

DVD/Blu-ray Roundup for Feb. 10, 2017

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Time for another look at the highlights arriving on Blu-ray and DVD this week. It's an incredibly busy edition with so many films in so many genres that it's going to take some time to get through them all. 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!

The 9th Life of Louis Drax - This young-adult suspense thriller from Alexandre Aja (*Horns*, *The Hills Have Eyes*

,
High Tension

) involves a 9 year old boy who has cheated death 9 times in his incredibly brief lifetime. A neurologist arrives to try and find out what's going on in the child's brain as well as what is happening at home, leading to conflict and intrigue with family members. Reviews were mixed for this one. Some thought the entire enterprise was tonally imbalanced and dopey, while others were impressed with the visuals and found it surprisingly interesting. It stars Jamie Dornan, Sarah Gadon, Adrian Paul, Aiden Longworth, Oliver Platt and Molly Parker.

The Alchemist Cookbook - An outcast with a background in chemistry ventures out to the remote woods to work on a personal project involving formulas that recreate the effects of black magic. In the process, he begins to believe that he may have awakened something very sinister. This feature from Joel Potrykus (*Buzzard*) played at Sundance and earned strong reception from reviewers. They suggested that it wouldn't be for everyone, but that this independent psychological horror feature was completely unique, unsettling and featured a strong lead performance. Ty Hickson plays tackles the central role.

Almost Christmas - This comedy follows a dysfunctional family who just can't stop bickering. After the family matriarch passes away, things get even more uncomfortable for the clan when they attempt to spend 5 complete days together under the same roof to celebrate the Christmas holidays. This one split critics right down the middle. Nearly half felt that the talented cast made up for the occasional story misstep. As for the others, well, in general they didn't feel that it was funny enough to recommend. It features Omar Epps, Danny Glover, Romany Malco, Mo'Nique, JB Smooth, John Michael Higgins and Gabriele Union.

American Pastoral - Ewan McGregor stars in and makes his directorial debut in this adaptation of the prized Philip Roth novel. He plays an all-American family man in the 60s who begins to see his family unravel after his teenage daughter turns into an activist and revolutionary. The press had issues with this effort, saying that despite the best of intentions, the movie didn't match the power of the book and that at times, the characters came across as artificial. It stars MrGregor, Jennifer Connolly, Dakota Fanning, Peter Riegert, Rupert Evans, David Strathairn, Uzo Aduba and Molly Parker.

Antibirth - In this independent horror flick, a hard-drinking, drug abusing party-girl gets the shock of her life when she wakes up to find herself pregnant. Of course, it's not a typical pregnancy. In fact, she begins to experience strange symptoms, leading to more concern and panic about what it happening inside. Although some stated that the storytelling was messy, notices were good overall and complimented the visuals, performances and originality of the tale. The cast includes Natasha Lyonne, Chloe Sevigny, Meg Tilly and Mark Webster.

Beyond Redemption - This martial arts action flick is about an undercover cop infiltrating a Triad gang. While there, he forges a friendship with the big boss's daughter. After a sting operation gone wrong, he attempts to protect her while maintaining his fake identity within the organization. This sounds like a Hong Kong film, but it is an English-language effort shot in Canada. There aren't any reviews out as of yet, so if you're interested you'll just have to take a

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chance. The cast is made up of stunt performers, so the fight scenes will likely be strong. The leads are played by Brian Ho and Don Lew.

Burn Country - An ex-war correspondent from Afghanistan moves to a small, sleepy town in Northern California and takes a position as a crime reporter at a local paper. It turns out to be a far more dangerous job assignment than expected when he uncovers corruption within the community. This indie drama garnered generally good response. There were a few who stated that they couldn't get on its unusual wavelength, but more found it a compellingly atmospheric and beautifully shot effort with strong acting. It features Dominic Rains, Melissa Leo and James Franco.

Cameraperson - Cinematographer Kirsten Johnson is the subject of this documentary which compiles footage and outtakes filmed around the globe through her 25-year career. There is no narration, only clips and images featuring Johnson talking to subjects, including a boxer, activists and even the filmmaker's mother. The movie received raves; it has been written that those willing to accept the unusual narrative style will find great insight into a documentary filmmaker and be inspired by many of her subjects. The disc is from Criterion, meaning there also is a wealth of bonus material arriving with the title.

Come What May - This French-Belgian drama is set during WWII, specifically during the invasion of German troops in France. An entire village in the army's path decide to leave en masse and head for the coast, with the story following the various trekkers and their relationships. Unfortunately, the North American press weren't particularly impressed with the production. Many didn't care for the by-the-numbers plotting and the overt sentimentality on display. The cast includes August Diehl, Olivier Gourmet and Mathilde Seigner.

Cross Wars - An ex-TV star gets special powers from a powerful and ancient amulet; he uses it to fight crime in LA and stop an impending apocalypse. This action/comedy is apparently based on a comic book and even more surprisingly is a sequel to a 2011 film called *Cross* (which I have never heard of). This is a straight-to-DVD effort, so you should already know what you're in for. At least it includes plenty of familiar faces in its cast - Brian Austin Green, Vinnie Jones, Danny Trejo, Tom Sizemore and Laura Heuring.

Desierto - A group of travelers headed from Mexico into the US are targeted by a nasty vigilante who takes border patrol duties into his own hands. He hunts them, gunning them down through the desert until they are forced to fight back. Reviews were mixed for this effort from Jonas

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Cuaron (son of Oscar-winning director Alfonso Cuaron), but with more leaning on the positive side. All thought the story was fairly predictable and deemed that the events were handled in a less-than-subtle manner, but many admired the tension generated and believed that the themes were relevant. It stars Gael Garcia Bernal, Alondra Hidalgo and Jeffrey Dean Morgan.

The Eagle Huntress - Told you there were a lot of movies this week! Okay, this one is a documentary focused on a 13-year old Kazakh girl in Mongolia training to become an eagle hunter. It's an occupation that has been comprised entirely of males for nearly 12 generations, but her natural ability and training proves that the youngster is as good as anyone in her field. Notices were quite strong for the feature, calling the mountain photography gorgeous and the simple narrative both moving and engaging. The film is narrated by Daisy Ridley.

Frank & Lola - An obsessive chef begins a romantic dalliance with a mysterious woman in this modern day film noir. Things become considerably more complicated and dangerous when it is revealed they both share dark, personal secrets. This independent effort received good reviews from critics. Some did find the storytelling too ambiguous, but more complimented the movie for its twist on the thriller formula and stated that it benefited greatly from forceful performances. The cast includes Michael Shannon, Imogen Poots, Michael Nyqvist, Justin Long, Emmanuelle Devos and Rosanna Arquette.

Girl Asleep - This independent coming-of-age comedy from Australia received a lot of positive press at film festivals. It involves an eccentric girl on the cusp of her 15th birthday who decides that she would prefer not to enter adulthood. In fact, she does everything she can to avoid it, until the party itself hurls her into a new and strange adult world. As mentioned, people really liked this one, calling it an enjoyably unique and oddball trip inside the head of a young woman. Sounds like a kind Aussie take on *Napoleon Dynamite*. It features Bethany Whitmore and Harrison Feldman.

Life on the Line - Told from the perspective of an electrical power grid worker, a Texas town is hit by a powerful storm in this drama that melds elements of a disaster flick. Haunted by the on-the-job death of his brother, the hero must attempt hazardous and dizzying feats to try and keep the power running through the tempest. Unfortunately, this flick was universally panned - there isn't a single positive review for it as of right now. The flick has been described as a clichéd and corny mess that doesn't do real life grid workers any sort of service. It stars John Travolta, Kate Bosworth, Devon Sawa, Gil Bellows, Julie Benz and Sharon Stone.

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Little Sister - Here's another small, indie comedy that earned plenty of praise at film festival over the previous year. It's about a young nun who is called back to visit her estranged family after receiving pertinent news about a relative. Upon arriving at her childhood residence, viewers learn that the lead was once a goth with a taste for heavy metal music. Reviews called it a great little flick that finds a funny, but not too exaggerated or over-the-top vibe while effectively examining tense family relationships. Addison Timlin, Alley Sheedy, Keith Poulson, Barbara Crampton and Peter Hedges headline.

Loving - The highest profile feature of the week is this biopic drama from Jeff Nichols (*Mud*, *Midnight Special*) about the lives of Richard and Mildred Loving. They were an interracial couple in Virginia who spent more than a decade attempting to have their marriage validated and accepted by the state. It only earned one Academy Award nomination, but the movie received very strong marks from the press and has been described as a quiet, low-key and worthy effort with exceptional performances. The cast includes Ruth Negga, Joel Edgerton, Will Dalton, Michael Shannon and Nick Kroll.

Nerdland - This independent, animated, R-rated comedy involves two friends struggling to find their fortune in Los Angeles. Desperate, they decide fame (or even infamy) is better than nothing and take crude, rude steps to attract some attention. Notices were mixed-negative. A few opined that the film did have interesting things to say about celebrity culture, but more were turned off by the gross-out humor. At least there are some big names behind the project. It was written by Andrew Kevin Walker (*Se7en*, *Sleepy Hollow*, *Panic Room*) and the voice cast includes Paul Rudd, Patton Oswalt, Hannibal Buress, Kate Micucci, Riki Lindhome and Mike Judge.

The Take - An American pickpocket living in Paris removes the wrong bag from the wrong person in this thriller. After going through the contents and throwing a toy away, it is revealed that the item is an explosive bomb - he then finds himself on the run and forced to clear his name. Reaction was split for this multinational co-production between the UK, France and USA. About half enjoyed the quick-pace and impressive action, but others had issues with characters and felt that the movie didn't take full advantage of its concept. It stars Idris Elba, Richard Madden, Charlotte Le Bon, Kelly Reilly and Anatol Yusef.

Trolls - This animated hit involves these spiky-haired little forest dwellers, who are filled with boundless energy and enthusiasm. When their village is invaded by a nasty intruder and friends are kidnapped, the happiest troll in the land trots out with perhaps the gloomiest one around to team up and save the day. Notices were reasonable for this entry. Some found the constant

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flatulence gags and scatological humor unfunny, but more enjoyed the numerous musical numbers and enthusiasm on display. The voice cast includes Anna Kendrick, Justin Timberlake, Gwen Stefani, Zooey Deschanel, James Corden and Russell Brand.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST!

It's hard to believe that you couldn't find something from that lengthy list of release. But if nothing there strikes your fancy, there are plenty of older releases either being released for the first time in high definition, or getting spiffed up with new extras and features. The first is Lionsgate's 30th Anniversary Collector's Edition of *Dirty Dancing* (1987). This edition of the hugely popular romance/dance flick starring Patrick Swayze and Jennifer Grey comes with a ridiculous amount of bonus features including multiple commentaries, deleted scenes, screen tests, outtakes, new shorts and physical replica items like little period mirrors, wrist bands and the like. If you're a fan of this tale and don't already own it, this is probably a good bet.

With the passing of Carrie Fisher last year, fans might be interested in picking up the film that is based on her personal memoirs. It's called *Postcards From the Edge* (1990) and it stars Meryl Streep, Shirley MacLaine and Dennis Quaid. The disc arrives on Blu-ray courtesy of Mill Creek, which means it won't contain much in the way of extras, but will come at an inexpensive price point.

Sony Pictures have a Blu-ray of the Sidney Poitier classic, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?* (1967) in a 50th Anniversary Edition release. For those unfamiliar, this is the story of a couple of parents whose personal views on relations are changed after meeting their daughter's African-American fiancé. This disc includes an introduction to the film by Tom Brokaw, Quincy Jones, Karen Kramer and Steven Spielberg, as well as multiple featurettes, an award presentation to director Stanley Kramer and some publicity materials.

Severin are known for their loving and elaborate treatment of low-budget, cult and exploitation films. This week, they've got *Wild Beasts* (1984) arriving on Blu-ray. Also known as *Belve Feroci*, it's an Italian feature from director Franco Prosperi, most famous for his "shockumentaries" *Mondo Cane* and *Africa Addio*. This narrative is about zoo animals who are contaminated with PCP in their drinking water.

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They escape and go on a mad, killing rampage through the city. Besides a good transfer of the feature, the disc has numerous interviews with the director, lead actor, editor and animal wrangler. It also contains a trailer.

Finally, Redemption have the Spanish/French Jesus Franco horror flick, *Dr. Orloff's Monster* (1964) aka

The Mistresses of Dr. Jekyll

. Personally, I'm not a fan of Franco, but this is one of his more competent efforts, about a mad doctor conducting strange experiments. He's visited by his pretty young niece, who tries to figure out what is going on and encounters a familiar, zombie-like servant while wandering the halls.

YOU KNOW, FOR KIDS!

There's a lot of kid-friendly entertainment available this week.

Justice League: Dark

LEGO Ninjago: Day of the Departed

PJ Masks: Let's Go PJ Masks!

Power Rangers: Dino Charge: The Complete Season

Power Rangers: Samurai: The Complete Season

Sabrina: Down Under

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Shaun the Sheep: Seasons 3 & 4

Shimmer and Shine: Friendship Divine

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