

By Glenn Kay

For the Sun

Welcome to a brand-new year and another examination of the latest titles arriving on Blu-ray and DVD. Things are just beginning to gear up after the holidays, but there are a few notable features arriving on shelves. 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!

ANTLERS: Set in Oregon, this horror tale follows a pair of men who run a meth lab out of an abandoned mine. One day, one of the men goes to the site with his young son and a few other workers. The group is suddenly attacked by a monster. The father and child survive and rush home, but they notice their bodies changing.

Fearful, the dad demands that his other son lock them up in a remote part of the house and keep watch as their conditions worsen. This chiller earned slightly more upbeat notices than negative ones. A fair number of write-ups said the story's twists were ineffective and that movie didn't offer anything new or different that separated it from other genre features. However, the majority did like the performances and complimented the film as a simple, but effective horror picture that was better than many other pictures of its kind.

It stars Keri Russell, Jesse Plemons, Jeremy T. Thomas, Graham Greene and Scott Haze.

BLACK FRIDAY: Purchasing gifts on Black Friday can be a stressful experience, but this horror/comedy takes the holiday to even more dangerous extremes. A group of disgruntled store workers prepare to open their store at midnight for an onslaught of customers. When a comet crashes outside the building, it turns the shoppers into monsters. Workers soon find themselves fighting for their lives.

The majority of press members enjoyed this feature. There was a contingent that noted that while it was amusing, the screenplay didn't make the most of the concept and the end results were forgettable. Still, the consensus was that this was a wild and enjoyable B-movie that features great practical effects and a likable collection of familiar performers doing their best to sell every outrageous gag. The cast includes Devon Sawa, Ivana Baquero, Michael Jai White and Bruce Campbell.

THE DJINN: For those unfamiliar with the title figure, a Djinn is a spirit or demon from Arabian and Muslim mythology. Apparently, some can be good, but in most horror flicks they are of the sinister variety. This feature tells the story of a mute boy who is left home alone in his father's apartment. He finds a book of spells in a closet and raises a Djinn who will grant him a wish.

Unfortunately, there is a terrible price to be paid for making a deal with the monster and the youngster must struggle to survive. Critics were positive about this feature. A small group commented that the small apartment setting was a detriment and they didn't find the story involving. Still, most were impressed by how scary and stylish the film was, noting that the performances were strong and the movie possessed a great deal of atmosphere and chills.

Ezra Dewey, Rob Brownstein, Tevy Poe and John Erickson headline the feature.

IDA RED: A family matriarch decides to ask her family for a huge favor in this crime drama. After being arrested for a robbery-gone-wrong, doctors tell the lady that she only has months to live. Determined to get out of jail and live her remaining days as a free woman, she asks her son and nephew to pull off an elaborate scheme to help break her out. The two must decide whether or not to proceed with the instructions given by the woman.

Reviews weren't very strong for this feature. A handful thought the performers were engaging enough to keep the attention of viewers. Unfortunately, most said that the movie didn't build up much dramatic tension and instead felt repetitive and slow-moving. It features Josh Hartnett, Frank Grillo, Melissa Leo, Sofia Hublitz and William Forsythe.

This movie is being released exclusively on DVD.

ONLY THE ANIMALS: This French drama involves the disappearance of a woman during a winter storm. When the snow eventually melts, her car is discovered on an isolated road. The police decide to interview the nearby residents in order to determine what happened. As they do so, secrets about the various locals are revealed and the disturbing case becomes even more entangled.

This feature was released in its home country in 2019 and received several Cesare nominations (the French equivalent of an Academy Award), as well as raves from the press. A very small number couldn't get on its wavelength and called the main storytelling technique gimmicky. The vast majority called it an excellent thriller using multiple viewpoints that kept them intrigued and gripped throughout, as what really occurred was unraveled. The cast includes Denis Ménochet, Laure Calamy, Damien Bonnard and Nadia Tereszkiewicz.

STOP AND GO: In this comedy, two sisters decide to drive cross country and retrieve their grandmother from a retirement home after learning of a COVID-19 outbreak on the premises. They race as quickly as they can, attempting to avoid all contact with people along the way. Of course, things don't go as planned. The ladies also end up having to race against another family member who doesn't believe in the pandemic and may end up passing the virus on to their grandmother.

Response toward this independent comedy was generally positive. About a quarter of reviewers complained that it simply wasn't sharp or funny enough to recommend. However, more said the film became progressively more entertaining as it continued and felt that the chemistry between the leads was fantastic. Currently, the film is only being released on DVD.

It stars Whitney Call, Mallory Everton, Julia Jolley and Anne Sward Hansen.

THE SUPERDEEP: A U.S.S.R. team conducts research in 12,000 meters under the ground in a hidden base. When a new group of agents arrives to investigate the site and the work being conducted, a horrifying secret is discovered. This is a genre film, so if you guessed that the team was creating monsters underground, give yourself a pat on the back. Everyone is attacked by the strange beasts and fights to keep the menace contained before it reaches the surface.

This Russian flick was not particularly well-received by critics. Those who liked it said that the movie looked spectacular and that the visual effects and elaborate death scenes were very well executed. Unfortunately, the consensus was that despite its slick appearance, the characters weren't very well-developed and so there wasn't much reason to care about the plight of those trapped beneath the surface. The cast includes Milena Radulović, Sergey Ivanyuk and Nikolay Kovbas.

TOGETHER TOGETHER: This independent comedy involves a single middle-aged man conducting an unusual series of interviews. He eventually hires a young woman in her twenties to be a surrogate mother and carry his unborn child. The strangers slowly get to know each other over the course of the following nine months and find that their new friendship changes their definitions of love, connection and relationships. This feature received a lot of good press during its limited run at movies theaters.

Only a few had issues with what they witnessed, calling the movie pleasant, but lacking any drama or tension. The overwhelming majority wrote that the movie was a low-key delight, providing a new spin on relationship movies. They also noted the great performances, saying it resulted in an endearing and relatable film. The film stars Patti Harrison, Ed Helms, Rosalind Chao, Timm Sharp, Nora Dunn and Tig Notaro.

ZEROES AND ONES: When an unknown enemy threatens the Vatican and the entire world, a U.S. soldier heads to Rome to try to find out who is responsible. After discovering more about those involved in the potential attack, he contacts his incarcerated and estranged twin brother (who was once a member of the organization), asking for advice and in helping to save the day. Write-ups for this thriller from eccentric filmmaker Abel Ferrara ("King of New York," "Bad Lieutenant," "Tommaso") were slightly more positive than negative. Those who gave it negative reviews really hated the movie, calling it an incoherent and frustrating mess.

Slightly more admired the film, saying that it was designed to show its lead falling into a murky mess of a situation that provided no easy answers. The cast includes Ethan Hawke (as the lead and his twin), Cristina Chiriac and Valerio Mastandrea.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST!

Blu-ray/DVD Roundup for Jan. 7, 2022

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If you're looking for older entertainment, there are a few features with image upgrades coming your way. Shout! Factory is releasing the Japanese animated movie "Weathering with You" (2019) in 4K Ultra HD (with a regular Blu-ray included in the package, too). The story involves a lonely teenager who meets a girl with special powers that allow her to stop the rain and clear the sky. Although it didn't end up getting an Oscar nomination, the movie did win awards from other critic groups during its release.

In addition to the high-quality picture, the discs also include an interview with the director, a featurette on the making of the movie, a director filmography special, a discussion on the feature, and publicity materials.

Kino has plenty of Blu-rays to report on. "All My Sons" (1948) is a film-noir with Burt Lancaster and Edward G. Robinson about an industrialist who frames his business partner for a crime. Years later, the imprisoned man's son proposes to the sneaky industrialist's daughter, causing past wrongs to resurface. The movie has been given a new 2K master and comes with a film historian commentary and trailers.

"China" (1943) stars Alan Ladd as a gas salesman in the title country who joins a band of guerillas fighting invading Japanese forces. The Blu-ray comes with a movie expert audio track and a trailer.

"The Crime of the Century" (1933) is a thriller about a journalist investigating a mentalist who predicts murders around town. The bonuses on this release are the same as for the previous title. "Double Door" (1934) is a suspense picture about a nasty family matriarch who will do anything to control the members of her family. Naturally, a couple of them try to break free from her clutches.

The spy feature "Golden Earrings" (1947) follows a British agent trying to retrieve a poison gas formula from Nazis forces. The agent falls for a Gypsy woman after she helps him evade capture. This Blu-ray comes with a film historian commentary and a trailer.

"Rich and Strange" (1931), aka "East of Shanghai" is an early Alfred Hitchcock effort. It's a dark comedy about a marriage in crisis during a lengthy cruise around the world. The movie has been given a 4K restoration for this Blu-ray release and it also has a movie expert commentary,

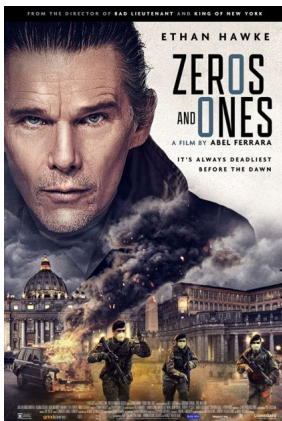
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an archived audio conversation between Hitchcock and Francois Truffaut about the movie, a critic introduction to the movie, and plenty of trailers.

Additionally, Kino has a Blu-ray of “Shake Hands with the Devil” (1959), a James Cagney picture about the Irish War of Independence. It appears on disc with a new 2K master, an interview with co-star Don Murray, and a trailer.

If you’re looking for B-movies, “The Naked Ape” (1973) is coming your way courtesy of Code Red. It was produced by Hugh Hefner (of “Playboy” magazine fame) and is a narrative film based on a pop-zoology bestselling book that details the evolution of sex through the ages. The movie has been given a 2K master for its Blu-ray debut along with a trailer.



Paramount is offering a Blu-ray of the drama, “Freedom Writers” (2007). The story follows a high school teacher in a racially-divided school who inspires tolerance and trust in her students through her creative writing class. It stars Hilary Swank and Patrick Dempsey.

YOU KNOW, FOR KIDS!

Hang tight kids, there will be more children’s entertainment arriving on disc next week!

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ON THE TUBE!

If you want to get an early head start on picking up some Hallmark Christmas made-for-cable movies, this is your week. You can also purchase plenty of interesting educational material courtesy of PBS.

“American Veteran” (PBS) DVD

“If I Only Had Christmas” (Hallmark Channel) DVD

“Her Pen Pal” (Hallmark Channel) DVD

“A Nashville Christmas Carol” (Hallmark Channel) DVD

“NATURE: My Garden of a Thousand Bees” (PBS) DVD

“NOVA: Arctic Drift” (PBS) DVD

“NOVA: The Cannabis Question” (PBS) DVD

“Sand Dollar Cover” (Hallmark Channel) DVD

“Time for Us to Come Home for Christmas” (Hallmark Channel) DVD

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“USS Christmas” (Hallmark Channel) DVD

VISIT: WWW.CINEMASTANCE.COM