

Written by gallupsun

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By Glenn Kay

For the Sun

Welcome to another look at some of the highlights arriving on Blu-ray and DVD. It's another remarkably busy week with big Hollywood titles and independent features from numerous genres. So, if you can't or shouldn't be heading out to the movies this week, be sure to give one of these titles a try!

BIG NEW RELEASES!

BAD CANDY: In this independent horror anthology flick, two New Salem, Mass. radio station hosts working a Halloween late shift relate scary stories over the air. The chilling segments involve a young woman whose monstrous drawing comes to life, a morgue worker using illicit substances to get through their night shift and several more. Unfortunately, the press was split on the effectiveness of the movie. About half thought that the tales were not memorable and that the film felt messy and cobbled together.

Still, just as many claimed that a sufficient number of the individual segments were atmospheric and enough of them worked to earn the feature a modest recommendation. The cast includes Corey Taylor, Zach Galligan, Derek Russo and Haley Leary.

COMING HOME IN THE DARK: A high school teacher, his new wife and two stepchildren decide to take a trip to the remote coast in this Australian horror picture. Of course, it turns out to be a terrible idea. While returning home, the family comes across two threatening, psychopathic drifters while on the road. They are taken hostage by the creeps and attempt to escape their captors.

As this occurs, the lead discovers that there is a past connection between him and the threatening figures. Critics were chilled to the bone by this picture. A handful of reviewers complained that the movie was too cold and cruel to recommend. However, the vast majority called the film well-acted, extremely tense and very frightening from beginning to end.

It stars Daniel Gillies, Erik Thomson, Miriama McDowell and Matthias Luafutu.

DARK BLOOD: After murdering the man who killed his son, a father awaits trial in a Colombian prison. With no criminal record, he quickly discovers that the facility is a brutal and horrifying place. The protagonist must immediately deal with nasty and brutal guards, as well as attacks from other inmates. Viewers witness the man slowly change, slowly hardening the longer he is forced to endure these extreme conditions.

There haven't been many write-ups for this Spanish-language picture so far, but the ones that have appeared online have been more positive than negative. A few have said that the picture tries too hard to upset viewers and almost appears to take pleasure in piling on the indignities. Slightly more called it powerful and shocking, benefiting from a documentary-style approach and excellent performances. John Leguizamo takes on the lead role.

THE EMPEROR'S SWORD: This period action film from China involves a magical sword with power so immense that it is broken into pieces and hidden by an emperor. Many years later the leader passes away and a sinister rebel seizes the throne. Naturally, he decides to locate the incredible weapon and possess its power. He begins massacring those who stand in his way.

The young daughter of a great general is the only one who can stop the power-mad tyrant. This foreign-language feature hasn't received many reviews so far, but those that have appeared online have been positive. They call it a fast-paced throwback to old-fashioned "Wuxia" flicks with impressive swordplay and plenty of performers leaping great heights on wires. The cast

includes Mou Fengbin, Yilin Hao and Qiyu Yang.

FourGoodDays.jpg

FOUR GOOD DAYS: Based on a true story by Pulitzer Prize-winning Washington Post writer Eli Saslow, this drama follows a 31-year-old woman battling a heroin addiction that has completely derailed her life. She asks for assistance from her mother, who has all but given up on her. The parent decides to try one last time to work with her child in the hopes of getting her off drugs. This feature divided the press.

Almost half of them thought the cast was good, but that the writing let the performers down, offering no new take on the material and ultimately coming across as cornball. However, just as many suggested that this was an important film that would resonate with many viewers, complimenting the work of the cast as exceptional and engaging. It stars Glenn Close, Mila Kunis, Stephen Root and Chad Lindberg.

A GIFT FROM BOB: Also released under the title, "A Christmas Gift from Bob," this is a sequel to the 2016 British drama, "A Street Cat Named Bob." The original was about a drug addict who turns his life around after befriending a stray cat. It was successful enough to warrant this holiday-themed follow-up, which features an animal welfare organization stepping in to try and separate the main character from his feline pal. Response toward this feature was generally upbeat.

A small group of reviewers complained that the follow-up was sugary and much more sentimental than the original, lessening its impact. Still, most thought the cat was adorable and that it provided plenty of entertainment for the entire family. The cast includes Luke Treadaway, Anna Wilson-Jones, Stephen McCole, Nina Wadia, and Bob the Cat.

MY SALINGER YEAR: A young, aspiring writer finds herself working as an assistant to a literary agent for J.D. Salinger. She is assigned to read fan mail for Salinger and send form letters in return. However, after taking in the heartfelt words and messages from his readers, she decides to personalize responses and use the famous writer's name. She begins to find her own voice crafting the letters, but naturally begins to cause trouble when others figure out what she has been up to.

This drama received more positive notices than negative ones. A quarter of critics disliked the screenplay, stating that the characters and situations felt phony. However, the majority thought the film was well-produced, well-acted and complimented the cast for selling the story's predictable elements. It features Margaret Qualley, Sigourney Weaver, Douglas Booth, Seána Kerslake and Colm Feore.

OLD HENRY: This western follows a widowed farmer who finds an injured stranger at his doorstep. He takes the man in and discovers that the wounded person is carrying a satchel of cash. A group of figures claiming to be lawmen arrive on the property, demanding the man and his money. The homeowner must decide who he should believe.

As tension builds, viewers discover that farmer may have a history as a sharpshooter. Critics were very impressed with this picture. One or two did state that the movie was too low-key and slow for their liking. Almost everyone else said that the lead performance was exceptional and that the film was tense and worked tremendously well as a minimalist western.

Tim Blake Nelson, Scott Haze, Gavin Lewis, Trace Adkins and Stephen Dorff headline the picture.

REMINISCENCE: In the future, global warming results in the flooding of major cities. One individual in Miami works as a private investigator of the mind, using special equipment to step into a person's memories and learn important facts for them. When a beautiful new client befriends the lead and disappears, the protagonist sets out to figure out what happened to her. He uncovers a conspiracy, but also must deal with terrible side effects from overusing the technology.

The press largely panned this science-fiction feature. A small contingent enjoyed the concept, called the movie clever and complimented the photography and visual effects. Still, the majority called the movie overstuffed and dramatically inert, saying that they eventually got tired of unraveling the complicated mystery. The cast includes Hugh Jackman, Rebecca Ferguson, Thandiwe Newton, Cliff Curtis and Daniel Wu.

RESPECT: Famous singer/songwriter Aretha Franklin is the subject of this biopic. It focuses on her rise from a child singing in her father's church choir, to signing with a major record label and earning international superstardom. We also see glimpses of her personal life and marriage to her producer, which results in domestic violence. Additionally, the film shows what inspired Franklin's biggest-selling album, "Amazing Grace."

Response toward the finished product was more positive than negative. Those who disliked the picture stated that the movie was too long and glossy, noting that it didn't deal with some of the darker aspects of its subject's life. However, more admired the lead performance and thought the film served as a decent introduction for those unfamiliar with the performer. It stars Jennifer Hudson, Forest Whitaker, Marlon Wayans, Audra McDonald, Marc Maron and Tituss Burgess.

SURGE: An introverted man working a difficult, soulless job in airport security feels depressed and listless. He eventually experiences a psychotic break, deciding to cut loose for 24 hours and act instinctively. Crimes and violent acts like robberies are committed as he rampages through the streets of London. About three quarters of reviewers appreciated this gritty and gloomy feature, while the rest were unimpressed.

Those who gave it a poor write-up thought that the movie never managed to make viewers care about the plight of the protagonist. However, the consensus was that the lead actor was fantastic and the movie tense, keeping one glued to the screen as the lead's mind slowly snaps under pressure. Ben Whishaw, Ellie Haddington and Hammed Animashaun headline the feature.

TINA: This documentary chronicles the life and experiences of popular singer, songwriter and actress Tina Turner. Using a wealth of never-before-seen footage, audio tapes, personal pictures and interviews, she describes growing up and how she began her career. The artist details her initial success and marriage to Ike Turner. After escaping from this abusive relationship, viewers see her newfound popularity as a chart-topping solo artist.

This movie earned excellent reviews overall. There were a couple of notices that said it was a standard tribute that spent too much time focused on her troubled relationship with Ike Turner. Still, all others suggested that it effectively managed to juggle dark personal trauma with upbeat experiences, ultimately serving as an inspirational ode to a talented figure.

VAL: Speaking of documentaries, interested parties can also pick up this picture that details the life of actor Val Kilmer. We learn that the performer was an early supporter of film and home video technology, recording hundreds of hours of himself at home, as well as footage taken working on various projects. This unseen material is cut together with Kilmer narrating various elements of his life, from his roles on stage and screen, as well as his marriage and battle with throat cancer. Reaction was very positive for this effort.

A handful of critics thought the fact that the actor provided all of the material and narration meant that the film had a biased perspective on the individual. Still, others were impressed with the incredible behind-the-scenes footage and new details about the thespian, stating that it painted a clearer picture of who Kilmer really is.

WATERLILY JAGUAR: A popular novelist desires more accolades from critics. He sets out to write a new, dramatic book that will wow everyone. Unfortunately, his obsession with creating the perfect novel begins to cause friction at home. His marriage becomes strained and his behavior begins to have negative effects on everyone around him.

Write-ups for this independent drama were split, earning a wide variety of responses. Some found the character difficult to root for and complained that the narrative lacked proper form and structure. However, just as many praised it for its unusual approach, stating that it effectively captured the mind of a writer going through a mid-life crisis and trying to create a great work of art. It stars James LeGros, Mira Sorvino, Stacey Oristano, Dominic Monaghan and Christopher Backus.

WHITE AS SNOW: This French, foreign-language comedy/drama was released in its homeland back in 2019, but is only now arriving on disc in North America. The film itself is a modern update of the "Snow White" fairy tale. It involves a woman of beauty who is targeted by a stepmother, who wants her dead. The lead is rescued from a murder plot by a man who lives on a farm.

She stays there, enrapturing seven village locals who want to help her out. The press was not wowed by this feature. A few believed that the movie provided an interesting new take on the fairy tale and even had some curious subtext. However, the consensus was that it was clumsy and didn't work, wasting a great cast with subpar material and little in the way of a clear message.

The cast includes Lou de Laâge, Isabelle Huppert and Charles Berling.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST!

While plenty of new films are hitting store shelves, there are just as many older titles receiving high-definition upgrades. Arrow Video is rereleasing the extremely enjoyable independent monster movie, "C.H.U.D." (1984). The story is about cannibal creatures who live in the sewers and eat New Yorkers during the evening hours. It was released as a "Special Edition" Blu-ray a couple of years back, but it went out of print.

Now, it's being made available again in a "Standard Edition". Presumably, it'll have at least some of the same great extras that were on the previous edition

The highlight of the week for this distributor is a "Limited Edition" 4K Ultra HD and Blu-ray of "The Hills Have Eyes" (1977). This is an early classic from director Wes Craven ("A Nightmare on Elm Street," "Scream") about a family who is attacked by a feral family while camping in the desert. You'll get a new 4K restoration of the film with improved picture quality, postcards, a reversible fold-out poster, a 40-page booklet on the movie, three archived audio commentaries (one with the cast, another with director Craven, as well as one with a film critic), a lengthy-making of documentary, an interview with the composer, outtakes, an alternate ending, publicity materials and more.

MVD Visual is presenting a couple of new Blu-rays. They have an interesting title from the legendary horror filmmaker Stuart Gordon ("Re-Animator," "From Beyond") and acclaimed writer David Mamet ("Glengarry Glen Ross"). "Edmund" (2005) follows a fortune teller who gets mixed up with an assortment of shady characters. The movie has an all-star cast including William H. Macy, Julia Stiles, Joe Mantegna, Rebecca Pidgeon, Mena Suvari, Jeffrey Combs and George Wendt.

The Blu-ray includes a commentary with Mamet and a second track featuring Gordon and two of the producers. It also comes with a featurette, deleted scenes and a trailer.

“Where the Red Fern Grows” (2003) is a family film about a boy and his hunting dog. This movie arrives on Blu-ray from the same distributor with a featurette on the production, a special on the animal stars and a trailer.

Kino is making Blu-rays available of three W.C. Fields comedies this week. Specifically, “The Bank Dick” (1940), “It’s a Gift” (1934), and “The Old Fashioned Way” (1934). They all come with film historian commentaries and trailers.

MPI Media Group is presenting a “Collector’s Edition” Blu-ray of the South Korean period drama, “The Concubine” (2012). It involves an illicit love triangle unfolding in a king’s palace. This release includes a Blu-ray and DVD with trailers, as well as a booklet on the film with director/actor profiles, and photos.

If action and kung-fu movies are more to your liking, 88 Films has a Blu-ray of “The Chinese Boxer” (1970). This film is from the legendary Shaw Brothers production house and the story involves a Chinese man taking revenge after his martial arts school is attacked by Japanese thugs. Bonuses include a film historian commentary and featurettes on the action scenes.

Horror fans can also pick up Media Blasters’ “Encore Edition” Blu-ray/DVD of the independent horror film, “Wicked Lake” (2008). It follows a group of women who travel to the mountains, only to be attacked by hillbillies. This 2-disc edition comes with the uncut theatrical version and a new, re-imagined director’s cut with the original language track, as well as other bonuses.

Mondo Macabro is releasing Blu-rays of three Italian genre films. They have “The Designated Victim” (1971), “Human Animals” (1983), and “It’s Nothing Mama, Just a Game” (1974). All of the titles arrive on disc with 4K transfers taken from the original film negatives. They also arrive with cast and crew interviews, as well as trailers.

“The Designated Victim” also includes an extended cut and alternate scenes.

Code Red has a Blu-ray of the western “One More Train to Rob” (1971) with George Peppard and John Vernon. It’s about a group of men who decide to steal money and jewels from a train passing through California’s gold mining country. The disc has an original trailer for the movie.

Full Moon is presenting “Mania Killer” (1987) aka “Maniac Killer” on Blu-ray. It’s a French horror flick with Bo Svenson and Chuck Connors and details a religious cult causing chaos in a small village.

There are a lot of musical biopics being released this week and The Film Detective has another to add with their “Special Edition” Blu-ray of “The Fabulous Dorsleys” (1947). It stars Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey as themselves, chronicling their rise up the charts with tunes like “I’m Getting Sentimental Over You” and “Tangerine.” This disc includes a commentary track from an expert on the pair, as well as an original documentary on the music of the era.

VCI is presenting a Blu-ray/DVD package of “Sparrows” (1926). Mary Pickford stars in this silent classic about a kidnapped orphan trying to escape from her nasty guardian and a gang of thugs. The movie was reconstructed for this pressing by The Library of Congress and scanned in 4K. It also comes with a newly-composed orchestral score.

Lionsgate is celebrating the 30th anniversary of the comedy “L.A. Story” (1991) by presenting it on Blu-ray for the first time in North America. It’s about a Los Angeles weatherman dealing with trends and fads in the city while attempting to woo the woman of his dreams. The movie stars Steve Martin, Victoria Tennant, Richard E. Grant, and Sarah Jessica Parker. Extras include deleted scenes and outtakes, numerous featurettes on the production and director, as well as marketing materials.

Paramount has several new titles as well. “The Addams Family” (1991) is getting a new “With More Mamushka!” edition. It is receiving a 4K Ultra HD release and a regular Blu-ray (each one is available separately, so make sure you pick up the right disc for your system). Both have theatrical and extended cuts of the movie, a new intro to the longer version, a special on director Barry Sonnenfeld (“Men in Black”) and archival featurettes.

No word on whether the very funny sequel will eventually be getting the same treatment.

The studio also has a Blu-ray of the amusing comedy, “Evolution” (2001). David Duchovny and Orlando Bloom are college professors who team up with a government agent played by Julianne Moore to investigate alien phenomena. Paramount is also putting out a new edition of “The Ten Commandments” (1956). You can pick it up as a 4K Ultra HD Steelbook or a regular Blu-ray. Both present a new and sharper transfer of the feature.

And you can purchase a “Special Collector’s Edition” Blu-ray of the hit Tom Cruise picture, “Top Gun” (1986). It deals with the trials and tribulations of young pilots in the Navy’s prestigious fighter school. Besides the high-definition image quality, the disc contains a legacy featurette, a 6-part documentary on the movie, commentary by filmmakers, cast and naval experts, multi-angle storyboards, a look at real pilots who inspired the flick, Tom Cruise interviews and more.

Warner Bros. is releasing a special 4K edition of the animated DC superhero film, “Batman: Year One” (2011).

That may please comic-book fans, but their big title of the week is “The Outsiders” (1983). Based on the S. E. Hinton novel, it’s a period piece that follows the lives of a group of teens from the wrong side of the tracks. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola (“The Godfather,” “Apocalypse Now”), the movie features an amazing cast of future stars like Matt Dillon, Ralph Macchio, Diane Lane, Patrick Swayze, Emilio Estevez, Rob Lowe, Tom Cruise and C. Thomas Howell and is an effective and well-shot teen drama. Coppola later re-cut the movie to more closely represent the original book - that version has been released on Blu-ray, but the original theatrical cut has never been available in high definition.

Frankly, I prefer the original cut, which is leaner and more effective. I even like the bombastic score in the earlier version, which is grandiose, but matches the heightened teen emotions on display. Whichever version you prefer, this exclusive 4K Ultra HD + Digital edition presents both versions of the movie with the highest possible quality. And it comes with a ton of bonuses both new and old, that are certain to please fans of the feature.

Hopefully a regular Blu-ray version will follow in the near future.

BluRay-DVD Roundup for Nov. 12, 2021

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Finally, Warner Archive is making made-to-order Blu-rays available of the films, “Fury” (1936), “Ladies They Talk About” (1933), and “The Last of Sheila” (1973) through Amazon.

YOU KNOW, FOR KIDS!

Here are some of the week’s kid-friendly titles.

“A Gift from Bob”

“Spirit Riding Free: Spirit of Christmas” Netflix Special

“Where the Red Fern Grows” (2003)

ON THE TUBE!

And these are all of the TV-themed releases arriving on store shelves.

“Ancient Aliens” Season 14

“The Christmas Doctor” (Hallmark TV-movie) DVD

“Christmas in Homestead” (Hallmark TV-movie) DVD

“A Cookie Cutter Christmas” (Hallmark TV-movie) DVD

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“DC’s Legends of Tomorrow” Season 6 Blu-ray

“Emily in Paris” Season 1

“FRONTLINE: America After 9/11” (PBS) DVD

“A Goodwink Christmas: Second Chance, First Love” (Hallmark TV-movie) DVD

“Muhammad Ali: A Film by Ken Burns, Sarah Burns and David McMahon” (PBS) Blu-ray

“Saved by the Bell” Season 1 (2020 series)

“Snowpiercer” Season 2 Blu-ray

“When the Heart Calls Holiday Double Feature: Home for Christmas & The Greatest Christmas Wish” DVD

“Younger” The Complete Series

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