

Blu-ray/DVD Roundup for December 1, 2023

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Welcome to a look at some of the highlights arriving this week on Blu-ray, 4K Ultra HD and DVD. This edition is a little quieter than the last one, but still includes a big studio picture and some interesting independent fare. So, if you can't make it out to the movies or need to stay indoors for a few days, be sure to give one of these titles a try!

BIG NEW RELEASES!

20 DAYS IN MARIUPOL: In February 2022, Russian forces invaded the country of Ukraine. One of the first targets was the city of Mariupol and its residents. This documentary follows a team of Ukrainian journalists who were trapped in the area during the attack and captured events as they occurred, including the bombing of a maternity hospital and other war crimes committed against ordinary citizens.

Critics uniformly praised the film and it has yet to receive a negative review. Reviewers called it one of the most harrowing and powerful movies of the year, showing extended, horrifying footage of these attacks, as well as the courage of those trapped in the region. It is considered a major contender for a Best Documentary nomination at next year's Academy Awards. For the time being, this is a DVD-only release.

AMONG WOLVES: Two ladies from a church witness the slaying of a group of striking miners committed by a pair of outlaws. They manage to escape without being captured, but realize that they are now being hunted by the killers. The two come upon the home of two ex-criminals who

agree to take them in and protect them before they are eliminated.

This western is being released as a DVD-only direct-to-disc feature and hasn't been seen by many. A couple of people who got their hands on the movie have written about it online, but haven't been overly complimentary. They state that the cast is impressive, but that they are underutilized. According to them, the story is forgettable and the action sequences leave a great deal to be desired.

Trace Adkins, Victoria Pratt, Jeff Fahey, James Russo and Tom Berenger headline the picture.

ASTRAKAN: This foreign-language drama from France was initially scheduled to be released at the end of October, but was delayed at the last minute. A young orphan is adopted by a foster family. Drama follows as he struggles to fit in at his new home. After beginning to feel a sense of belonging and happiness, he goes through coming-of-age trials and also discovers an unexpected and hidden secret about his new parents.

The press adored this feature and every reviewer who saw the picture recommended it. They commented that while some might find the storytelling difficult to digest, the movie was unlike any tale they had seen about a youngster becoming an adult. They praised the performances and the authenticity of the story, stating that it lacked any overt melodrama or sentimentalism.

The cast includes Mirko Giannini, Jehnny Beth, Bastien Bouillon, Theo Costa-Marini and Paul Blain.

GODS OF MEXICO: Here is yet another documentary that is receiving a lot of positive response. The filmmakers involved in this production have been inspired to capture the beauty of rural Mexico. They present vast landscapes both in color and in black-and-white, while also visiting numerous communities and paying tribute to locals who are preserving their cultural identity in a rapidly modernizing world.

As mentioned, the overall response to the film was upbeat. A small number thought the presentation was a little too abstract and focused on imagery over the individuals being spoken to. Still, the vast majority were impressed by the beauty on display and called the movie an artful and dynamic experience that would captivate viewers with gorgeous visuals and interviews with the remarkable residents who live there.

A HAUNTING IN VENICE: The third feature in the recent series of Agatha Christie adaptations by actor/director Kenneth Branagh finds sharp-witted detective Hercule Poirot giving up his trade and moving to Venice, Italy. After meeting an old friend, he is asked to help her prove that a local psychic and spiritualist is a fraud. Poirot agrees to attend a Halloween séance being performed by the individual, but his focus changes after an attendee is brutally murdered.

The press generally enjoyed this mystery. About one-quarter of them commented that they thought a few roles were miscast and didn't like the attempts to combine mystery with gothic horror elements. However, everyone else had a good time with this sequel. They appreciated that the story being adapted wasn't overly familiar, enjoyed the atmospheric photography and thought that the film was generally engaging.

It stars Branagh, Tina Fey, Camille Cottin, Jamie Dornan, Jude Hill, Riccardo Scamarcio, Kelly Reilly and Michelle Yeoh.

THE TAKING: Monument Valley on the Arizona-Utah border is one of the most beautiful regions in the United States. This documentary explores how the revered Navajo area has been represented in westerns and advertising over the decades, beginning with the film

Stagecoach

in 1939. It notes how filmmakers helped perpetuate a fantasy of the "Old West" and the effects that these productions have had not just on Americans, but audiences around the world.

Reactions toward the film have generally been positive. One noted that the techniques used in the film were frustrating, stating that it jumps around from narrator to narrator without identifying who is speaking, making the different ideas being expressed confusing. Regardless, most thought the message was effectively delivered and that it detailed how movies can create an inaccurate portrait of a land. They stated that it would leave viewers with plenty to think about.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST!

For viewers interested in older features, there is plenty to choose from this week.

Arrow Video is releasing the cult classic *Barbarella* (1968) starring Jane Fonda in a variety of formats. There is a "Limited Edition" 4K UHD and Blu-ray bonus disc set, an Arrow Video Exclusive 4K Ultra HD and Blu-ray bonus disc package available through their website, and a standalone 2-disc Blu-ray version. For those unfamiliar with the picture, it follows the title character, a 41st century Earth woman, who is sent on a mission to find a scientist who has disappeared in outer space with a devastating weapon.

Besides the upgraded picture, it comes with a film critic commentary, alternate opening and closing credits, a movie expert appreciation of the movie, a behind-the-scenes featurette, a 2-hour historian discussion about the title and its legacy, as well as a 30-minute with a fashion scholar on the costumes. You'll also get an interview with the camera operator, a talk with the son of co-star Ugo Tognazzi, an interview with a stuntman and body-double for the film, a video essay on producer Dino De Laurentiis and tons of publicity materials.

Dark Star Pictures is presenting a double-feature Blu-ray of *Marfa Girl* (2012) and *Marfa Girl 2* (

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2018). The second title on the set includes a director commentary and a trailer.

The Bullet Train (1975) is a Japanese thriller with Sonny Chiba about a mad bomber placing an explosive device on the title mode of transportation that will detonate if its speed dips below 80km. Discotek is presenting a new Blu-ray of the fun picture that contains the original Japanese version with English subtitles and an English dub.

Subscribers in the Disney Movie Club can now pick up a 20th anniversary edition Blu-ray and DVD set of *Holes* (2003) exclusively through their site. It stars a young Shia LaBeouf, Sigourney Weaver, Jon Voight, Tim Blake Nelson, Henry Winkler and Patricia Arquette. Unfortunately, this writer doesn't have access to the service and can't comment on whether there are any bonuses included on the disc.

The same goes for the Disney Movie Club Exclusive 30th anniversary Blu-ray and DVD combo of the well-regarded family comedy, *Thelma & Louise* (1991). *Th*

YOU KNOW, FOR KIDS!

Well, despite being rated PG, the two films listed below are as close as anything gets to kid-friendly entertainment.

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Holes (2003) 20th Anniversary (Disney Movie Club Exclusive) Blu-ray and DVD

The Sandlot (1993) 30th Anniversary (Disney Movie Club Exclusive) Blu-ray and DVD

ON THE TUBE!

And below is a list of all the week's TV-related releases.

Ancient Aliens Season 18 (History) DVD

The Chelsea Detective Series 2 (Acorn) DVD

Iconic America: Our Symbols and Stories with David Rubenstein (PBS) DVD

Monk Season 1 (Kino) Blu-ray

Riverdale The Complete Series (Warner Bros.) DVD

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Riverdale The 7th and Final Season (Warner Bros.) DVD

The Sandman Season 1 (Warner Bros.) 4K Ultra HD or Blu-ray

Wandavision The Complete Series (Disney Movie Club Exclusive Steelbook) 4K Ultra HD Steelbook or Blu-ray or Blu-ray and DVD

“World on Fire” Season 2 (Masterpiece) (PBS) Blu-ray or DVD

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