/mystery film) from director Dario Argento (“Deep Red”, “Suspiria”). All of the bonus features are the same as in previous editions, but you'll get restored and improved picture quality and sound, as well as new art and packaging.

You can also pick up “Vengeance Trails: Four Classic Westerns” on Blu-ray from the distributor. It contains two of Italian Spaghetti Westerns alongside a couple of Spanish/Italian co-productions. “Massacre Time” (1966) from director Lucio Fulci (“Zombie”, “The Beyond”) stars Franco Nero as a prospector who teams up with his drunkard brother to fight off sinister landgrabbers. “My Name is Pecos” (1966), follows a gunfighter looking for revenge on the killers who murdered his family.

“Bandidos” (1967) follows a similar figure who wants revenge, but can't strike back after his hands are maimed in battle. Instead, he trains a group of young men to gun down the villains. Klaus Kinski headlines “And God Said to Cain” (1970), as a man looking for revenge on the men who wrongly sent him to prison. You'll get 2K restorations on all four films in addition to critic commentaries, new interviews with the cast and crew, and trailers.

It also comes with an illustrated collector's booklet with essays on these flicks.

"Treasure of the Ninja (1987) and the Films of William Lee" is also arriving on Blu-ray courtesy of AGFA (American Genre Film Archive). William Lee was a martial artist who wrote, produced, directed, and starred in several homemade martial arts movies and shorts, all of which were shot on Super 8 film. The title feature has been newly transferred from the original 3/4-inch master tape with a commentary from Lee himself. The disc also includes a bonus movie called "Dragon vs. Ninja" (1984).

Additionally, it comes with a number of shorts that the filmmaker created during the decade, all transferred in 2K from the original elements.

Shout! Factory also has some notable genre films coming your way. "Brotherhood of the Wolf" (2001) is an impressive French period epic set in the late 1700s. It's about a scientist and his partner who are sent to hunt down and eliminate a murderous monster in the countryside. This "Collector's Edition" Blu-ray delivers the Director's Cut of the film and plenty of bonuses.

There's a featurette detailing the elaborate fight scenes, a making-of special, a look at the "Beast of Gevaudan" (a legend that served as the inspiration for this tale), as well as deleted scenes and theatrical trailers.

You can also pick up a Blu-ray of "Chamber of Horrors" (1966), which follows the exploits of a maniac without a hand. In order to continue his sinister work, he modifies his wrist so that he can screw various nasty tools (like a hatchet or hook) in place of his lost appendage. The producers have used a new master from the inter-positive for this transfer. The disc comes with a critic commentary track and lots of publicity materials.

"The ice... is gonna break!" Any fan of "The Dead Zone" (1983), will be familiar with that memorable line from lead Christopher Walken. Based on a book of the same name by Stephen King, Walken plays a man who gets into a car accident and awakens to discover that he can see brief snippets of the future. Unfortunately, this gift comes with a heavy toll as he meets a political figure and discovers some shocking truths about where the country is headed.

This movie from director David Cronenberg (“The Brood,” “The Fly,” “A History of Violence”) stands as one of the very best King adaptations out there. As a result, the movie is receiving the “Collector’s Edition” treatment. The Blu-ray includes a transfer from a 4K restoration taken from the original camera negative. Bonuses include new interviews with the producer and actress Brooke Adams.

In addition, there are four audio commentaries ... one with the cinematographer and three more with various film historians. You’ll also get other featurettes detailing the politics behind the movie, the visual style, how the visions for the main character were created and other intriguing extras. This title is a must-buy for any horror enthusiast.

Finally, the distributor is also presenting the comedy “State and Main” (2000), under their Shout! Select line. From writer/director David Mamet (“House of Games”), the story is about a film crew who arrives in a small town. They are surprised to find the residents ready to give up all their values for the new showbiz arrivals. Extras include a trailer and a commentary with cast members Sarah Jessica Parker, William H. Macy, Clark Gregg, David Paymer, and Patti LuPone.

Kino has a large selection of Blu-ray additions. This includes the Bob Hope western/comedy “Alias Jesse James” (1959). They also have the more recent French thriller “Baise-Moi” (2000), which comes with a film historian commentary, a 45-minute documentary on the movie and a Q&A with the directors. “Clay Pigeons” (1998), is a crime/comedy with an impressive cast that includes Vince Vaughn, Joaquin Phoenix, Janeane Garofalo, Scott Wilson and Ian Holm.

This release comes with a director commentary and trailer.

The distributor is also releasing a Double-Feature Blu-ray of “Immensee – Ein Deutsches Volkslied” (1943), and “The Great Sacrifice” (1944), two German melodramas. And they have the “Ken Jacobs Collection, Volume 1 (1955 - 2021),” which contains two Blu-rays full of experimental short subjects and documentaries made by the New York-based independent filmmaker.

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“L’amour Braque” (1985), aka “Mad Love” is a well-regarded French romantic comedy with Sophie Marceau. This Blu-ray presents a 4K restoration of the film from the original camera negative, a movie critic commentary, a director and writer audio track, an interview with Marceau, a discussion with the director of photography and behind-the-scenes footage from the production.

The distributor is also putting out the Jimmy Stewart Civil War film, “Shenandoah” (1965). This Blu-ray arrives with a movie historian commentary, a short filmed on the set and a trailer. And western fans can pick up “Stranger on the Run” (1967), with Henry Fonda. This title follows an alcoholic ex-con who is falsely accused of murder.

The movie has been given a 2K restoration and arrives with a film expert commentary, a trailer, newly commissioned art, and a fancy slipcase cover.

Paramount recently purchased the back catalog of Miramax and is now issuing titles from the vaults on Blu-ray. This week, the features include “40 Days and 40 Nights” (2002), “54” (1998), “Albino Alligator” (1996), “The Boy in the Striped Pajamas” (2008), as well as the Oscar-nominated “Chocolate” (2000), and “The Cider House Rules” (1999). You can also pick up the award-winning “City of God” (2002), either on its own or as a Double-Feature Blu-ray that also includes the drama, “City of Men” (2007). They are re-releasing the 15th Anniversary Edition of “Clerks” (1994), as well as the titles, “Cold Mountain” (2003), “Confessions of a Dangerous Mind” (2002), “Equilibrium” (2002), “The Great Raid: Unrated Director’s Cut” (2005), and the phenomenal neo-noir crime-drama, “The Grifters” (1990).

If you’re looking for more, you can pick up Blu-rays of “Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back” (2001), the music-themed documentary “Madonna: Truth or Dare (1991),” “Marvin’s Room” (1996), and the horror film “Mimic: The Director’s Cut” (1997). They also have the Oscar-winning “My Left Foot” (1989), as well as “Proof” (2005), and “Reindeer Games” (2000). The comedies “Scary Movie” (2000), “Scary Movie 2” (2001), and “Scary Movie 3” (2003), are also being made available. And you can pick up the Australian dance-themed rom-com “Strictly Ballroom” (1992), and the horror flick “Venom” (2005).

In addition, there are DVDs of even more Miramax films arriving on store shelves this week — check your retailer to find out which ones.

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Vinegar Syndrome has a couple of interesting Blu-rays coming your way. The low-budget flick “Alien from L.A.” (1988), stars model-turned-actress Kathy Ireland as a young woman whose archeologist-father disappears. She ends up on an adventure as she searches for him under the planet’s surface. This title has been newly scanned and restored in 2K.

The disc also includes an interview with the director, and another with cast member Thom Mathews and more.

They are also releasing a 4K Ultra HD + Blu-ray set of “The Beastmaster” (1982). This fantasy film features a young man in a fantastic world who possesses the ability to communicate with animals. After his family is wiped out, he raises his sword and rises with his wild friends to fight back against those responsible. This feature came on the heels of “Conan the Barbarian” and became a popular cult flick through its VHS release and frequent cable airings.

Directed by Don Coscarelli (“Phantasm,” “Bubba Ho-Tep”), this particular edition includes updated visual effects. It also arrives with a recently recorded filmmaker commentary, an archival audio track with the director, a new feature length making-of documentary, an archival making-of, 8mm home movies that were shot on set, outtakes, as well as stills, promotional and archival publicity materials. If you enjoy the film, this sounds like a great package.

Scorpion is putting out “The People Next Door” (1970), on Blu-ray. It’s a gritty drama about a couple who try to help their teenage daughter overcome a severe drug addiction. The transfer of the film comes from a 4K restoration of the original camera negative. Extras include a film historian audio commentary, an interview with one of the cast members and some trailers of movies with similar themes.

Finally, ClassicFlix is releasing the Blu-ray set, “The Little Rascals: The ClassicFlix Restorations, Volume 2.” It contains 11 remastered and uncut comedic shorts made between 1930 and 1931. They feature a cast of young rascals known as “Our Gang,” who consistently find themselves getting into trouble. Obviously, some of the material featured here is 90-years-old and won’t be very PC (and perhaps inappropriate for young kids).

However, those who do remember the shorts or are curious about them, can now pick them up if they so desire.

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YOU KNOW, FOR KIDS!

Here's some titles that may be appropriate for youngsters.

"Blaze and the Monster Machines: The Cast of the Treat Thief" (Nickelodeon)

"The Herculoids" The Complete Original Series (1967 - 1968)

ON THE TUBE!

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

"American Gods" Season 3

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“Blaze and the Monster Machines: The Cast of the Treat Thief” (Nickelodeon)

“Dexter” The Complete Series (2006 - 2013)

“Family Ties” The Complete Series

Hallmark 2-Movie Collection: “In the Key of Love” & “A Valentine’s Match” (Hallmark) DVD

Hallmark 2-Movie Collection: “Winter Castle” & “Love on Iceland” (Hallmark) DVD

“Hawaii Five-O” The Complete Series

“Keeping Faith” Series 3

“NOVA: Hindenburg - The New Evidence” (PBS)

“Professor T.” Season 1

“V.C. Andrews' Landry Family” 4-Movie Series

“The Venture Bros.” Season 1

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