

Blu-ray/DVD Roundup for December 22, 2023

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Happy holidays and welcome to a look at some of the highlights arriving this week.

BIG NEW RELEASES!

AVATAR: THE WAY OF WATER: After its theatrical release at the end of 2022, the third-highest grossing film of all time worldwide (behind the original *Avatar* and *Avengers: Endgame*)

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is finally arriving on a variety of formats. In fact, there's a 4K Ultra HD and Blu-ray edition, a Best Buy exclusive in 4K Ultra HD and Blu-ray, and a 3D Blu-ray and regular Blu-ray version.

This sequel is set many years after the previous installment, where main characters Jake Sully and Ney'tiri have nurtured a family. When invading military forces arrive on Pandora once again, the leads move to a water-based community on the other side of the planet in order to protect their children. But they can only hide for so long and are eventually forced to face the villains in direct combat.

The movie was generally well-received by critics and earned Oscar nominations in numerous categories, including Best Picture. One-quarter of reviewers stated that the movie was too long and predictable with characters that weren't particularly interesting. However, the majority called the movie visually spectacular, action-packed and that the end result was the definition of epic filmmaking. They also appreciated the film's environmental themes.

It stars Sam Worthington, Zoe Saldana, Sigourney Weaver, Stephen Lang, Cliff Curtis, Joel David Moore, CCH Pounder, Edie Falco, Jemaine Clement and Kate Winslet.

THE EXORCIST: BELIEVER: Those looking for holiday counter-programming may be interested in this horror sequel. A photographer and widower panics after learning that his daughter has disappeared with a friend from school. The two are eventually located, but have no memory of what occurred and begin exhibiting strange behavior. Soon enough, the initially skeptical protagonist begins to believe that his daughter may have been possessed by a demonic force. He ends up receiving help on how to proceed from a face that will be familiar to fans of the original.

The press largely panned this effort. Less than one-quarter of notices were upbeat. They commented that the movie effectively delivered chills and enjoyed the message about various faiths working together to exorcise evil forces. All others wrote that the movie was a cheaply produced and ineffective knock-off of a classic with an absurd story. Most importantly, they stated that the film didn't frighten them.

The cast includes Leslie Odom Jr., Ellen Burstyn, Ann Dowd, Lidya Jewett, Olivia O'Neill and Raphael Sbarge.

THE GHOST STATION: A train station attendant becomes fearful after a series of horrible accidents and workplace deaths occur. The individual contacts a reporter and friend, asking them to look into the incidents. Before long, the pair become certain that something supernatural is occurring at the station and begin to learn some disturbing secrets that may have caused the hauntings.

Very few critics in North America have seen this foreign-language South Korean effort and reaction to it has been weak. One reviewer called it unoriginal, but well-paced and stylishly made. The writer who panned the film commented that its lack of any new or original elements made it feel like an uneventful and unnecessary ghost yarn.

The movie features Kim Bo-ra, Kim Jaehyun and Shin So-yul.

ONYX THE FORTUITOUS AND THE TALISMAN OF SOULS: This independent horror/comedy involves an “average joe” struggling within his community of Satanists. He agrees to attend a ritual by a powerful leader, hoping it will inspire him. However, the protagonist discovers that the important figure may actually be using his followers and planning to do something horrible to all of them. The lead must find a way to stand up to the threat and protect the other attendees.

Reaction toward this picture was slightly more positive than negative. Those who disliked it weren't taken by the main character and thought that the filmmakers failed to land many of the potentially humorous beats. Still, the majority liked the movie's quirkiness and called it both

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amusing and charming, saying it managed to amuse on a small budget.

Andrew Bowser, Arden Myrin, Jeffrey Combs, Olivia Taylor Dudley, Rivkah Reyes and Terrence "T.C." Carson play the lead roles.

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