

It's time for another look at some of the highlights that will be arriving on Blu-ray and DVD. Once again, this is a busy week with some notable Hollywood films, independent fare and international curiosities. 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!

THE 355: This thriller involves a female CIA agent working on a case with a fellow spy and close friend. When her partner/pal is killed in the line of duty while trying to recover a top-secret weapon, the lead becomes determined to find out who is responsible. In order to locate and stop the villains from using the stolen creation, she joins forces with other female agents from across the globe.

This picture was largely panned during its theatrical release at the beginning of January. A small group commented that they liked the cast enough to overlook the predictability of the story. However, the majority wrote that even great talent couldn't salvage this feature. They noted that it was bland and critiqued the screenplay for its underdeveloped characters and corny dramatic elements.

Jessica Chastain, Sebastian Stan, Penelope Cruz, Lupita Nyong'o, Diane Kruger and Fan Bingbing headline the film.

AMERICAN UNDERDOG: Kurt Warner is the subject of this biopic sports drama. It tells his life story and struggles to make his dreams of playing in the National Football League a reality.

After earning accolades in college, Warner fails to impress NFL scouts and doesn't get drafted. Working as a stock boy in a grocery store, he continues trying out for various teams and eventually lands a backup slot with the St. Louis Rams. With the support of his friends and family, he ends up a Superbowl champion and Hall of Fame quarterback.

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Response towards this sports film was generally good. About a quarter of reviewers complained that this was a bland and squeaky-clean biopic that didn't paint a detailed picture of its subject. Still, the majority commented that the film was an enjoyably old-fashioned and inspirational tale and was helped tremendously by an excellent cast. It stars Zachary Levi, Anna Paquin, Dennis Quaid, Ser'Darius Blain, Hayden Zeller and Bruce McGill.

HARD HIT: In this thriller, a well-to-do bank manager decides to drive his kids to school. After pulling away in his car with the kids, the lead receives a threatening cell phone call.

He is informed that a bomb has been installed under his seat and that it will detonate unless he pays a ransom. As he continues driving, the man tries to control his panic, find a way to collect the needed money and determine who is responsible for the heinous act.

There aren't a great many reviews in this part of the world for this South Korean, foreign-language title. Notices that have popped up online are split. Nearly half state that it is a dull and routine thriller. Still, others suggest that while it has plot holes it is an entertaining and, at times, exciting effort.

Additionally, the movie received a Best Supporting Actress Buil Film Award nomination (which is the South Korean equivalent of an Oscar). The cast includes Chang-Wook Ji, Woo-jin Jo, Haerry Kim and Jae-in Lee.



HOUSE OF GUCCI: This biopic is Inspired by the true story behind the Italian fashion brand, Gucci, and the family who run it. The story focuses on the arrival of an ambitious and calculating woman who marries a Gucci. She quickly ruffles the feathers of those around her as she rises to prominence within the company.

Her success triggers a fracture within the family, resulting in acts of betrayal, revenge and eventually, murder.

Overall, critics were positive about this drama, although there were a wide variety of passionate and extreme opinions about the end product. Those who panned the movie claimed that while the story offered lots of conflict, it all came across as over-the-top, ineffectual and campy. Still, the consensus was that this was a wild and winning melodrama involving a very memorable group of larger-than-life personalities.

It features Lady Gaga, Adam Driver, Jared Leto, Jeremy Irons, Al Pacino, Jack Huston and Salma Hayek.

HYPNOSIS: A teenager troubled by sleepwalking decides to visit a psychotherapist. The charming doctor uses hypnosis to treat the patient and the youth falls under his spell.

Before long, the boy has trouble distinguishing reality from illusion. Things get even worse when a female patient of the doctor dies and the lead begins to suspect the therapist of killing her.

This Russian feature hasn't been seen by many in this part of the world. However, it received numerous nominations and awards (mostly for its score) at film festivals, a nod at the country's equivalent of the Oscars and some upbeat critic write-ups. Online reviews from Moscow suggest the movie is cryptic and doesn't make the most of its interesting concept, but is an intriguing and fascinating effort.

The cast includes Maksim Sukhanov, Sergey Giro, Ekaterina Fedulova and Sergey Medvedev.



THE KING'S MAN: This prequel to the 2014 surprise hit “Kingsman: The Secret Service” and its 2017 follow-up, “Kingsman: The Golden Circle”

is set at the beginning of the 20th

century and details the beginnings of the secret guild of heroes.

When a group of tyrants and criminal masterminds decide to orchestrate a series of events to start a war that will result in the death of millions, the protagonists set out to neutralize the threat.

While the first movie in this series received excellent reviews, the press wasn't nearly as taken by the first sequel or this follow-up. About a third of them thought it was fun enough to recommend and had plenty of sly and clever gags based around the world of spies. Unfortunately, more stated that the movie was a jumble of tones. They also said it wasn't funny or exciting enough to compare with the original.

It stars Ralph Fiennes, Harris Dickinson, Rhys Ifans, Djimon Hounsou, Gemma Arterton, Matthew Goode, Charles Dance and Stanley Tucci.

EL PLANETA: This picture was announced as arriving on Blu-ray a few weeks back, but was delayed and is now hitting shelves. After experiencing money problems, a mother and daughter from a wealthy family decide to find a way to keep living their lavish lifestyle. They bluff and use grifting techniques to keep themselves going, ultimately bonding over the possibility of losing everything.

Reaction was quite positive for this black and white, foreign-language film from Spain. A tiny contingent criticized the feature for, like its characters, trying to coast by on charm and chuckles without offering any deeper meaning. Still, the consensus was that the two leads were extremely charismatic and that the story was intriguing and funny, also possessing a dark and satirical edge beneath the surface. Ale Ulman, Amalia Ulman, Nacho Vigalondo and Genoveva Garcia Castanon headline the picture.

THE SCARY OF SIXTY-FIRST: This Blu-ray was also scheduled for release a month ago, but was delayed at the last minute and is arriving this week. Two college students think they've gotten incredibly lucky after finding an inexpensive duplex for rent on Manhattan's Upper East Side. Unfortunately, their happiness doesn't last long after moving in.

A mysterious woman arrives and claims that the apartment used to be owned by notorious sex-offender Jeffrey Epstein. The pair decide to investigate her claim and soon become obsessed, with one of them actually becoming preoccupied by sexual mania and even acting possessed.

The press was split on this independent horror picture. Almost half thought it was messy and cluttered, also commenting that it didn't have much to say about many of the topical issues it was bringing up. Slightly more admitted that while flawed, it still had some darkly humorous and chilling moments and was a compelling genre flick. It stars Madeline Quinn, Betsey Brown and Dasha Nekrasova.



SHATTERED: According to this thriller, it's tough and lonely being a tech billionaire. A socially awkward genius thinks that he may have found that special someone after encountering a charming and sexy woman. A relationship blooms and grows even stronger after he suffers an accident and she steps in to nurse him back to health.

However, things turn grim when her behavior becomes more threatening and his best friend dies under mysterious circumstances. This feature was not well liked by critics. A small contingent who gave the movie a positive write-up described it as amusing and, at times, side-splittingly enjoyable trash.

Everyone else wrote that it didn't deliver the necessary passion or chills and called it a cheesy and badly written stinker. The cast includes Cameron Monaghan, Frank Grillo, Lily Krug, Sasha Luss and John Malkovich.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST!

There's some great older stuff arriving in high definition this week. Arrow Video have discovered the early 80s slasher film "Deadly Games" (1982) and are presenting it for the first time ever on Blu-ray.

It's about a maniac who plays board games to determine his next victims. The movie is noted by genre fans for focusing its attention on the female cast members and not the killer. It has been given a 2K restoration and the disc includes a commentary track with movie experts The Hysteria Continues.

You'll also get an interview with co-star Jere Rae-Mansfield, who talks about working on the picture. Additionally, there's a discussion with the special effects and stunt coordinator, an extensive images gallery, a trailer and the original screenplay (which can be accessed as BD-ROM content).

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They also have a Blu-ray set of “Lies and Deceit: Five Films by Claude Chabrol” which looks very elaborate. Chabrol was a popular and successful member of the French New Wave cinema movement who created numerous classic titles. The films featured in this package are

“Cop au Vin

(1985), “Inspector Lavardin

”

(1986), “Madame Bovary

”

(1991), “Betty

”

(1992) and “Torment

”

(1994). The set comes jam-packed with critic commentaries, visual essays on the movies and their significance, select scene commentaries on all the movies with Chabrol and much, much more.

Arrow also have Standard Editions of the previously released box set “*Cold War Creatures: Four Films from Sam Katzman*

” on Blu-ray. It includes four low-budget monster movies from the 1950s and plenty of bonus features about the titles. They also have a Standard Blu-ray Edition of the “

Yokai Monsters Collection

”. This set contains four Japanese monster movies (three made in the late 60s. as well as a 2005 reboot) featuring wild and trippy creatures.

Blu-ray/DVD Roundup for February 25, 2022

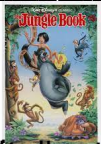
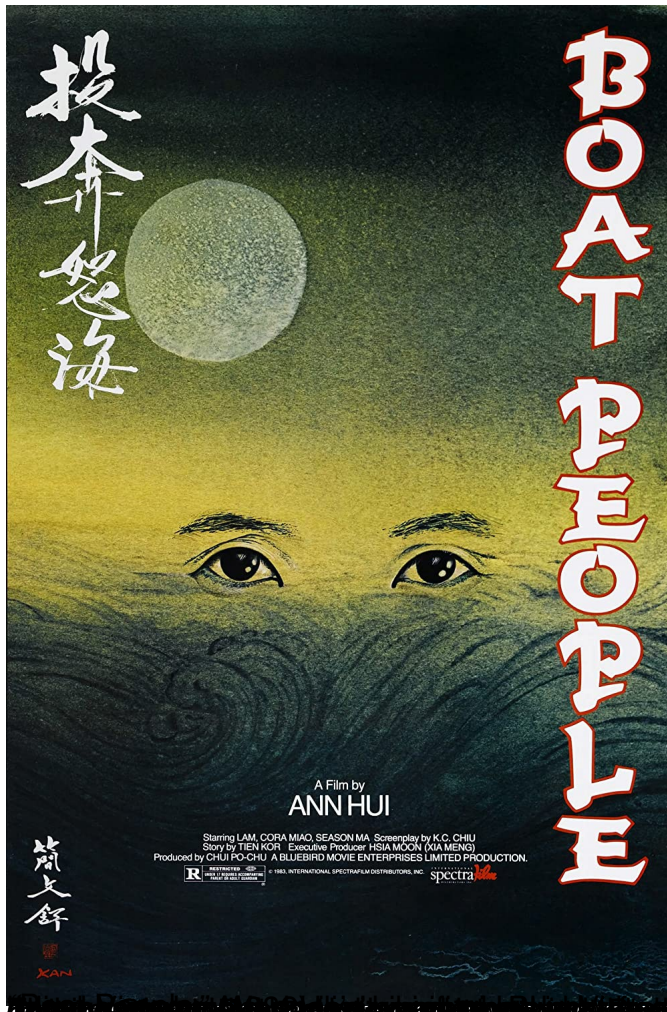
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