

DVD/Blu-ray Roundup for August 19, 2016

Written by By Glenn Kay

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Welcome to another look at the highlights arriving in stores this week on Blu-ray and DVD. Beyond the run of new releases, this is a fantastic week for great older features making their debuts in high-definition. So if you can't make it out to the movies this week, be sure to give one of these flicks a try!

Big New Releases!

The Angry Birds Movie - The video-game franchise makes its film debut in this animated comedy. Viewers are promised an explanation as to why the birds are so ill-tempered; it may have something to do with monstrous green piggies that arrive on their island. The movie did well at the box office, but like many game adaptations, it garnered mixed notices, with more negative reviews than positive. Most didn't hate it, but they stated it was creatively uninspired and felt more like a lengthy commercial than a feature. The voice cast includes Jason Sudeikis, Josh Gad, Danny McBride, Maya Rudolph, Bill Hader, Peter Dinklage, Sean Penn, Keegan-Michael Key, Kate McKinnon, Tony Hale and Hannibal Buress.

Backgammon - This independent mystery flick tells the tale of a weekend vacation between friends. When a disagreement and breakup erupts, it results in all but one man and woman being left at the house. Reportedly, as their attraction grows, the pair becomes equally anxious that the lady's boyfriend might not have actually left the location. Critics haven't responded well to this title, saying the psychological games being played aren't particularly convincing or thrilling. It stars Noah Silver, Olivia Crocicchia, Brittany Allen, and Christian Alexander.

Bolshoi Babylon - The famous ballet is chronicled in this documentary. Recent opinion of the Russian dance troupe has been polarized, with plenty of criticism heaped at the creative choices, rivalries, and behind-the-scenes drama. This film takes viewers backstage with unprecedented access to the artists. Reaction to the feature was strong, if not exceptional. Apparently, ballet fans will be enraptured and compelled by what they see, but the filmmakers don't delve too deeply into the scandals, and newbies to dance may find it inaccessible.

Bunker of the Dead - In the mood for a low-budget zombie picture? This German-made, English language production is about a group who finds an old trench and dugout used by Nazis during WWII. They discover that it was a secret lab and even more unfortunately, they learn that the 70-year-old experiments underground are still active. This one is debuting on disc, so there are currently no reviews available. A few online write-ups suggest it features a lot of first-person photography, and as horror flicks go, it might be a little cheesy. The cast includes Michael Abts, Sarita Bradley, and Patrick Jahns.

God's Not Dead 2 - This Christian drama involves a high-school teacher who fights for the right to state her religious beliefs in class, taking her mission all the way to the courtroom. Ugghhhh.... The press panned this one universally, saying it was overlong (at a full two hours), not to mention filled with long-winded lectures and tedious sermons. They also complained that it presented some pretty awful stereotypes of those not following the lead's particular beliefs; basically, they felt that it was terrible by just about any storytelling standards. It stars Melissa Joan Hart, Jesse Metcalfe, David A. R. White, Ernie Hudson, and Robin Givens.

Ingrid Bergman: In Her Own Words - Criterion is distributing this well-regarded Swedish documentary. Using home movies, archival interviews, letters, and diaries, the picture aims to give viewers a clearer look into the private life and thoughts of this famous actress. A few said it might be a bit too long for its own good, but all found it gave an interesting and more full picture of the real person. Isabella Rossellini, Sigourney Weaver, and Alicia Vikander take part in the production.

Raiders! The Story of the Greatest Fan Film Ever Made - Here's another documentary. This one is about three 11 year-old boys who set out to do something very unusual... recreate their favorite movie, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), shot-for-shot with their own cameras. It took them 7 years to complete and this effort chronicles the experience, as well as what it all meant to the participants. Notices were very good. A few wrote that it over-complimented its subjects for making a fan film, but most believed that it was a fun flick that also captured childhood relationships as well as their dissolution in adulthood.

Sky - This English-language drama is a France/Germany co-production about a woman who ends her marriage while on vacation in the western U.S. She begins to wander the deserts on a journey of self-discovery. Not many have had the opportunity to check out this little arthouse film yet, but those who have were split on the results. Some called it odd and pretentious, while others described it as an interesting and eccentric character study. It boasts an impressive cast that includes Diane Krueger, Norman Reedus, Guy Lellouche, Lena Dunham and Lou Diamond Phillips.

Blasts From the Past!

Remember goofy action cinema of the '80s? If you do, you probably recall the surprise hit from Cannon Films, *American Ninja* (1985). This week, Olive Films is bringing the entire series to Blu-ray. The original stars Michael Dudikoff and Steve Jones as two U.S. soldiers given special martial-arts training to take on mercenaries in the Philippines. Naturally, this results in all sorts of action mayhem.

American Ninja 2: The Confrontation (1987) was the follow-up, reuniting the two stars against a new foe. This time out, the bad guy is a super-criminal and part-time scientist who has created an army of mutant ninjas ready to do his bidding. It was followed by *American Ninja 3: Blood Hunt* (1989), which introduces new hero David Bradley in the title role. Finally, *American Ninja 4: The Annihilation* (1990), teams Bradley with original star Dudikoff as they take down their deadliest foe yet... Get ready to be Dudikoffed! Fans of cheesy '80s low-budget fight films are very likely to get a kick out of them.

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But that's not all. Olive is also releasing the Frank Sinatra/Cary Grant adventure *The Pride and the Passion*

(1957). In addition, they're debuting the long out-of-print cult drama,

Tell Me That You Love Me, Junie Moon

(1970) in high definition. It stars Liza Minelli as a burn victim who struggles to rebuild her life after years in the hospital. And there's more! You can also pick up a Blu-ray of the political satire

Wild in the Streets

(1968) about a counter-culture rock band who fought for the rights of teenagers to vote in a presidential election (and for a 20-something candidate, too).

There are some great titles coming from Shout! Factory as well. *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the 8th Dimension*

(1984) is a cult flick from the '80s about a rock star/brilliant scientist/super-surgeon who attempts to stop a massive alien invasion. It's completely tongue-in-cheek and bizarre beyond words, but it's a whole lot of fun if you can get on its odd wavelength. The movie stars Peter Weller, John Lithgow, Ellen Barkin, Jeff Goldblum, Christopher Lloyd and many others. It also features one of the best end-credit sequences (featuring all of the heroes strutting) you're ever likely to see — the current crop of comic-book films could learn a thing or two from it. The "Collector's Edition" Blu-ray comes loaded with so many extra features that there isn't enough space to list them all here.

Many may not realize this, but horror film director John Carpenter (*Halloween, The Fog, The Thing*

Prince of Darkness

, and many others) made what still stands as the best Elvis Presley biography ever.

Elvis

(1979) was a mini-series that starred Kurt Russell as the famous performer and told the singer's complete life story.... the King of Rock 'n Roll also shoots out a TV or two over the course of the running time. This Blu-ray features the complete, 170-minute version, which is the one you want to see. The disc also includes some archival interviews, as well as a commentary track from an Elvis historian.

Shout! Factory also has the creepy thriller *Session 9* (2001) arriving in high-definition. It's an extremely effective, low-key chiller that was shot on video. The story involves a crew cleaning out an old mental asylum who begin experiencing strange and disturbing events. It was directed by Brad Anderson (*The Machinist*) and stars David Caruso and Peter Mullan. The disc comes with a director audio commentary, new interviews with cast and crew members, deleted scenes, featurettes, and other bonuses. If you're looking for something very scary, this should do the trick.

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Kino has some Blu-rays that are worth noting. They've got the Greece-set war drama *Eleni* (1985) featuring Kate Nelligan, John Malkovich and Linda Hunt. Those looking for B-movie thrills can enjoy Shelley Winters in

Whoever Slew Auntie Roo?

(1972), a strange, modern (for its day) take on

Hansel and Gretel

.

Enjoy *The Revenant*? Then you may be interested in an earlier flick with the identical plot (both were inspired by the same real-life story).

Man in the Wilderness (1971)

starred Richard Harris as a fur trapper who is attacked by a bear and left for dead by his compatriots. He survives and swears vengeance on those who left him behind. It arrives on Blu-ray courtesy of Warner Archive. Now viewers can compare versions for themselves.

Here's a really trashy one for bad-movie fans. Way back in the day when no-budget horror flicks were coming to VHS and Beta left, right, and center, one of the most provocative was *Microwave Massacre*

(1983). It followed a man who becomes a cannibal and begins cooking victims in a newly acquired microwave. Arrow's bringing the flick to Blu-ray and has included a commentary track, making-of featurette, and plenty of other extras.

108 Records is also putting the religious school satire, *Saved!* (2004) out on Blu-ray. Produced by Michael Stipe of the band

R.E.M.

and starring Mandy Moore, Macaulay Culkin, and Patrick Fugit, it tells the exploits of a group of troubled teens at a bible camp.

And there's still more. You'll have to settle for a DVD, but *The Dark* (1979) is arriving courtesy of distributor Shriek Show. If memory recalls, it's a pretty bad horror flick about an alien on a killing rampage. The cast includes William Devane, Cathy Lee Crosby, and Casey Kasem; it may provide a couple of unintentional laughs for bad-movie fans.

Finally, Universal is releasing some comedies on Blu-ray that may be of interest. There's the family flick *Beethoven* (1992), as well as *The 'Burbs* (1989), *The Dream Team* (1989), *The*

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Great Outdoors

(1988), and

The Money Pit

(1986).

The 'Burbs

with Tom Hanks features some great improv and is a lot of fun (despite its somewhat strange overall message), and the disc comes with some interesting extras, including the original ending.

The Great Outdoors

is a good time as well, and may evoke feelings of nostalgia for anyone who ever enjoyed summer vacations at the lake. It stars John Candy and Dan Aykroyd.

You Know, For Kids!

Here are the week's highlights for kids!

The Angry Birds Movie

Power Rangers Super Megaforce: The Complete Season

Shimmer and Shine: Welcome to Zahramay Falls (Nickelodeon)

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