

DVD/Blu-ray Roundup for Jan. 15, 2016

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 15 January 2016 10:51



Hello again! It's once again time to pick out highlights coming your way on Blu-ray and DVD. There are a lot of interesting releases, so if you can't make it out to the movies this week be sure to give one of these titles a try!

Big New Releases!

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Hotel Transylvania 2 - In this sequel to the animated hit, vampire/hotel proprietor Drac decides to give the his grandson a crash course in how to be a proper monster. The film garnered mixed reviews, although they were a little more positive for this effort than for the first installment. Most suggested it was a reasonably enjoyable bit of family fluff. The voice cast includes Adam Sandler, Andy Samberg, Selena Gomez, Kevin James, Steve Buscemi, David Spade, Keegan-Michael Key, Fran Drescher, Molly Shannon, Megan Mullally, Nick Offerman, Dana Carvey, Rob Riggle and Mel Brooks.

Howl - A group of train passengers in England come under attack when something from the tracks sneaks onboard. They must work together to survive. This independent horror flick directed by a make-up effects artist whose credits include *The Descent*, *Doomsday* and *Attack the Block*

ended up receiving a few more picks than pans. Some felt that it petered out by the end, but many admired the likable cast and the movie's dark sense of humor. Ed Speleers, Holly Weston and Shauna Macdonald make up some of the passengers.

Irrational Man - Woody Allen's latest is a very dark comedy about a burnt-out philosophy professor who preaches taking direct action to intellectuals around him. To prove his point, he goes to the extreme and gets himself involved in an ethically dubious plot to change a random person's life. Critics had issues with this film – while some found it interesting, others felt that it borrowed too heavily from the director's earlier works (in particular, *Crimes and Misdemeanors*

) and didn't quite hit the mark. It stars Joaquin Phoenix, Emma Stone and Parker Posey.

The Look of Silence - This documentary is one of the best reviewed films of the year. In fact, it stands a strong chance of receiving an Academy Award nomination. It's a follow-up to the 2013 non-fiction effort, *The Act of Killing*. This time out, the camera tails an Indonesian optometrist who confronts the elderly generals responsible for murdering his baby brother decades earlier. He does this while fitting them for glasses. It's accurately been described as a disturbing and powerful effort that brings attention to a truly horrific period in the country's history (as well as world leaders who turned a blind eye to the atrocities being committed).

The Martian - The biggest release of the week is this hit adaptation of the bestselling book. It follows an astronaut who is wounded left behind on the surface of the planet Mars. Completely stranded, he uses his wits to survive while others back on Earth plot to get him home safely. Notices were very strong, stating that the movie captured the plight of its hero exceptionally well and added in effective doses of humor to create an excellent and entertaining underdog story.

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One should expect a couple of Oscar nominations. It stars Matt Damon, Jessica Chastain, Kristin Wiig, Jeff Daniels, Michael Pena, Sean Bean, Kate Mara, Chiwetel Ejiofor and Donald Glover.

Paranormal Activity: The Ghost Dimension - The sixth entry in this horror series was advertised as its final installment. The plot follows a family who move into a haunted house and find that they can see the evil spirits through a video camera left behind at the home. Reviews were quite poor – although a few write-ups claimed the jump scares were effective, almost all felt that the same material had been rehashed yet again and that the big finale ultimately failed to satisfy even the most avid of fans. Chris J. Murray, Brit Shaw and Ivy Jones lead the cast.

Sinister 2 - The first *Sinister* was a creepy supernatural horror flick that scored at the box office – this sequel involves another family who move into the same house and begin to experience similarly disturbing phenomena. Unlike the previous installment, critics hated this follow-up. They called it unnecessary and claimed that it simply repeated the same material from the original, only with less visual panache. The cast includes James Ransone, Shannon Sossamon, Robert Daniel Sloan and Dartanian Sloan.

This Changes Everything - Inspired by the non-fiction book of the same name, this documentary tackles the subject of climate change and the likely causes of this ever growing problem. Write-ups were decent for this sobering effort. While some complained that it needed to take a more aggressive stand against the systems responsible for the declining state of the environment, most felt that it did make some solid points and offered some potential solutions.

Blasts From the Past!

There's a wide variety of reissues coming your way. Shout! Factory are putting out a double-feature Blu-ray containing two cheesy Bo Derek B-movies. Both have won awards (albeit for the wrong reasons). In fact, they were both crowned as the year's worst film by the Golden Raspberry Awards. *Bolero* (1984) is about a woman going through a sexual awakening. She travels across the world to find the perfect man to lose her virginity to.

Ghosts Can't Do It

(1989) finds the actress playing the wife of an elderly millionaire (played by Anthony Quinn). When he passes away, his lovesick spouse attempts to find a young man for her husband's soul to possess. Donald Trump also appears (as himself) – he probably doesn't want you reminded of this movie's existence. They're truly terrible features, but do hold a certain charm to

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purveyors of the worst in cinema.

Out 1 (1971/1974) is an extremely lengthy, but far classier effort that falls under the category of French New Wave cinema. It's a character study drama about two unrelated characters searching for meaning in their lives, only to find their experiences slowly intertwining as the story plays out. The cinema-verite style project is being delivered on disc in two separate cuts. The first is as an 8 episode miniseries (released in 1971) as well as the 1974 four-hour theatrical cut. Extras include a feature documentary about the production as well as other bonuses.

Criterion also has two noteworthy Blu-rays. *The American Friend* (1977) is an eccentric tale from German director Wim Wenders (*Angels of Desire*

, *Buena Vista Social Club*

) about a criminal who attempts to convince a picture-frame shop worker friend to become a hit man. Both drama and mystery follow in this well regarded arthouse effort. The disc includes a new transfer and interview with Wenders and star Bruno Ganz. It also contains a pre-existing commentary track (featuring co-star Dennis Hopper) recorded in 2002 along with some deleted scenes.

Bitter Rice (1949) is an Italian drama about a female criminal taking refuge as a worker in a rice field while she hides from the authorities. Events spiral slowly out of control when co-workers and her old partner take an interest the woman. The Blu-ray features a new restoration as well as a documentary on the film and an interview with its screenwriter.

Not to be outdone, Kino have several interesting Blu-rays in the pipeline – all of which appear to be UK productions. *The Bed Sitting Room* (1969) is an eccentric sci-fi comedy with Rita Tushingham, Peter Cook and Dudley Moore about characters getting on with their lives amidst the ruin after a nuclear war. Robert Shaw and Malcolm McDowell star in the drama

Figures in a Landscape

(1970). They play two prison escapees on the run in a Latin American country.

How I Won the War (1967) marks a headlining performance from famed musician John Lennon. He and Michael Crawford lead this anti-war comedy about an incompetent WWII general clumsily leading his troops across battlefields in Europe and Africa. It's something of a cult item

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and will definitely be of interest to any Beatles enthusiasts out there.

Finally and most recently, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead* (1990) is a tale that takes the supporting characters from Shakespeare's Hamlet and throws them into their own story. In this case, they're dim half-wits attempting to learn the source of pal Hamlet's malaise (and getting into all sorts of trouble in the process). Gary Oldman and Tim Roth play the title roles.

The Warner Archive recently put out a series of older catalog titles on DVD. The lengthy list includes *Anne of Green Gables* (1934), *Bad Boy* (1949), *The Littlest Hobo* (1958), *My Pal, Wolf* (1944), *Roughshod* (1949), *Snowfire* (1958), *Station West* (1948), *The Time, the Place and the Girl* (1946), *Two Guys from Milwaukee* (1946), *Two Guys from Texas* (1948), *Wild Bill Hickok Rides* (1942) and *The Younger Brothers* (1949). I must admit to being curious about *The Littlest Hobo*

. For those unfamiliar, it follows the adventures of a good hearted German Shepherd who would wander into various towns and save the residents from some sort of trial, before hitting the road and moving on. It inspired a Canadian TV series in the 80s that was very popular with youngsters (and featured appearances by several future stars).

You Know, For Kids!

Here are the week's options for little tykes.

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Hotel Transylvania 2

Power Rangers Dino Charge: Unleashed!

Reading Rainbow: Miss Nelson is Back