

Blu-ray/DVD Roundup for December 17, 2021

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Welcome to another look at highlights arriving on Blu-ray and DVD. The holidays are fast approaching, but the titles keep on coming. This week, you'll find many notable studio pictures and independents in a wide variety of genres. 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!

AMERICAN SICARIO: A successful American-born drug lord sets his sights on taking over the Mexican trade and begins making moves to become an underworld leader

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across the border. Unfortunately, he runs into trouble when a shipment goes wrong. He immediately falls into the crosshairs of many other groups, including deadly cartels and the DEA, as well as Mexican authorities. This independent action/thriller is debuting on disc and on streaming platforms this week, so currently there are no reviews available for the movie.

While it may be enjoyable, all interested parties should exercise caution before making any blind buys. At least it features a familiar face in Danny Trejo. The rest of the cast includes Philippe A. Haddad, Maurice Compte, Maya Stojan and Jaylen Moore.

***THE CARD COUNTER*:** A former serviceman with a taste for gambling decides to reform an angry and vulnerable young man seeking revenge on a mutual enemy. Instead of helping him target the figure, the lead sees this as an opportunity for redemption. He instead focuses his new friend's efforts on various card games. Together, they enter the World Series of Poker in Las Vegas, but as the tournament progresses, the lead has more and more trouble keeping his protégé focused.

Overall, critics gave this drama high marks. A small contingent found the pace slow and the film itself too low-key for their liking. In the end, they didn't think it added up to much. However, the majority wrote that the performances were excellent and the movie delivered palpable mood and intrigue that would keep viewers invested throughout.

It stars Oscar Isaac, Tiffany Haddish, Tye Sheridan, and Willem Dafoe.

***THE LAST DUEL*:** Set during the Hundred Years War and based on a true story, this feature is set in France and details the country's last sanctioned duel. Apparently, it occurred between a knight named Jean de Carrouges and nobleman Jacques Le Gris. When Carrouges' wife accuses Le Gris of rape, unexpected tensions and conflicts arise between all three parties. The

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film tells the identical story from the viewpoint of the three central characters, revealing unexpected details as events progress.

The press gave the feature high marks. A small group didn't like the story structure and a few even complained that the female perspective should have been presented first. However, the vast majority wrote that the movie used the novel storytelling technique to its advantage, skillfully detailing the treatment of women centuries ago and the savagery of the era. Matt Damon, Adam Driver, Jodie Comer, Harriet Walter, Ben Affleck and Marton Csokas headline the feature.

THE MITCHELLS VS. THE MACHINES: This animated family film from Netflix is getting a Blu-ray release from Sony Pictures. The plot involves a creative outsider about to start film school. She gets an unexpected shock when her family announces they are driving her cross-country to her university. Things get even more complicated on the road after all of the world's tech devices begin to revolt against humanity.

Critics adored this feature. A handful didn't find the movie particularly funny and called it overlong. All others stated that it was one of the best animated films of the year, deftly mixing outrageous humor with heartfelt messages about the importance of family. The voice cast includes Abbi Jacobson, Danny McBride, Maya Rudolph, Michael Rianda, Eric André, Olivia Colman, Fred Armisen, Beck Bennett, Chrissy Teigen, John Legend, Charlyne Yi and Conan O'Brien.

This disc is being referred to as a "Katie Mitchell Special Edition" with numerous extras.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST!

As if there weren't enough new releases to go around, there are also plenty of older titles receiving high-definition upgrades. For those with the appropriate set-up, Arrow Video is upgrading and rereleasing the great cult flick "Donnie Darko" (2001) as a 4K Ultra HD exclusive. It presents both the original and director's cut of the film, presumably with the very same extras that are available on the regular Blu-ray. The distributor is also rereleasing the original film adaptation of "Dune" (1984) as a Special Edition 4K + Blu-ray set and as a single Blu-ray.

One assumes that the previous editions must have sold out in order to justify this version.

If you're looking for something lighter, you can also pick up a Special Edition Blu-ray of the comedy, "My Stepmother is An Alien" (1988). Alyson Hannigan plays the daughter of a widowed astrophysicist (Dan Aykroyd), worried after her dad falls for an attractive woman (Kim Basinger). The two end up marrying quickly and the youngster soon suspects that her eccentric new stepmom is an alien trying to study the human species. Presumably, comic mayhem ensues.

I don't remember this title being exceptional, but the cast is impressive and also includes Jon Lovitz, Seth Green and Juliette Lewis. The movie has been given a 2K restoration and comes with a film historian commentary, an interview with director Richard Benjamin ("My Favorite Year," "The Money Pit," "Mermaids"), a trailer, and an image gallery.

"The Brass Bottle" (1964) is another comedy starring Tony Randall and Barbara Eden about a man who finds a genie in a bottle. This flick inspired the hit '60s TV series, *"I Dream of Jeannie."* It comes with a movie expert commentary and a trailer.

Criterion is presenting the Gordon Parks' drama, "The Learning Tree" (1969). It's set in small-town Kansas during the 1920s and depicts the life and trials of a black teenager. The movie was extremely well-received and, 20 years after its release, was preserved and honored by the National Film Registry. Among numerous extras, this Blu-ray includes a 2K digital restoration of the feature, new documentaries and commentaries on the making of the movie and its influence on viewers.

Additionally, it has a documentary on Parks and several short films by the figure premiering for the first time on home video.

YOU KNOW, FOR KIDS!

Here are a couple of titles that may appeal to children (or the young at heart).

"The Mitchells vs. The Machines" (Katie Mitchell Special Edition) Sony Blu-ray

"Where the Red Fern Grows" (2003) MVD Blu-ray

ON THE TUBE!

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This week is a slow one for TV shows, but there is one Japanese animated series that is arriving on shelves.

“Robotech - Part 3: The New Generation” (1985 - 1988) FUNimation (Blu-ray)

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