By Glenn Kay

For the Sun

It’s time for another look at some highlights coming your way on Blu-ray and DVD. There are a great many new releases this time out, including flicks that have played the drive-in circuit, as well as some independent fare. So, since you likely can’t or shouldn’t go out to the movies this week, be sure to give one of these titles a try!

BIG NEW RELEASES!

THE 2ND: A secret service agent decides to take some time off work and reconnect with his estranged son. He decides to drive over to the youngster’s school and pick him up, only to learn that his offspring happens to be best friends with the daughter of a Supreme Court justice. Suddenly, the youngsters find themselves being held hostage by terrorists who want to influence the outcome of a landmark case. Using his special skills, the heroic agent decides step in and neutralize the threat.

As one might expect given the hackneyed premise, his title was not screened for the press and is premiering this week on streaming platforms and on disc. That means that viewers should exercise caution before making a big purchase. The movie features Ryan Phillippe, Casper Van Dien, Jack Griffo and William Katt.

ASHFALL: The plot of this disaster/adventure flick from South Korea involves an imminent volcanic eruption on Baekdu Mountain, located on the border of China and North Korea. A team of scientists from North and South Korea are tasked with working together to minimize the threat and save everyone they can in the surrounding area. Of course, the process of helping out results in the team putting their own lives at risk. This foreign-language feature received decent notices from the press.

A small group didn't think the movie was as much fun as it should have been and described the climax as lackluster. However, more thought that the drama between the lead characters worked, commenting that the film had some entertaining moments. They also appreciated its efforts to show scientists from different nations working together. The cast includes Byung-hun Lee, Jung-woo Ha and Dong-seok Ma.

BEFORE THE FIRE: A rising TV-star in Los Angeles is forced to leave the city after the arrival of a global pandemic. She heads to her rural home town in order to wait out the trouble in the city. However, her return is noted by several sinister figures from her past. The lead and her family end up being threatened by these dangerous people whom she left behind long ago.

This independent thriller hasn't received too many reviews so far, but the ones that have appeared have been reasonably positive. They state that the feature's subject matter is very timely and also thought that the cast did enough to overcome the familiarity of the story. It stars Jenna Lyng Adams, Jackson Davis, Ryan Vigilant, Charles Hubbell and M.J. Karmi.

CANIBA: Curious about how a person develops a taste for cannibalism? This documentary digs into the uncomfortable subject, focusing specifically on one figure, Issei Sagawa. In 1981, Sagawa murdered a Dutch student in Paris and, before he was arrested, began eating the victim's body. The filmmakers attempt to determine his motivations for the horrific act and show what happened to the man in the years that followed. As you might have guessed, this picture had a difficult time getting a release in this part of the world. After a couple of years of struggling to land a US distributor, it is finally appearing on disc. Notices were mixed. Almost half who saw -the feature called it difficult to watch and not enlightening enough about its subject to justify its existence. Slightly more said that while unpleasant, this film was unlike anything they had ever witnessed.

HOW ABOUT ADOLF? This foreign-language feature is a satire from Germany about a university professor and his wife. They decide to throw a shindig for family and friends announcing their pregnancy. When they also state that they want to name their unborn son Adolf, it doesn't go over well with the guests. In fact, it triggers a series of escalating arguments that eventually begins to reveal hidden secrets about the group's past.

This comedy was a hit in its homeland last year and is making its debut on disc in this part of the world. The press in Germany suggested that the dialogue was very sharp and that the film was funny. Alas, there are few in this part of the world that have seen it, so who knows if the

humor will translate well. It features Christoph Maria Herbst, Florian David Fitz and Caroline Peters.

I USED TO GO HERE: A writer who has decided to follow her own path in life is disappointed when her major novel flops and her publicity tour is cancelled. Depressed that her friends have all gotten married and started families, she forces herself to accept an invitation to speak at her alma mater. Once there, the lead opens up to the professor who invited her and expresses her discontent. She also begins to connect with other eccentric students attending the university.

Critics were largely positive towards this independent comedy. One or two complained that for all the interesting questions it raised, the movie offered little insight. Still, most called it a sweet and funny flick that benefits from an excellent cast. It stars Gillian Jacobs, Jemaine Clement, Josh Wiggins, Forrest Goodluck and Kate Micucci.

INVINCIBLE DRAGON: In this Hong Kong action/thriller, an undercover and impulsive agent makes a mistake that results in a serial killer outsmarting him and evading justice. The lead is fired and his girlfriend disappears. Not sure of what to do with himself, he returns to a career of professional fighting. After reuniting with an old rival, the hero learns that this person may have the key to catching the criminal and finding out what happened to his girlfriend.

There haven't been many articles on the feature in this part of the world, but based on the ones that have appeared, reaction toward the feature thus far has been mixed-negative. Many say that while the action is good, the story tries to juggle too much and that the end result is a bit of a mess. The cast includes Jin Zhang, Anderson Silva and Kevin Cheng.

LIVING DEAD: Also known as *Are We Dead Yet*, this British indie comedy/horror follows a group of house burglars whose latest robbery backfires. To hide from police and evade capture, they sneak into a spooky old castle. Unfortunately, they quickly discover that the location has a grim history and is filled with nasty spirits ready to torment and torture them. This picture has played at a few film festivals, but otherwise hasn't been seen in this part of the world.

Tracking down write-ups is difficult, but a few have popped up. Some say that it's a reasonable genre flick that emphasizes comedy over horror and has a little more on its mind than the typical genre feature. Just as many stated that it was messily constructed and didn't accomplish much

of what it set out to do. Jessica-Jane Stafford, Khali Best and Tim Faraday headline the film.

THE PALE DOOR: This western/horror mash-up involves a train robbery gone wrong. After hurrying away to lick their wounds, the bandits find themselves in a ghost town. They're pleasantly surprised to discover that the locale does have one active and populated structure … a brothel. While initially welcomed in, the group soon learns that it's actually home to a coven of diabolical witches.

Response towards this low-budget horror picture was split down the middle. Half said that while there were some good ideas, the pacing was poor and that on the whole it didn't make much of an impression. The other half stated that while flawed, it was an interesting B-movie hybrid of genres and did have a few good ideas scattered here and there. It features Melora Walters, Noah Segan, Zachary Knighton and Stan Shaw.

SAVE YOURSELVES! A couple fed up with modern technology decides to unplug for a weekend and head out to an isolated cabin to enjoy some time alone together. Once there, they miss the big news circulating around the world … that aliens have arrived and are invading. Completely oblivious, they try to enjoy their vacation. After noting some strange events, they decide to head home, but find themselves ill-equipped to deal with the ongoing disaster.

Critics were upbeat about this little feature. A few didn't like the flawed and self-involved characters enough to invest in their plight. However, most thought the onscreen chemistry between the leads was very strong and stated that their bickering was remarkably enjoyable and entertaining to watch. The movie stars Sunita Mani, John Reynolds, Ben Sinclair and John Early.

THE SECRET GARDEN: The latest adaptation of the famous Frances Hodgson Burnett novel once again tells the story of an orphaned girl who is sent to live with her uncle on a remote property. At first, the shy girl hates her new home and adult guardian. However, after finding a magical garden on the property, she begins to appreciate the world around her. This period family film received good marks from reviewers.

A percentage did complain that this new version was unnecessary and thought that some of the story updates adversely affected the tone of the piece. Still, more thought that the movie was a

gorgeously shot and impressively told tale that effectively tackled themes of grief, while also providing some fantastical moments. The cast includes Colin Firth, Julie Walters, Maeve Dermody, Jemma Powell and Dixie Egerickx.

TALES FROM THE HOOD 3: In the years since its release in 1995, the effective scare film *Tales from the Hood* has developed a larger and larger following. The original was unique because it moved the traditional horror anthology to Los Angeles and detailed a group of gang members being told a series of dark tales. This direct-to-disc follow-up features a man and a child being pursued by an unseen evil. The youngster begins telling four moralistic stories to help two confront and deal with the oncoming sinister force.

It appears that unlike the first flick in the series, this one isn't being screened in advance for the press. As such, viewers curious about the latest installment will have to go in blindly and hope that it delivers some chills. It features Tony Todd, Lynn Whitfield, Stephanie Sy and Cooper Huckabee.

THE TAX COLLECTOR: This action/drama from writer/director David Ayer (*End of Watch*, *Fury*, *Suicide Squad*, *Bright*) follows a family man who works as collector for a powerful criminal organization. When a new outfit and an old threat return to the city, the protagonist's job and eventually the lives of his family are put in jeopardy. It all leads to a showdown between the two foes. Sadly, this feature wasn't nearly as well received as some of the filmmaker's other works.

There was a small group who admired the eccentric performances of the leads and thought it might entertain fans of crime pictures. Yet the overwhelming majority criticized the dialogue as being too hard-boiled and found the story increasingly preposterous as it progressed, resulting in a weak and ineffective movie. It stars Bobby Soto, Shia LaBeouf, Cinthya Carmona, Jose Conejo Martin, and George Lopez.

TIDY TIM'S: Father and son owners of a used car lot are the focus of this indie comedy. With health problems, love problems and foreclosure looming, the pair decides to take extreme measures to try and keep their business afloat. Their scheme is further complicated when the

son, a 45-year-old virgin, falls for a stripper working across the street. The press notes state that the film was co-written by two-time Pulitzer Prize nominee Joseph W. Oglesby and that the movie won the prize for Best Comedy at the 2020 Hollywood Reel Independent Film Festival.

Other than these notes, there aren't any reviews currently available and this title appears to be making its



debut on disc. The cast includes Shane Woodson, Rich Williams, Jennifer Day, Drew Hale and Andy Dick.

TO YOUR LAST DEATH: Adult fans of R-rated animation may be interested in this unique title. The story follows a woman squaring off against an evil online presence. She must enter a video game reality where expiring online could result in death in the real world. The lead is tasked with fighting off a mysterious villain known as the Gamemaster, who creates diabolical and bloody plots (similar to those found in movies like *Saw*) for those who enter his world.

In general, the press was positive about this unusual venture. About one third of them didn't care for the animation style and complained that the film seemed specifically designed for young boys rather than adult audiences. Still, more wrote that the movie had an intriguing concept and offered an unusual spin on the horror genre. The voice cast includes Morena Baccarin, Ray Wise, Bill Moseley, William Shatner and Florence Hartigan.

VALLEY GIRL: Remember the 1983 romantic comedy *Valley Girl*, starring a young Nicolas Cage and Deborah Foreman? This is a remake of that film that has been transformed into a musical featuring new interpretations of familiar '80s tunes. For those unaware of the original flick, the plot involves two teens from different backgrounds who fall for one another and try to stay together despite negative interference from their friends and parents. The feature ended up garnering a wide variety of reactions.

About half called it a frothy little flick bolstered by some great songs. Just as many wrote that this version felt like a bland, charmless, Disneyesque take on the original that lacked any distinctive characters or personality. It features Jessica Rothe, Josh Whitehouse, Jessie Ennis, Ashleigh Murray, Chloe Bennet, Logan Paul, Judy Greer and Ron Huebel.

THE WONDERLAND: Also known as *Birthday Wonderland*, this animated feature from Japan tells the story of a lonely and timid young girl readying for her birthday. While out, she accidentally bumps into a mysterious alchemist. He and his assistant tell the girl that they require her help in saving the world. To do so, they must travel to a magical place called Wonderland.

She agrees and finds her own confidence growing as she sets out on the journey. There currently aren't too many write-ups in this part of the world for the film, but the ones that have appeared in print are positive. While some suggest that this title is stylistically aping the work of

Hayao Miyazaki (*My Neighbor Totoro*, *Spirited Away*) and doesn't have the same level of depth, they say it is a sweet and entertaining confection that should entertain anime fans. The release includes the original version with English subtitles and an English-dubbed edition.

THE WORLD IS FULL OF SECRETS: Here's another horror anthology for those who appreciate the subgenre. This independent effort is told from the point-of-view of an elderly woman remembering a specific night in the early 1990s when she and her friends had a sleepover. Together, they shared stories about the various things that frightened them. Viewers see these stories depicted onscreen and wait to see what influence the tales had on their lives.

This little independent title has played at various film festivals around the world over the past year or two. While it is premiering on disc, there are a few reviews for it that have appeared from online outlets. They state that it may entertain viewers who can appreciate a do-it-yourself minimalist horror film with an emphasis on mood over shocks. Elena Burger, Dennise Gregory and Ayla Guttman headline the feature.

YUMMY: This Belgian horror feature involves a young group of people traveling to an Eastern European country in order to take advantage of inexpensive plastic surgery rates. As you might have guessed, this cost-cutting measure idea does not turn out to be a good idea. As the boyfriend of the main character waits for his girlfriend, he wanders into a closed wing and finds a woman strapped to an operating table. The group soon discovers that many illegal procedures are being conducted onsite and that they'll need to ward off various undead creatures in order to escape.

Notices for the picture were pretty good. A group did complain that the plot quickly did away with its impressive set-up and turned into an ordinary, gross-out zombie flick. Still, the majority commented that while it was far from deep, the movie provides a few enjoyable creature-feature moments. It stars Maaike Neuville and Bart Hollanders.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST!

Some interesting older titles are also making appearances on Blu-ray this week. Arrow Academy has a Special Edition of the well-regarded French effort, *Little Nothings* (1992) aka *Ri ens du tout*

. The movie is a critique of modern management techniques that details what happens when a department store in financial trouble hires a new CEO with alternative approaches to turning things around. Besides a high definition digital transfer of the feature, the disc includes a 52-minute documentary on the making of the movie, as well as a short film from its director.

Kino has plenty of interesting titles as well. The first Blu-ray is the B-movie *Curse of the Undead* (1959), which places a vampire in a western setting. This movie has been given a new 2K restoration and arrives with a film critic audio commentary and some trailers. They also have *The Face at the Window*
(1939), a British chiller set in Paris involving a mad killer who likes to show off his mutated face as he slaughters his victims.

This title has received a 4K restoration and extras include a movie expert commentary, stills and horror trailers from the era. If thrillers are more to your liking, you can purchase the George Peppard flick, *The Groundstar Conspiracy* (1972). This feature follows an agent in Europe chasing down a saboteur who has blown up a secret U.S. science laboratory. The Blu-ray presents a new 2K master of the film and bonuses include a film historian commentary and trailer.

The Hard Way (1991) is also appearing on Blu-ray this week. It's a buddy action/comedy about a hard-nosed police officer forced to hunt down a killer while being shadowed by a spoiled Hollywood actor – bickering follows as they constantly get in each other's way. It stars James Woods and Michael J. Fox and also features a great supporting cast that includes Luis Guzmán, LL Cool J, Delroy Lindo, Penny Marshall, Christina Ricci and Lewis Black. The release includes a new audio commentary with director John Badham (*Saturday Night Fever* , *Blue Thunder* ,

WarGames
,
Stakeout
).

Speaking of cop flicks, George Peppard leads the cast in *Newman's Law* (1974). The Blu-ray contains a 2K master scan along with similar extras and some radio spots. And if you want to complete a Peppard trilogy this week, you can pick up a Blu-ray of
P.J.
(1968), an earlier detective flick featuring the actor appearing in extras like the previous entries.

The distributor has a second Michael J. Fox Blu-ray as well. This one is for the comedy *The Secret of My Success*
(1987) in which the star plays an average guy who rises to the top of the New York business world by impersonating a very powerful executive. This release contains an entertainment journalist commentary, in addition to a new interview with co-star Helen Slater and a trailer.

Criterion is delivering a Blu-ray of *Pierrot le fou* (1965) from Jean-Luc Goddard (*Breathless*, *2 or 3 Things I Know About Her*
). It's about a Parisian man who decides to throw away his old life and live on the Mediterranean with a woman on the run from Algerian hitmen. This satire of a consumerist lifestyle has been given a new 2K digital restoration. The disc contains an interview with a cast member, a video essay about the movie, an hour-long 2007 documentary about Godard, excerpts from interviews with the cast and crew, as well as a trailer.

Mill Creek is putting out some budget-friendly Blu-rays as well. They include the notorious science-fiction flop *Battlefield Earth* (2000) with John Travolta. You can also pick up a double-feature Blu-ray containing the comedies *Big Bully*
(1996) and
Wrongfully Accused
(1998). For families, Mill Creek has the animated feature adaptation of
The King and I
(1999).

And if you're looking for a scare, they are also making available a Blu-ray of *Snow White: A Tale of Terror*
(1997), a horror-based adaptation of the famous fable with Sigourney Weaver and Sam Neill.

And there's even more! Flicker Alley is releasing *Chicago* (1927), the first adaptation of the hit Broadway play (which was later remade as the 2002 Oscar-winning musical,
Chicago
). Long believed to be a "lost film", one pristine print was located about 15 years ago and the movie has been painstakingly restored by the film department at UCLA. Now you can own a copy of a feature once thought to have disappeared forever.

A great many films are also getting 4K Blu-ray upgrades for high-end televisions. If you have the technology, Warner Brothers is releasing a 4K disc of *300* (2007), Universal is delivering the classic, *Jaws* (1975) and Paramount is putting out *Interstellar* (2014), *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) and a 10th Anniversary 4K edition of *Shutter Island* (2010). Additionally, they are making a box set available called the *Star Trek 10-Movie Stardate Collection*, which contains every film in the series over the last 40 years, all in 4K. All feature the highest quality transfers currently available.

Finally, Warner Archive has a new title to add to their made-to-order Blu-ray collection. It's the beauty pageant comedy, *Drop Dead Gorgeous* (1999), which stars Kirsten Dunst, Ellen Barkin, Allison Janney, Denise Richards, Kristie Alley, Brittany Murphy, Amy Adams, Will Sasso, Adam West, Thomas Lennon and many others. This flick has also developed a cult following over the years and certainly features quite an impressive cast!

YOU KNOW, FOR KIDS!

Here are a few titles that may appeal to youngsters in the household.

Blue's Clues & You! Caring with Blue

Happy Halloween, Scooby-Doo!

The King and I (1999)

Octonauts: Operation Deep Freeze

The Wonderland

ON THE TUBE!

And here are the week's TV-themed releases. It isn't even Halloween yet, but Hallmark is already pushing a few Christmas-set romance flicks your way. If that isn't to your liking you can check out a series that documents the entire history of the horror genre. You'll find all the listings below.

Balthazar: Series 2

Christmas at the Plaza (Hallmark TV-movie)

The Christmas Club (Hallmark TV-movie)

Double Cross: Season 1

Eli Roth's History of Horror: Season 1

Hacking Your Mind (PBS)

Islands of Wonder (PBS)

It's Beginning to Look A Lot Like Christmas (Hallmark TV-movie)

The Last Kingdom: Season 4

Love in Harmony Valley (Based on a Harlequin novel)

Picture a Perfect Christmas (Hallmark TV-movie)

Rescuing Rex (dog documentary from TVO Canada)

Sense, Sensibility & Snowmen (Hallmark TV-movie)

Star Trek: Picard: Season 1

When Calls the Heart: Year 7

When Calls the Heart Double Feature: *Into the Woods* & *New Possibilities*

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