

by Glenn Kay

For the Sun

Welcome back to another busy week of Blu-ray and DVD releases. Once again, there's a wide variety of titles to choose from in this edition, as well as some fascinating older features receiving high-definition upgrades. 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!

AMERICAN TRAITOR: THE TRIAL OF AXIS SALLY: Mildred Gillars is the subject of this period biopic that follows an American woman who falls for a German man and moves abroad. After WWII breaks out, Gillars becomes a voice of Nazi propaganda, sending discouraging messages to U.S. soldiers across the radio. After the fall of the Third Reich, the woman is sent back to America and forced to stand trial for treason. A lawyer presents her case in court.

This drama earned mostly pans from the press. A few wrote that the subject matter was intriguing, even if the storytelling itself was flawed. Still, everyone else thought that the movie was a clumsily told mess that didn't pique interest or address its subject in a thoughtful manner. It stars Meadow Williams, Al Pacino, Thomas Kretschmann and Mitch Pileggi.

BATMAN: THE LONG HALLOWEEN - PART TWO: Roughly a month and a half ago, Warner Bros. released the first part of this animated Batman story. The finale to this tale is now arriving on disc. The first title was set during a period when organized crime was rampant in Gotham City. Batman finds even more to contend with upon the arrival of a serial killer who kills during holidays.

Now, as the next ill-fated festive period approaches, Batman and Commissioner Gordon must identify and stop the psychopath before he strikes again. Critics have been very positive about

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this effort. There haven't been any negative notices yet. All reviews state that this is an exciting and tension-filled climax to the story that outdoes the first installment and serves as an excellent adaptation of the original print source material.

The voice cast includes Jensen Ackles, Naya Rivera, Josh Duhamel, Billy Burke and Troy Baker.

FINDING YOU: An aspiring violinist has a terrible audition at a prestigious New York music conservatory. Feeling defeated, she decides to get away and study abroad. After arriving at a small coastal village in Ireland, the lead bumps into an actor filming a popular TV-series on the island. They share their concerns for the future, sparks fly and the two inspire each other to change their outlooks on life.

As the production winds down, they must decide if they have a future together. Write-ups for this romantic-comedy were split right down the middle. About half stated that the movie was a sentimental pastiche of just about every genre trope from the past 20 years. Just as many thought the cast members were charming and believed anyone looking for simple escapism would appreciate it.

It features Rose Reid, Jedidiah Goodacre, Katherine McNamara and Patrick Bergin.

THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR: MEET THE BLACKS 2: The 2016 comedy "Meet the Blacks" was a satire of "The Purge" horror series. It told the story of a family with new money moving to a wealthy, West Coast suburb and trying to survive a government-sanctioned crime spree. This follow-up picks up with the same characters after they decide to return home to Chicago. After their arrival, the family becomes concerned about their new neighbor, whom they believe is a vampire out to drain their blood.

Reviews were not very strong for this effort. A very small number suggested that they liked this concept better than the one used in the previous film and thought it delivered some chuckles. However, the overwhelming majority complained that this sequel was a completely unnecessary collection of brain-addled jokes that lands with a thud. The cast includes Mike Epps, Katt Williams, Bresha Webb, Zulay Henao, Lil Duval, Michael Blackson, Danny Trejo, Rick Ross and Snoop Dogg.

THE MISFITS: A famous international thief breaks out of jail at the beginning of this thriller. He soon finds himself taken in by a young group of modern-day Robin Hoods. The thief learns that this group of criminals does devious work, but for the greater good of society. Together, they all set out on a daring mission to steal gold bars from a sinister and ruthless businessman who uses his wealth to fund terrorists.

This feature is directed by genre veteran Renny Harlin (“Die Hard 2,” “Cliffhanger,” “The Long Kiss Goodnight,” “Deep Blue Sea”), but critics didn’t respond positively to the finished product. A small group called it an entertaining throwback to ‘90s action films with impressive action sequences. However, most stated that the poorly written, nonsensical script was too big of an obstacle for the movie to overcome. It stars Pierce Brosnan, Nick Cannon, Jamie Chung, Rami Jaber, Mike Angelo and Tim Roth.

MY HEART CAN’T BEAT UNLESS YOU TELL IT TO: In this independent horror picture, a young man skulks the streets at night looking for victims who won’t be missed. It soon becomes clear that the killer is providing for his sister and brother ... specifically the youngest and sickliest family member who needs blood. Feeling guilty about his crimes, the lead argues with his siblings and considers leaving them both. Critics were very upbeat about this eccentric genre picture.

A small group complained that the pacing was too slow and wrote that the unrelentingly somber approach hurt the film. Still, almost everyone else thought the performances were excellent and complimented the feature as a grim, but memorable and original take on the vampire genre. Patrick Fugit, Ingrid Sophie Schram and Owen Campbell headline the film.

OCCUPATION: RAINFALL: Aliens arrive on Earth and mount an intergalactic assault in this Australian science-fiction effort. Two years later, a group of survivors in Sydney continues battling the invading forces and finally discovers their enemy’s hidden weakness. But with the world in ruins and more dying by the day, can the heroes get the message out to others before it is too late? This feature is actually a sequel to a 2018 feature called “Occupation.”

There aren’t a great many reviews for this follow-up yet and the ones that have appeared are mixed. Many have noted that the performances are uneven and this low-budget film can’t compete with mega-budgeted sci-fi epics. However, numerous reviewers have asserted that it is

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an improvement over the first film, with a stronger story, and convincing action and effects. It features Dan Ewing, Temuera Morrison, Daniel Gillies, Lawrence Makoare and Ken Jeong.

PROFILE: Based on a true story, this drama follows a driven British journalist investigating Islamic extremist groups and their efforts to indoctrinate young women through social media. She sets up a fake online persona to get in contact with a violent group and receive firsthand knowledge of how their techniques work. However, the reporter befriends and finds herself slowly becoming personally involved in one of the men's struggles. Despite being set entirely on a computer screen, this movie ended up receiving mostly positive reviews.

Those who disliked the picture criticized the approach as gimmicky and claimed that the lead was too gullible. However, more thought that the unusual storytelling technique worked more effectively here than in other films of its ilk and felt the work of the talented cast helped sell the movie. It stars Valene Kane, Shazad Latif, Christine Adams and Morgan Watkins.

SUPERSTARS: THE DOCUMENTARY – EXTENDED VERSION: “Jesus Christ Superstar” is a famous rock opera musical that premiered onstage in 1970. In 1973, director Norman Jewison (“Fiddler on the Roof,” “Moonstruck,” “The Hurricane”) adapted the material for the big screen, shooting in Israel with young, talented actors and singers. The movie was successful at the box office, earning numerous nominations and awards after its release. Using archived footage from the production, this documentary takes a look at how the movie was made.

It also includes new discussions with surviving cast and crew members, who comment on their experience and the impact the show had on their lives. There aren't many reviews for this picture available at present, but one can assume that it will be of interest to any fans of the production.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST!

Looking for some Blu-ray upgrades of older titles? There's plenty to choose from this week. Shout! Factory is presenting “Havoc” (2005) in high definition. It features a young Anne Hathaway and Bijou Phillips as two affluent suburban girls who take a trip to Los Angeles and find themselves getting embroiled in gang culture. This Blu-ray includes a trailer.

In the 1970s, public interest in aliens and mystical phenomenon became something of a fad, resulting in TV shows like “In Search of ...” and films like the pseudo-documentary, “Chariots of the Gods” (1970). This, well, exaggerated and silly film made a case for aliens having built or inspired ancient structures like the pyramids of Egypt. In honor of the feature’s 50th anniversary, VCI is releasing the movie on Blu-ray with a 2K restoration from the original negative (so all the stock footage used in it will look sharper than ever!).

It’ll provide goofy fun for alien enthusiasts and the disc also includes “Mysteries of the Gods” (1976), a follow-up featuring more “evidence” that is narrated by William Shatner.

If you enjoy old cliffhanger serials, the distributor is also putting out “Pirate Treasure” (1934), in high definition. This tale of treasure hunters aiming to beat dangerous competitors and find hidden pirate booty over several chapters (that end up totaling four hours) has been given a spiffy new 2K picture restoration.

Kino is delivering plenty more Blu-rays this week. They have the Susan Hayward tearjerker “Back Street” (1961), which arrives with a film historian commentary and trailer. The classic romantic comedy “Desire” (1936), is also available on Blu-ray. This heist tale stars Marlene Dietrich and Gary Cooper. You’ll get a new 2K master of the film, two commentary tracks giving background information on the production and a trailer.

And action-fiction fans can pick up “F.P. 1 Doesn’t Answer” (1932), a German film about the crew of a massive airport floating. This disc includes the original foreign-language version and the English U.S. version title “Secrets of F.P. 1,” along with a movie historian commentary.

“Lilies of the Field” (1963), is a drama about a traveling handyman who helps five impoverished nuns build a church. This well-regarded drama was nominated for five Academy Awards and earned star Sidney Poitier a Best Actor Oscar. It also comes with an audio track featuring a movie authority giving details about the production. In the World War II drama, “O.S.S.” (1946), Alan Ladd plays an undercover spy trying to help the French prevent Nazi forces from using their railway system.

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This picture has been given a 2K master and includes a commentary and trailer. And you can also pick up a Blu-ray of the Gary Cooper period drama, “Peter Ibbetson” (1935), that is based on the George du Maurier novel. It comes with a film historian track and a theatrical trailer.

Criterion is making a Blu-ray available of the Japanese drama, “After Life” (1998). It’s set in a world where, when one dies, their spirits are permitted to exist in one happy life memory. The dead struggle to choose and determine how to spend eternity. The disc includes a 2K restoration of the feature, a film scholar commentary, new interviews with the movie’s cinematographers, deleted scenes, a trailer and an essay on the story.

Horror fans likely already know about the massive “Friday the 13th” series Blu-ray box set that was released by Shout! Factory last year. If you didn’t pick it up and have been waiting for a cost-effective alternative, Paramount is rereleasing the first batch of titles that they produced and distributed (New Line Cinema ended up releasing four installments). This new set is called the “Friday the 13th: 8-Movie Collection” and it contains many of the same extras featured in the previous edition, including newly restored versions of first four movies. Frankly, if you’re a big fan you’re probably better off with the big box set, but those who want a cheaper option may appreciate this edition.

The studio is also revealing the original “Friday the 13th” (1980), as a standalone title in a Steelbook.

And, if you’d like more horror in your life, you can also pick up a Blu-ray of the remake of “The Haunting” (1999). It isn’t nearly as well-regarded as the 1963 original, but it does feature an impressive cast that includes Liam Neeson, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Owen Wilson, Lili Taylor, Virginia Madsen and Bruce Dern.

The high-quality “Paramount Presents” Blu-ray line also has a couple of new titles coming your way. The first is the much-lauded musical drama “Nashville” (1975), from director Robert Altman (“MASH,” “McCabe & Mrs. Miller,” “The Player,” “Gosford Park”), which follows a few days in the life of some musicians mounting a show for a presidential candidate. The film arrives with a 4K restoration and includes a documentary on the feature, an archived commentary track with Altman, trailers and collectible, fold-out packaging that displays the movie poster.

“A Place in the Sun” (1951), is a well-respected drama from director George Stevens (“Shane,” “Giant”), about a poor factory worker who falls in love with two women from different social classes. It was showered with six Academy Award wins (although it didn’t pick up Best Picture), and has now been given a 4K restoration for this Blu-ray edition. The disc includes a featurette about the movie with noted film critic Leonard Maltin, retrospective cast and crew interviews, an archived director commentary track, a special about filmmaker George Stevens, trailers, and the same nifty packaging.

If you’re looking for genre fare, Dark Force has a Blu-ray of “The Treasure of Jamaica Reef” (1974), aka “Evil in the Deep.” It’s a thriller with Cheryl Ladd (from the TV-series “Charlie’s Angels”) searching for a lost sunken galleon under the sea. This disc includes a new 2K master of the movie, a recently recorded 35-minute interview with the movie’s camera operator, an extra-scenes featurette and the original pressbook for the flick.

Media Blasters is putting out a Blu-ray of the Japanese animated feature, “Black Rat” (2010), which follows a group of high school students fighting off a maniacal killer. Additionally, the distributor is releasing the low-budget creeper, “Flesh for the Beast” (2003). It stars Sergio Jones and Caroline Munro and features music by Buckethead. Bonus features include a behind-the-scenes featurette, and interviews with cast members Munro and Aldo Sanbrell.

Full Moon Pictures has a Blu-ray of a low-budget feature coming your way as part of their “Eurocine Collection.” It’s an exploitation effort from B-movie writer/director Jess Franco (“The Awful Dr. Orloff,” “Oasis of the Zombies”), called “Angel of Death” (1987). Described by some critics as “daft ... and unsavory,” curious parties will find the film presented in its uncut form mastered from the original camera negative.

You can also pick up a Blu-ray of “The Frenchman’s Garden” (1978), from Mondo Macabro. It’s a narrative based on Spain’s most notorious serial killer. The film has been hard to find outside of its homeland, but is now arriving on disc in the U.S. fully uncut and restored for the first time. The movie has received a 4K transfer and comes with an interview with star Paul Naschy, as well as a film critic commentary and trailers.

The distributor also has the violent and somewhat trashy Philippines-made genre flick, “Silip: Daughters of Eve” (1985). It also comes with similar extras.

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Finally, Warner Archive is premiering an amusing little '80s teen comedy on Blu-ray. "One Crazy Summer" (1986), was the follow-up to writer/director Savage Steve Holland's cult flick, "Better Off Dead." It stars many of the same cast members, including John Cusack and Curtis Armstrong. In this tale, Cusack plays as an aspiring cartoonist in Nantucket, Mass. who comes to the aid of a singer (played by Demi Moore) after her home is targeted by sinister property developers.

Bobcat Goldthwait also plays one of the protagonists.

Like a couple of other comedies made during the era ("Summer Rental," "Up the Creek"), the group ends up having to face off and beat the bad guys in a boat race. This movie isn't high art, but it definitely has a following and includes a few amusing gags. Many fans will likely recall a very funny scene inspired by "Godzilla" films. There is no word on whether any extras are included yet.

But one hopes that the commentary track from the old DVD has been added to this release, as well as the film's specially narrated trailer.

YOU KNOW, FOR KIDS!

Here is the kid-friendly entertainment coming your way this week (providing they can handle some chills)

"Are You Afraid of the Dark? Curse of the Shadows" (2019 - 2021) Nickelodeon TV-series

ON THE TUBE!

And here are some TV-themed releases arriving on store shelves.

Blu-ray/DVD Roundup for Aug. 13, 2021

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“Are You Afraid of the Dark? Curse of the Shadows” (2019 - 2021) Nickelodeon TV-series

“Charmed”: Season 7 Blu-ray

“Charmed:” Season 8 Blu-ray

“Dinosaur Train: Adventure Island” (PBS Kids)

“Don’t Go Breaking My Heart” (Hallmark)

“Total Control”: Season 1 (Sundance)

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