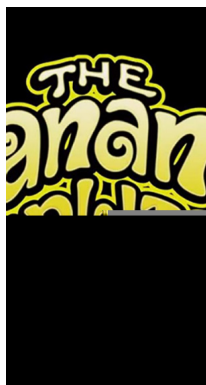


DVD/Blu-ray Roundup for August 30, 2019

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Looks like it's another busy edition with loads of Blu-ray and DVD releases hitting store shelves and rental outlets. There are some big summer epics coming your way, as well as noteworthy independent fare and a few documentaries. 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!

The Banana Splits Movie - If you were a little kid in the '60s or '70s, you might remember various live-action Sid & Marty Krofft children's programs like H.R.
Pufnstuf

and

Sigmund and the Sea Monsters

. This direct-to-disc feature film re-imagining of the

Banana Splits,

turns one of their family-friendly shows into an R-rated horror flick. A young boy and his family decide to attend a taping of the program, only to see the strange creatures turn malevolent and attack the audience. There aren't a lot of reviews available right now, but the ones that have appeared online are reasonably upbeat.

They suggest that while the plot points are routine and the satire could have been sharper, the unusual take on the material does add a unique element to the proceedings. It features Dani Kind, Finlay Wojtak-Hissong, Romeo Carere and Steve Lund.

Big Top Evil - Speaking of turning nostalgic childhood memories into nightmare fuel, this small independent horror production involves a group of young travelers who stop in at a rundown roadside motel. They soon discover a dilapidated circus nearby and find themselves being hunted by a group of psychotic and savage cannibal clowns. Sounds like a fun weekend! Alas, this picture hasn't played at any film festivals and is premiering on disc, so there are no write-ups that can attest to its quality.

However, it doesn't look to be anywhere in the same league as the *Banana Splits* feature and may be exclusively for low-budget horror enthusiasts. The cast includes Bill Moseley (of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* fame), J. LaRose and Jisaura Cardinale.

Clarence Clemons: How Do I Think I Am? - Gifted musician Clarence Clemons (who might be most recognizable to readers for his work in Bruce Springsteen's E Street Band) is the subject of this documentary. After an expansive tour with the Boss came to an end in 2003, Clemons began thinking about his place in the world. In fact, he decided to travel to China with a film crew to make a little film about his experiences. Sadly, Clemons suffered a fatal stroke not long after.

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This picture chronicles his life and presents some intimate footage of the man along with interviews from those who knew him personally. This includes President Bill Clinton, Joe Walsh, as well as former bandmates and family members. There isn't much word on this project yet, but it played at a few New York and New Jersey film festivals and may appeal to music fans.

The Creatress - This small indie comedy/drama has seemingly come from out of nowhere to receive a release on disc. The plot involves a writer whose book becomes a big hit. She sells the rights away for a film adaptation and receives a huge advance for her next project, only to start experiencing backlash from the press and readers. This includes a false memoir about the scribe and some negative re-evaluations of her work. The protagonist strives to stay above it all and survive the onslaught, as well as come up with an idea for her next book.

There is literally no information about this title other than it having a screening in France at the Nice film festival, so who knows how effective it is. Lindy Booth, Fran Drescher and Peter Bogdanovich headline the picture.

Godzilla: King of the Monsters - The giant green monster returns in this follow-up to the 2014 reboot. This time out, the cryptozoological agency known as Monarch finds its hands full after several monsters rise and attack in various countries across the world. Once believing Godzilla to be its enemy, it soon realizes the creature may be its only hope of surviving this onslaught. This sequel didn't receive as warm a welcome as the previous entry. While a group of critics did state that the monster fights were enjoyable enough to keep them watching, most complained that the film had difficulty shuffling several threads and finding a proper tone.

They also noted that the characters both human and otherwise, weren't as engaging as they could have been. The movie stars Vera Farmiga, Ken Watanabe, Sally Hawkins, Kyle Chandler, Millie Bobby Brown and Bradley Whitford.

Killers Anonymous - This independent action picture has an interesting premise... it follows a support group for assassins who get together and privately share their insecurities and concerns regarding their dangerous line of work. Tension mounts when one of them attempts a hit, leading authorities in the direction of the group in general. The killers must reconvene, determine who is responsible for the hit, and take action before they all get caught. The press hated this flick...right now, there isn't a positive write-up to be found.

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All commented that the screenplay is poor, leaving its talented performers stranded, and becomes more of an endurance test than thriller. Ouch! The movie features Tommy Flanagan, Rhyon Nicole Brown, Jessica Alba and Gary Oldman.

The Last Black Man in San Francisco - Set in a San Francisco not long into the future, this unusual arthouse effort follows a young man being pushed out of his old downtown neighborhood by gentrification. When the residents of the house he used to live in are forced to leave the property, he moves back in and attempts to reconnect with his family's history. However, his actions end up causing unexpected complications. Notices were excellent for this unique picture.

A small portion found the feature too ponderous and suggested that it was an obtuse and odd effort that was difficult to connect with. Still, the vast majority liked the cast, stated that the ideas were creatively presented, and took note of the engaging and impressive photography and music. The cast includes Jimmy Fails, Jonathan Majors and Danny Glover.

The Narcissists - Here's another independent feature from New York that has been making the rounds on the festival circuit. This tale is about a filmmaker struggling in a creative funk and finding his relationship with his girlfriend at a crossroads. The couple decides to take a bit of time apart and spend a few days with friends, wandering through the metropolis and trying to figure out their next steps. Their discussions lead to several realizations about the future and their life together.

The movie has been billed as a comedy/drama and is premiering on disc. However, there haven't been any reviews posted online yet. Augie Duke and Jessica DiGiovanni play the main characters.

Rocketman - As one might have guessed from the title, Elton John is the subject of this biopic. It details all of the remarkable ups and downs in his life and career, starting with his humble beginnings and the early days of his career as a songwriter and backup musician. The story then details his massive success, as well as a period of drugs and excess. All of it is backed to musical numbers based around some of his most famous tunes.

Reaction towards the movie was extremely positive. A tiny segment did state that the events

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depicted were too downbeat and self-involved. Still, the consensus was that the picture had great numbers and ably dealt with all aspects of the musician's life, helped tremendously by an exceptional lead performance. It stars Taron Egerton, Jamie Bell, Richard Madden, Bryce Dallas Howard and Gemma Jones.

The Secret Life of Pets 2 - This sequel to the 2016 animated hit continues to reveal secrets about what our animal friends do when we aren't in their company. After his owners have a child, family dog Max must deal with new concerns and his role in the family as the clan heads out to a farm in the countryside. In the city, others pets deal with recovering an important toy and saving an abused tiger from the circus. Critics were split on the end results, although more enjoyed the movie than disliked it.

A contingent suggested that there wasn't much that was memorable about the follow-up and found it to be a mediocre family film. Slightly more admitted the picture was no classic, but felt it made up for its deficiencies with impressive animation and humorous moments. The voice cast includes Patton Oswalt, Kevin Hart, Harrison Ford, Tiffany Haddish and Jenny Slate.

Blasts from the Past!

It's a busy edition for older titles as well. Shout! Factory is delivering another Hammer horror flick with *Fear in the Night* (1972). The story involves a young woman who marries a schoolteacher and moves to a small campus in the country. Once there, she must deal with a menacing stalker and eccentric characters. This Blu-ray includes the film in two aspect ratios, a film historian audio commentary, an interview with the co-writer/producer/director of the feature, as well as a second commentary track featuring the figure. You'll also get a featurette on the production, a theatrical trailer and a still gallery.

The same company is also releasing *The Leech Woman* (1960). It's about a scientist and his wife doing research in Africa and attempting to discover the secret to eternal youth. When they find the answer and head back to the U.S. with the information, the scientist's wife decides to take advantage of the discovery. Too bad the process requires a male sacrifice! A 35mm fine grain composite of the film has been given a 2K scan and the Blu-ray includes a film expert commentary as well as publicity materials.

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VCI Video is putting out a Blu-ray of *The Vanishing Shadow* (1934). This is a Universal Pictures serial that has never before been released and has been transferred in 2K from the original 35mm fine grain. The plot involves a young man who sets out to avenge the death of his father by using all sorts of interesting implements, including robots, a vanishing belt and other weapons (the serial is believed to feature the first onscreen appearance ever of a hand held ray gun).

Vinegar Syndrome also has a great many Blu-rays arriving online and in shops. Among the several releases is the German punk/sci-fi/horror flick *Decoder* (1984), which features a bit part from author William S. Burroughs and music by Soft Cell. Besides the movie getting a 2K restoration from the original camera negative, extras include a critic commentary, new and archival interviews with the writer/producer, footage of Burroughs on set, video footage of the 1982 Berlin riots, a featurette on the locations and publicity materials.

They also have the cult flick, *Hell Comes to Frogtown* (1987). This is a post-apocalyptic action flick starring wrestler "Rowdy" Roddy Piper as the last fertile man on the planet, who wanders the wastelands trying to survive the elements. This release marks the Blu-ray debut of the film in North America with a new 4K restoration. It also comes with a commentary featuring the director/cinematographer and the writer/producer, archived interviews with Piper as well as the make-up effects artist, an extended scene and the theatrical trailer.

Anyone who's a fan of Peter Jackson's 1989 effort *Meet the Feebles* might take an interest in Vinegar Syndrome's release of

Let My Puppets Come

(1976). This is an earlier adult-themed musical feature featuring an all-puppet cast set that is set in the world of adult films. Apparently, this bizarre comedy shocked audiences during its original run and then disappeared for decades. Now, the uncut original version has been given a 2K restoration and is being released on Blu-ray.

It comes with a film historian commentary and a second track with a puppet designer, audio from the musical upon which the movie was based, an audio conversation with the director and a trailer.

Criterion also has several new Blu-rays heading your way. *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* (1952) is a well-regarded effort from Japan about a marriage quietly crumbling. The disc includes a new 4K restoration of the picture, a video essay on the title from a film scholar, a

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documentary on the screenwriter and a 1937 feature from the same director called *What Did the Lady Forget?*

The thriller *Insomnia* (1997) is also hitting Blu-ray. This effort from Norway follows a cop investigating a murder in a village experiencing a 24-hour daylight cycle. If that synopsis sounds familiar, the movie was later remade in 2002 with Al Pacino. Besides a new 4K digital restoration of the movie itself, you'll also get two short films from the director, a new conversation between the filmmaker and star Stellan Skarsgård and a trailer.

They also have a Collector's Edition Blu-ray set of *The Koker Trilogy*. This release includes three Iranian films that are said to be a cross between fiction and documentary, detailing life in the title village and deftly mixing comedy and tragedy. The three specific movies included are *Where is the Friend's House?* (1987), *And Life Goes On* (1992) and *Through the Olive Trees* (1994).

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