

Blu-ray/DVD Roundup for August 20, 2021

By Glenn Kay

For the Sun

Hello and welcome to another look at highlights arriving on Blu-ray and DVD. This is another jam-packed edition with a wide variety of pictures both new and old. So, if you can't or shouldn't, be heading out to the movies just yet, be sure to give one of these titles a try!

BIG NEW RELEASES!

FAST VENGEANCE: A man who returns home after years abroad discovers that his brother has been slain. Angry and ready to take action against those responsible, the protagonist learns that the murder was committed by a motorcycle gang. In order to get close to his targets, he must enter the underground racing world, rise to the top and even get help from some of the other competitors. Of course, as he does so his secret history becomes difficult to hide.

This picture appears to be premiering on disc and on digital platforms at the same time. As such, no one has seen it yet and there aren't any reviews available. However, given the number of weak direct-to-disc action flicks that get released, one would be wise to wait for more details to emerge before making a purchase. It stars D.Y. Sao, DMX, Natalie Burn, Lyndon Hoffman-Lew and Jonathan Hursh.

GHOSTS OF CHERNOBYL: Also known as "Left Behind" and "After Chernobyl," this independent Russian genre film follows a group of American tourists who decide to visit the site of the nuclear reactor disaster. Once there, supernatural events begin to occur and they find themselves trapped. The visitors discover that ghosts of citizens who were forced to stay and perish at the site still haunt the area. To get out, the terrified leads have to solve a mystery involving a young girl still residing in the area.

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This picture was only recently released in its homeland and there are no write-ups available for it. Once again, curious parties may want to exercise a bit of caution before jumping right in. For the time being, the movie is only being made available on DVD. The cast includes Michael Golodini, Catherine Badalyan, Vladimir Dykhovichnyy and Rostislav Gulbis.

THE HITMAN'S WIFE'S BODYGUARD: This sequel to the 2017 action/comedy hit reunites its protagonists in a new adventure. Bodyguard Michael Bryce finds himself out of work and struggling to figure out what to do with his life after the chaotic events of the previous picture. He suddenly meets the wife of hitman Darius Kincaid (from the previous film), who tells him that her husband has been kidnapped by sinister forces. Bryce and the others are forced to work together again in order to save the world.

Critics responded negatively to this follow-up. A few did find the cast charismatic and thought that the flick would provide some fun for action fans. However, the majority stated that the editing was choppy, the gags fell flat, the tone was off and the movie simply didn't work. Ryan Reynolds, Samuel L. Jackson, Salma Hayek, Antonio Banderas and Morgan Freeman headline the feature.

LITTLE Q: Adapted from a popular Japanese novel, this foreign-language drama is told from the point-of-view of a guide dog. After being assigned to an ill-tempered and misanthropic celebrity chef suffering from blindness, the dog is less-than-impressed with his new master. But as time passes, the golden-hued Labrador forms a close bond with the man as they try to make a life together. There aren't many write-ups for this feature that have appeared in this part of the world, but a few have popped up online.

Those notices were generally mixed. Most felt that the dog was adorable and that those looking for a tearjerker would appreciate the feature. Yet, just as many suggested that the movie was too sentimental and felt obvious in its attempts to manipulate viewers, leaving them cold. It features Simon Yam, Gigi Leung, Him Law and Charlie Yeung.

THE MAID: A new maid arrives to start work at a fancy royal residence. She soon learns that the previous domestic help whom she is replacing disappeared without a trace. The servant starts seeing strange sights and sounds, eventually believing that she and the family are being tormented by the spirit of the previous maid. She decides to investigate and find out what really happened to the old employee.

This horror film from Thailand hasn't been seen by many in North America, but a few in other parts of the world have reviewed it. The movie received middling reactions from those outlets. Most of them say that the pacing is a bit slow and while atmospheric, some elements are clumsily put together. However, a few noted that the story takes an unexpected twist in the last act, resulting in a memorable ending. The cast includes Ploy Sornarin, Sawika Chaiyadech, Teerapat Sajakul and Kannaporn Puangtong.

MIDNIGHT DINER: This comedy/drama from China is actually a remake of a hit Japanese feature. The plot follows the owner of a little restaurant on a side street. He opens his business at midnight, serving a wide variety of customers. The lead listens to their stories and problems while making each of them a specific and appropriate dish.

As mentioned, the original films were incredibly popular and as a result this redo has received a more muted response across the sea. Write-ups complain that the original film and series is much better, stating that the set of stories presented here is predictable and corny. In fact, they also said that the movie didn't develop the characters appropriately or show enough of the dishes to make much of an impact. Tony Leung Ka-fai, Tony Yo-ning Yang, Tao Liu, Zhang Yibai and Elaine Jin headline the feature.

THE REBELS OF PT-218: Based on a true story, this tale is set during World War II and follows the crew of an American torpedo boat stationed in the Mediterranean Sea. The team finds itself being bombarded and attacked by German forces at the height of the war and struggles to survive a brutal and seemingly unending onslaught. The movie recently premiered on streaming services and is now arriving on disc. There aren't many reviews available for the feature thus far, and the few that have appeared aren't exemplary.

These pieces state that the movie certainly deals with an interesting subject and aspires to greatness, but doesn't possess a production budget high enough to tell its story in an exciting or dynamic fashion. The feature stars Eric Roberts, William Baldwin, Geoff Meed and Danny Trejo.

RIDERS OF JUSTICE: After his wife is killed and daughter injured in a horrible train crash, a soldier returns home to pick up the pieces. A mathematician and two colleagues appear and soon change the father's outlook on what occurred. These visitors, who were also onboard, present the lead with a theory about the crash being intentional. The group egg each other on

and head out to take down those whom they believe are responsible for the tragedy.

This foreign-language, Danish production sounds like an action film, but is as much of a dark comedy as a revenge picture. It won awards in its homeland and also received raves from the press. Only one or two reviewers had trouble getting on the film's wavelength or appreciating the gallows humor. Everyone else called the movie completely unique, unpredictable and very funny, tearing apart traditional genre tropes and presenting them in a new way. The cast includes Mads Mikkelsen, Nikolaj Lie Kaas, Andrea Heick Gadeberg and Lars Brygmann.

SHOOK: A social media star gets a taste of her own medicine when a follower decides to embark on an online terror campaign against the celebrity. The mysterious figure sends a series of cryptic texts to the protagonist. She must solve the puzzle being presented to her to prevent those she cares about from being murdered. This horror film premiered on the streaming service Shudder and is now making its debut as a DVD-only release.

Reaction toward the picture was split down the middle. Those who didn't care for the movie stated that it wasn't frightening and that the story fell apart by the close with a preposterous and ineffective reveal. The same number thought it was a reasonably tense chiller that attempted to deal with its subject in an interesting manner. Daisye Tutor, Emily Goss and Nicola Posener headline the feature.

STAY OUT OF THE ATTIC: Also known as "Stay Out of the F**king Attic," this low-budget creeper follows a group of ex-cons who start a moving business. Despite their criminal past, the group is eventually hired by a creepy client for a last-minute, all-night job. After arriving at a Victorian manor to pack boxes, the group is targeted by disturbing figures. Notices weren't very strong for this horror picture.

A small percentage appreciated that a lot of time was spent developing the main characters before the supernatural shenanigans began and found that the jump-scares worked. Still, the majority thought the original title of the feature was the best thing about it. They complained that the movie was plodding, lacked tension and didn't make a lasting impression. It features Ryan Francis, Michael Flynn, Morgan Alexandria and Bryce Fernelius.

THE TRUFFLE HUNTERS: Foodies will likely be intrigued by this documentary that details the

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unique work of truffle hunters in Piedmont, Italy. An Alba truffle is a valuable and sought-after fungi that is similar to a mushroom. It can't be cultivated and is only found hidden in the soil. A film crew follows a group of old men and their devoted animals as they try to locate these items and deal with obstacles from competitors.

Many critics groups honored the movie with awards last year and it also received positive write-ups. There were a few who thought that the movie dragged, didn't really provide a detailed picture of the business's darker side, and even felt staged in certain scenes. However, the overall consensus was that this was an interesting, insightful and beautifully shot picture about an incredibly rare and unusual line of work.

THE WATER MAN: In this family feature, a lonely young boy moves with his family to Oregon. The child begins to feel especially isolated after his dad is forced out of town for work. After the lead learns that his pregnant mother is suffering from leukemia, he sets out to find a mystical figure who he believes will help heal his parent. Along the way, the boy meets and befriends a young girl who attempts to assist him on his journey.

Response toward this feature was generally upbeat. A small percentage did critique the screenplay for being slightly overcooked and succumbing to clichés. Still, most noted that the movie was sweet and earnest and called the performances and characters exceptionally strong and engaging. The title stars Rosario Dawson, Maria Bello, Alfred Molina, Lonnie Chavis, Amiah Miller and David Oyelowo (who also directed the film).

BLASTS FROM THE PAST!

If you're looking for upgrades of older releases, you're in luck this week. Shout! Factory is debuting a Blu-ray of the cult flick, "The Borrower" (1991). This horror/comedy from writer/director John McNaughton ("Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer," "Mad Dog and Glory," "Wild Things"), is about a violent alien who is sent to Earth by his own species for its various crimes. When its head gets damaged, the alien starts stealing craniums and other body parts from victims in order to continue a reign of terror. The movie's inter-positive has been given a 2K scan that has been approved by the director.

This disc also comes with a commentary track featuring McNaughton and the film's producer, an interview with the make-up effects artist, early make-up test footage, the VHS trailer, a still gallery and storyboards. Sounds like some wild and gruesome fun.

Kino has a few new Blu-rays as well. "The Emperor Waltz" (1948) is a musical/comedy from Hollywood legend Billy Wilder ("Double Indemnity," "The Lost Weekend," "Sunset Blvd," "Ace in the Hole," "Some Like It Hot," "The Apartment"). It stars Bing Crosby as a gramophone salesman in pre-World War I Austria trying to earn a product endorsement from the country's royalty. The disc comes with a film historian commentary, an archived interview with Wilder about the movie, and some trailers.

In the comedy, "Fitzwilly" (1967), Dick Van Dyke appears as a butler. When he learns of his elderly, philanthropist employer's dire financial situation, he tries to assist her by stealing riches from other well-to-do families in town. The Blu-ray extras for this comedy include a movie expert audio track and a trailer. "The Fortune Cookie" (1966), is another feature from filmmaker Billy Wilder about two men who feign a head injury in order to extort a fortune in insurance claims.

Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau take on the lead roles. This disc includes a film expert commentary, a special with Jack Lemmon seeking out extras for the movie, another featurette on the movie's stars, as well as some trailers.

Criterion also has an interesting new release. It's a documentary that details what goes on behind-the-scenes when Broadway musical performers are asked to make an album of their play. Original Cast Album: "Company" (1970), follows the stars of Stephen Sondheim's groundbreaking concept musical "Company," in the recording studio. With Sondheim himself at the helm, what resulted was a legendary, marathon session that left many actors pushed to their limits.

This film is extremely well-regarded and has been hard-to-find for several decades. Now, it's premiering on Blu-ray with a new, restored 4K digital transfer, a recently recorded commentary with Sondheim himself, a second track from 2001 with the director, various interviews with Sondheim, film critics and other composers. Bonuses also include a 2020 reunion of the surviving cast and crew, an episode of the "Documentary Now!" comedy series that parodies the movie, and much more.

Sony has a trio of Blu-ray titles that may amuse those who grew up in the 1980s and early '90s. "Bingo" (1991), tells the story of a runaway circus dog who encounters and helps a shy young boy. The two struggle to stay together after the kid's parents decide to leave the dog behind

To be frank, the only thing I remember most about this title was the terrible poster art that featured the lead dog's head photoshopped on the body of a stuffed animal. It looks like they've cropped it a bit for the new Blu-ray cover. The movie didn't make a big impression at theaters, but may have developed a following over the years thanks to frequent TV airings.

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Just a couple of these extra bits include deleted and alternate scenes (with commentary from Henson's son), as well as original audition footage featuring the cast. This looks like a great package for fans of the film.

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As mentioned in a previous column, Lionsgate has brought back their Vestron Video line, which specializes in genre films from the VHS era. This week, they have a Blu-ray Collector's Edition of the horror/comedy, "Sundown: The Vampire in Retreat" (1989). It combines elements of westerns combined with the vampire film.

The cast includes a lot of familiar faces like David Carradine, Morgan Brittany, Maxwell Caulfield, Bruce Campbell, John Ireland, Deborah Foreman and Dana Ashbrook. This disc also provides an audio commentary with the director and cinematographer, interviews with many members of the cast and crew, as well as publicity materials. It is also affordably-priced on many online sites and may be of interest to genre fans.

Looking for a very eccentric British comedy? Code Red is presenting "Percy" (1971), on Blu-ray. The story involves a man who has a debilitating accident and receives a penis transplant. He begins to feel differently after his recovery and decides to look into the life of his new organ's previous owner. The cult movie stars Hywel Bennett, Denholm Elliott, Elke Sommer and Britt Ekland and perhaps is most notable for its excellent soundtrack that was written and recorded by rock band, "The Kinks."

Mill Creek is delivering plenty of inexpensive Blu-ray entertainment as well. First, they are rereleasing a Blu-ray of the Tim Allen/Kirstie Alley comedy, "For Richer or Poorer" (1997). It's about a Manhattan socialite couple being chased by the IRS who hides out in an Amish community.

If you like "Mighty Morphin Power Rangers," you may also want to give the Japanese show "Gridman: The Hyper Agent": Season 1 (1993) a try. It features a trio of kids fighting digitized monsters and demons on their computers. And the company is also rereleasing the cult flick, *Rad* (1986). This title involves BMX-riding kids who get involved in a local race.

If you enjoy old movies about horses, ClassicFlix has you covered with "The Black Beauty DVD Collection," which contains the well-regarded "Black Beauty" (1946), and "Courage of Black Beauty" (1957).

Warner Bros. is beginning to provide image quality upgrades to one of its most notable

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franchises. The smash fantasy film “Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone” (2001), is arriving on shelves to celebrate its 20th anniversary and there will be two editions. One is a 4K Ultra HD + Blu-ray Steelbook that will be available exclusively at Best Buy.

The second version will be available everywhere. It is a 2-disc Blu-ray set that contains two different cuts of the movie and offers a “Magical Movie Mode” feature that can present trivia and picture-in-picture supplements as the movie is playing.

Finally, the Warner Archive line is debuting the romantic-comedy/musical, “In the Good Old Summertime” (1949), on Blu-ray. It’s about a pair of employees at a music store who don’t get along. Neither of the two realizes that they are actually pen pals who are falling deeply in love with one another through their mail communications.

And you can also pick up “Shadow of the Thin Man” (1941), a sequel in the long-running “Thin Man” mystery series. The stories involve a husband-and-wife detective team solving crimes. This film sees them at a racetrack investigating a murder.

YOU KNOW, FOR KIDS!

There are plenty of new and classic titles being made available for children and tweens this week!

“Bingo” (1991)

“Care Bears Movie II: A New Generation” (1986)

“Charlie’s Colorforms City: Fantastick Adventures!”

“Gridman: The Hyper Agent” Season 1 (1993)

“Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone” (2001) 4K Steelbook (Best Buy Exclusive) and “Magical Movie Mode” Edition

“Labyrinth” (1986) 4K

“Rainbow Rangers: Off to Save the World!” (Nick Jr.)

“The Water Man”

ON THE TUBE!

And here is a list of all of the TV-themed titles coming your way.

“A Discovery of Witches” Season 2

“Gridman: The Hyper Agent” Season 1 (1993)

“The Indian Doctor” The Complete Series

“NCIS” Season 18

“NOVA: Ships That Changed the World” (PBS)

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