

DVD/Blu-ray Roundup for Jan. 4, 2019

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 11 January 2019 07:56



Happy New Year to everyone! Despite that the week is filled with plenty of celebrations, there are actually a good number of new Blu-ray and DVD releases arriving on store shelves (including a couple of high-profile Hollywood productions). So if you can't make it out to the movies this week, be sure to give one of these titles a try!

Big New Releases!

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A.X.L. – The U.S. government uses artificial intelligence to create a secret robotic dog for use in the military. After the artificial pooch escapes into the desert and is discovered by a local, the two develop a bond. The dog begins protecting its new master, while the young man does his best to keep it out of the clutches of the scientists who created it. This sci-fi family flick didn't make much of an impression on critics. There was a small percentage who appreciated the message. However, the majority complained that, as written, the characters didn't make an impression and the situations were clichéd. It stars Alex Neustaedter, Becky G, Alex MacNicoll, Dominic Rains and Thomas Jane.

After Everything – This tearjerker romance involves two young people in their 20s who fall for each other. When one of the leads is diagnosed with a terrible illness, the two decide to continue the relationship. They soon discover that navigating medical treatment procedures is in some respects simpler than dealing with concerns of family members. This independent production received strong notices. A few felt the characters were a bit too quirky and couldn't buy into the concept. While most admitted it wasn't perfect, far more were impressed by the stars and said the chemistry between the pair was endearing. The cast includes Maika Monroe, Gina Gershon, Marisa Tomei and Jeremy Allen White.

Bad Times at the El Royale – A mysterious group of people arrives at a remote motel on the border of California and Nevada. As the guests slowly reveal information about themselves, it becomes clear all have a dark past and many harbor deadly secrets. As the night progresses, things become increasingly more dangerous for all of the visitors as they attempt to redeem themselves. This eccentric thriller earned decent reviews from the press. A group suggested that after a great start, it lost momentum and stated the story included too many coincidences to be truly effective. Still, a larger number enjoyed the cast and thought it was an impressive homage to filmmakers like Quentin Tarantino. Jeff Bridges, Cynthia Erivo, Dakota Johnson, Jon Hamm and Chris Hemsworth headline the film.

Eating Animals – Factory farming is the subject of this documentary. It seeks to explain the process of food production and suggests the current business model that gives buyers cheaper eggs, meat and dairy could be inhumane and have terrible repercussions. The movie goes into great detail about the steroids and antibiotics used on animals that people ingest as well as the environmental hazards of these practices, before offering some ideas for more ethical farming techniques. This feature earned positive write-ups. A few noted the movie needed to focus more on solutions than rallying against the system, but the general sentiment was that it made plenty of valid and effective points. The movie is narrated by Natalie Portman.

Love, Gilda – This documentary chronicles the life of gifted comic and actress Gilda Radner.

Celebrities read excerpts from her personal diaries as well as audio she used to record her thoughts and feelings. Friends and family also comment on their time with the star. These tales, along with home movies, photos and clips, show how Radner developed her skills over the years, eventually working at Second City and Saturday Night Live. They also detail her struggles with cancer. The press generally described the movie as excellent. One or two didn't think it went deep enough into the performer's head. Still, most others said despite the brief running time, this was a remarkably moving and insightful documentary.

Night School – A successful salesman sees his life turned upside down after an accident at work. He bounces back and is offered a position at an investment firm, but discovers in order to be hired, a GED is required by the firm. Unfortunately, the hero has concentration issues, dropped out of school and has always coasted by on charm alone. He attends night classes to try and earn his diploma and finds himself surrounded by a group of misfits. This comedy didn't make the grade with critics. It stars Kevin Hart, Tiffany Haddish, Rob Riggle, Taran Killam, Romany Malco and Mary Lynn Rajskub.

The Ranger – This independent horror flick follows a group of punks on the run from authorities. They decide to take refuge in the woods, but encounter a deranged and very violent park ranger. One by one, they are murdered by this strange and threatening figure. Reaction towards this picture was somewhat more enthusiastic than expected. A small percentage thought it was dopey, brainless and didn't find much to enjoy. Regardless, more described it as a silly, gory, fun B-movie with some nifty references to '80s slashers. The cast includes Jeremy Holm, Chloe Levine, Granit Lahu, Bubba Weiler, Amanda Grace Benitez and Larry Fessenden.

Reach – A picked-on, socially awkward student who plays in his high school band contemplates suicide in this independent comedy/drama. His plans change after the arrival of a new kid in town. The two find some common ground and start a friendship, bringing the protagonist out of his shell and allowing the troubled teen to deal with the problems in his life. Reviews weren't exemplary for this effort. A small number liked the cast and admired the attempts at throwing some new wrinkles into the teen misfit formula. Alas, the majority found it uneven and didn't find all of scenes or situations believable. It features Garrett Clayton, Corben Bernsen and Joey Bragg.

Blasts from the Past!

Kino's delivering several interesting older titles on Blu-ray. The first is a Special Edition release

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of *The Appaloosa* (1966) with Marlon Brando and John Saxon. This Western was shot by Russell Metty (*Spartacus*) and is perhaps best known for its cinematography. The release includes a film historian commentary.

Kino's also putting out a Special Edition of *The Bounty* (1984). This retelling of the true story based around a shipmate rebelling against a captain stars Mel Gibson and Anthony Hopkins. The Blu-ray comes with a director commentary as well as a second track featuring the film's historical consultant.

Fans of John Ritter will also be happy to see two more obscure titles from the performer released on DVD. The first one is *The Comeback Kid* (1980), which features John Ritter teaching a bunch of misfit kids to play baseball. *Pray TV* (1982) is a satire that skewers TV-evangelists and their attempts to con money out of followers. It co-stars Ned Beatty.

The Scarlet Letter (1995) with Demi Moore and Gary Oldman has also been given the Special Edition Blu-ray treatment. Based on the famous novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne, this period drama arrives with an all-new director's commentary.

Additionally, you can pick up a Special Edition Blu-ray of the Robert Redford Western, *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here* (1969). A film historian commentary track is included. Finally, Kino has the Jennifer Jason Leigh period drama, *Washington Square* (1997) in high definition. This disc also includes a new director commentary.

And Scorpion offers a new, Special Edition Blu-ray of the slasher flick, *Silent Screams* (1979) aka *The Silent Screams*

. It's about a college student who rents a room at a local estate and finds dead bodies piling up all around her, as well as a bevy of suspects. The Blu-ray includes two audio commentaries featuring cast and the writers, a look back at the film 30 years later, the original script, interviews with the cast and crew, publicity materials and other bonuses.

You Know, For Kids!

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Not a lot out there in this edition for kids, but it's early in the year, so there will be plenty in the coming weeks.

My Little Pony - Friendship is Magic: Hearts and Hooves

On the Tube!

And here are the week's TV-themed releases.

Astral (UK TV-movie)

Black Mirror: Season 4

Diagnosis Murder: Season 4

Diagnosis Murder: Season 5

FRONTLINE: The Pension Gamble (PBS)

House of Lies: Season 1

Midsomer Murders: Series 20

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My Secret Valentine (Hallmark TV-movie)

Return to Eden (1983 Original Mini-series)

Very, Very, Valentine (Hallmark TV-movie)

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