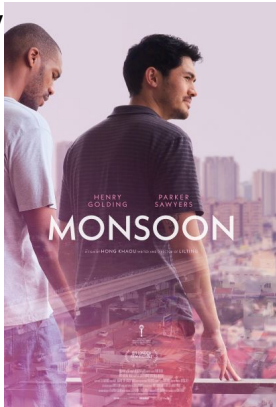


By Glenn Kay



For the Sun

Welcome back to another look at highlights arriving on Blu-ray and DVD. It's another edition filled with plenty of interesting and unique little flicks. So, since you can't or likely shouldn't head out to the movies this week, be sure to give one of these titles a try!

BIG NEW RELEASES!

AMERICAN DREAM: This little thriller follows two entrepreneurs desperate for funding in order to finish their construction project. They approach a Russian mobster, but fail to reach a deal. However, after securing a legitimate deal with other sources, the mobsters decide to involve themselves in the project. As the story progresses, tension ultimately leads to violence.

This movie from LionsGate is only being released on DVD for the time being and there aren't any reviews for it available as of this writing. However, there are some big names involved in the production. It is directed by notable Oscar-winning cinematographer Janusz Kaminski (who has shot the majority of Steven Spielberg's films over the last 30 years) and stars Michiel Huisman, Luke Bracey, Nick Stahl and Agnieszka Grochowska.

EPICENTRO: Havana, Cuba is the focus of this documentary. According to the official plot

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synopsis, the movie details the country from its Spanish and American colonial eras to present day, detailing the development of cinema as a propaganda tool. The press release also states that the filmmakers explore a century of interventionism and myth-making while celebrating the spirit and perseverance of the nation's children. Reaction toward the film was very strong overall.

One or two stated that the movie should have been more focused on specific issues. However, the majority of critics called it an impressive, detailed and informative journey into a nation's background, sharing the good and bad aspects of its storied and tumultuous history.

GO/DON'T GO: After a mysterious event ends almost all human life on Earth, the last remaining survivor goes on, living an isolated and quiet existence and keeping a daily routine in order to maintain his sanity. However, when strange things begin occurring around him that suggest the protagonist may not be alone, the increasingly paranoid figure begins to question if he hasn't actually gone mad. This title appears to be making its premiere on disc and so there are only a handful of write-ups available for it. The small number that appeared online are generally positive, calling the movie an imperfect but interesting psychological thriller that deals with loneliness and its effects on an individual.

The cast includes Alex Knapp (who also wrote and directed the picture), Olivia Luccardi and Nore Davis.

HEART OF THE HOME: Here's another independent feature that is debuting on disc this week. In fact, there is little that is known about the flick other than what has been stated in a press release. It suggests that the movie is about two women looking for a new roommate to share their space with. Desperate for rent money, they approve a woman without a renter's contract or doing a background check on her.

As it turns out, this is a bad idea! Things quickly devolve as the new arrival pits everyone against each other and causes a living nightmare for all the residents. The protagonists eventually discover the underlying reason for the new arrival's cruelty and try to force her out. For those interested in giving the movie a shot, it features Elisabeth Steen-Nokleberg, Mia Ando and Yukina Takase.

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HOT MESS: A 25-year-old aspiring playwright begins questioning her career choices and life decisions in this comedy. She seriously considers making a new start after meeting a charming young man who suggests he'll take care of her if she quits writing, agrees to marry him and then move out to the suburbs. This Australian feature was officially released a couple of years ago, but is only now making its North American DVD debut (a Blu-ray release hasn't been announced yet). The feature won an award in its homeland for Best Independent Feature and earned decent notices from critics *Down Under*.

They wrote that while produced on an extremely low-budget, the movie delivers some laughs thanks to its sharp and bluntly humorous script. Sarah Gaul, Hannah Lehmann and Marshall Campbell headline the film.

JONATHAN SCOTT'S POWER TRIP: Many are familiar with Jonathan Silver Scott as the co-host of the HGTV series *Property Brothers*. In this documentary, Scott looks into the benefits of solar power. In doing so, he becomes aware of fossil fuel monopolies and their disturbing efforts to stifle the use of renewable energy, all done to protect their own wealth and power. He also interviews officials, solar panel experts and coal miners to determine what can be done to help everyone as the world focused on increasing the implementation of new energy production practices.

There aren't a great many reviews for the feature just yet, but it did play at various documentary film festivals over the past year to positive response. Bernie Sanders and Al Gore also appear to share their thoughts on the subject.

JUNGLELAND: As if losing a big fight in the ring isn't unfortunate enough, a boxer and his brother/manager encounter more troubles after it is revealed that they owe a significant sum to local crime boss. In order to pay the villain back, they are forced to enter a dangerous bare-knuckle boxing tournament, one which the pugilist must win if he and his sibling want their lives to return to normal. On the whole, the press enjoyed this sports drama. A small percentage complained that the story didn't offer many surprises and mentioned they had more and more trouble suspending disbelief as events progressed.

However, the majority thought the film was a stylish and atmospheric effort with great performances. It stars Charlie Hunnam, Jack O'Connell, Jessica Barden, Jonathan Majors and Fran Kranz.

LUPIN III: THE FIRST: In case you might be wondering, this animated feature is not a sequel. It's actually based on a Japanese Manga comic book series *Lupin III*. The story is set in the 1960s and follows a gentlemen thief and his team, who trek from Paris to Brazil in order to locate a lost and incredibly rare item that will grant its possessor enormous wealth. They must race against a group of Nazi-treasure hunters also out for the prize.

Response was very upbeat towards this adventure film and it won plenty of awards in its homeland. Only one reviewer in this part of the world criticized the story, saying it lacked excitement. Everyone else described the movie as an impressively animated caper that also served as an excellent adaptation of the source material. You can watch it either in its original language with English subtitles or dubbed into English.

MONSOON: This drama involves a child who escaped Ho Chi Minh City with his family during the Viet Nam War. Now an adult living in the UK, he decides to return home for the very first time since leaving, all in an effort to rediscover his homeland. He struggles to acclimatize to the changed country, but meets various family members, as well as a potential romantic interest. The lead then must determine if he should return to Britain or start a new life in Vietnam.

Critics admired the feature. There were a few who stated that the movie was too subdued and subtle, leaving them uninvolved in the proceedings. However, the vast majority called it a beautifully shot, considerate, and well-acted drama detailing the inner concerns of an immigrant. It stars Henry Golding, David Tran, Parker Sawyers and Molly Harris.

SKYLINES: Remember the 2010 alien invasion movie, *Skyline*? It was not well received, but did inspire a sequel that earned slightly stronger notices. This is the third feature in the franchise and continues the story after an epic battle leaves much of Earth being rebuilt. When a strange virus begins causing problems for the planet's survivors, a military official leads a team to an alien world to face their foes one more time.

This effort received a mixed reaction. Half said that while it was another improvement over the previous chapters, it was still derivative and didn't make a whole lot of sense. Just as many commented that it was reasonably entertaining B-movie fun that would entertain fans of the series. Lindsey Morgan, Jonathan Howard, Daniel Bernhardt and Rhona Mitra headline the flick.

SPELL: A pilot decides to fly with his family in a personal aircraft so they can attend a family funeral in rural Appalachia. They crash and the lead awakens to find himself under the personal care of a stranger. Although she is friendly, she reveals that she is a voodoo practitioner who will heal him using a doll made from his own blood and skin. He soon learns that he is a captive and attempts to escape.

This independent horror flick divided reviewers. Almost half wrote that the movie was atmospheric and thought it was an interesting spin on the genre that reminded them of the 1990 feature, *Misery*. Slightly more criticized the movie for not adding any new ideas or commentary to the concept and suggesting that it became increasingly ridiculous as it proceeded. The cast includes Omari Hardwick and Loretta Devine.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST!

It's yet another busy period with plenty of new Blu-ray upgrades of older features. Mill Creek Entertainment is continuing its practice of releasing movies from the 1980s and '90s with covers perfectly mimicking the original VHS box art. They've got several underrated titles ready for purchase. The discs themselves don't offer extras and may not be stellar in terms of picture quality, but will look better than their DVD counterparts and are priced at a very affordable rate.

The first title on the slate is the Rutger Hauer action/comedy, *Blind Fury* (1989). It's an amusingly goofy little picture with the star playing a blind Viet Nam vet who learns the ways of the samurai (including how to handle a sword). When he returns to the U.S. to help the family of an old friend being targeted by crooks, the hero shocks the villains with his amazing skills with a blade. Director Phillip Noyce (

Dead Calm

,

Patriot Games

,

Rabbit-Proof Fence

,

Salt

) handles the action scenes well and ably delivers some B-movie fun.

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They also have the music-themed drama, *Crossroads* (1986), which features Ralph Macchio (*The Karate Kid*

) as a guitar-playing kid who wants to learn the blues and ends up helping out a music idol whose success came as a result of making a deal with the Devil. This effort comes from director Walter Hill (*The Warriors*, *Southern Comfort*

,
48 Hrs.

,
Streets of Fire

,
Red Heat

,
Trespass

,
Undisputed

,
Undisputed

).

The Freshman (1990) is a great comedy from writer/director Andrew Bergman (who wrote and directed *Honeymoon in Vegas* and also penned the screenplays for *Fletch*, as

well as co-writing

Blazing Saddles

). Matthew Broderick plays a NYC film student who accidentally befriends a mysterious figure (played by Marlon Brando), whom the young man believes may be a mafia boss. Comic shenanigans ensue. The distributor also has the body-swapping comedy

Like Father, Like Son

(1987) with Dudley Moore and Kirk Cameron.

Kino is releasing a couple of new Blu-rays. The first is the action/comedy *Stretch* (2014), about a debt-ridden limo driver (Patrick Wilson) who takes an assignment with a big-tipping, but completely insane passenger who gets the pair into all sorts of danger. The feature arrives with a new commentary from writer/producer/director Joe Carnahan (*The Grey*

The Grey

,
The A-Team

), a film historian audio track and a trailer. They are also putting out a Blu-ray of the unrated director's cut of the thriller,

Thursday

(1998).

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This one follows a shakedown artist who accidentally finds himself in the middle of a dangerous drug scam. The disc includes a film critic commentary, an interview with star Thomas Jane, and a trailer.

If pulse-pounding films are for you, then you can't go wrong with *The Raid Collection* Blu-ray set from Sony. It contains

The Raid: Redemption

(2011) and

The Raid 2

(2014), two Indonesian flicks with some of the wildest, craziest and best martial arts sequences seen over the past decade. The first movie, about a SWAT team trapped in a mobster's tenement who must square off against an army of killers, is something of an action masterpiece. This release allows you to own both flicks for a low price.

If art films are more to your liking, Arbelos Films has a Blu-ray of *Satantango* (1994). It's a Hungarian feature about a family that plans to sell their farm and leave the area for good, until the presumed-dead owner reappears unexpectedly with other plans for the household. This movie has received a 4K restoration from the original 35mm camera negative and a new subtitle translation. It also comes with a video interview the film's composer (who is also a cast member), a video essay on the feature, an archival interview with the director, and another featurette on the meanings behind the movie.

If low-budget genre films are for you, Media Blasters is presenting *Blood Sisters* (1987) and the Japanese fantasy/horror flick

Devilman

(2004) on Blu-ray. The first title has even been given a 4K restoration.

Code Red is putting out a Blu-ray of *The Devil's Wedding Night* (1973) in conjunction with Kino. This Italian effort follows a Transylvanian Countess ready to bring Count Dracula back to life using any means necessary. This release presents the remastered U.S. version, trailers, and a special intro revealing background information about the project.

They also have *Just Before Dawn* (1981). This is a slasher featuring campers getting killed off by a psycho with a machete. It includes both the uncut U.S. version and the extended international edition, both restored from the original 35mm inter-negative. The disc also includes interviews with cast members Gregg Henry, Chris Lemmon, as well as several crew members.

Finally, Flicker Alley also has an interesting 2-disc Blu-ray set called *Laurel and Hardy: Early Solo Films of Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy* (1914 - 1926). As you might imagine, it contains over 35 comedic shorts featuring each performer before they teamed up. All of the flicks have been restored in 2K. The disc also includes an image gallery and new musical scores composed and recorded specifically for the shorts, as well as notes on each film.

YOU KNOW, FOR KIDS!

Here are some kid-friendly titles coming your way.

SpongeBob SquarePants: Season 12 (Nickelodeon)

Ultraman Taro: The Complete Series (1973 - 1974) Mill Creek

ON THE TUBE!

And these are all of the TV-themed releases arriving this week.

Fashionably Yours (Hallmark)

Legacies: The Complete Second Season (Warner Archive)

Manifest: The Complete Second Season (Warner Archive)

Blu-Ray/DVD Roundup for Jan. 18, 2021

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NATURE: Australian Bushfire Rescue (PBS)

NCIS: Seasons 1 - 4

NCIS: Seasons 5 - 8

NOVA: Touching the Asteroid (PBS)

SpongeBob SquarePants: Season 12 (Nickelodeon)

The Twilight Zone: Season 2 (new series)

Workaholics: The Complete Series (Comedy Central)

Ultraman Taro: The Complete Series (1973 - 1974) Mill Creek

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