

Blu-ray/DVD Roundup for September 10, 2021

By Glenn Kay

For the Sun

It's time for another look at some of the highlights that are arriving on Blu-ray and DVD. In addition to a high-profile superhero title, you'll find plenty of quirky little releases that may be of interest. So, if you can't or shouldn't be heading out to the movies this week, be sure to give one of these films a try!

BIG NEW RELEASES!

AMERICAN PIE PRESENTS: GIRLS' RULES: While the original, "American Pie" series came to a close in 2012, that hasn't stopped producers from making direct-to-disc spin-offs. The latest follows a group of four female high school seniors who want to lose their virginity and/or are looking to take revenge on past boyfriends. The friends help each other to accomplish their goals before graduation. This is the first movie in the franchise not to feature a cameo from Eugene Levy and critics panned the final product.

A few commented that they liked the idea of having women at the center of the story and enjoyed a couple of the performances. All others stated that while the gender swap offered potential, the movie featured the same old gags and familiar scenarios that weren't any funnier in their updated form. It stars Madison Pettis, Lizzie Broadway, Piper Curda, Natasha Behnam, Danny Trejo and Barry Bostwick.

APOCALYPSE '45: Marking the 75th anniversary of the Pacific War, the makers of this documentary have unearthed unseen and at times grisly color footage from the last months of the conflict. This incredible, newly-discovered film has been restored to pristine condition and is being presented for the first time, narrated by two dozen soldiers who lived through the events.

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As of this writing, all members of the press have praised the feature. Most were stunned by what they witnessed.

They called it a jarring and completely compelling contrast to Hollywood's narrative depictions of the war. The journalists noted that it was heavy viewing, but showed things as they really occurred and painted an intimate portrait of the horrors that many were forced to endure. The feature originally premiered on Discovery and is now arriving on disc.

THE GATEWAY: A down-on-his-luck social worker is assigned to provide assistance to a single mother with a recently paroled ex-husband. He does his best to protect the woman and her daughter, but is told by the lady that a large stash of cash is hidden in the home. He soon finds the place surrounded by the woman's violent, drug-dealing spouse and his team of thugs. Reviewers were less-than-enthused by this crime thriller.

A small contingent enjoyed the performances and thought the movie delivered some tense moments. Unfortunately, the majority complained that while the filmmakers had noble intentions in trying to deal with spousal abuse, it didn't handle its themes well or generate any excitement. The cast includes Shea Whigham, Olivia Munn, Keith David, Taryn Manning, Mark Boone Junior, Taegen Burns and Frank Grillo.

GREAT WHITE: After their seaplane crashes in the ocean over 100 miles from shore, the surviving pilot and tourists climb into a life raft and wait for rescuers. Unfortunately for them, the waters are shark-infested. Drifting throughout the night, a clever, stealthy great white picks up their scent and tracks them, leading to a battle between the group and an apex predator. Response to the feature was more negative than positive.

Those who appreciated this thriller suggested it was tense and that the characters were developed enough for viewers to care about them. Sadly, the majority stated that there really wasn't enough about the title that was unique or clever and that it would be forgotten soon after the credits rolled. It features Katrina Bowden, Aaron Jakubenko, Kimie Tsukakoshi, Tim Kano and Te Kohe Tuhaka.

SILLO: Farms are dangerous places! This independent thriller follows a teenage boy who accidentally falls into a silo filled with corn. Trapped and slowly sinking in the massive tower, he

does his best to alert his family. From this point forward, his parents and neighbors do everything they can to retrieve the boy before it's too late.

This title is scheduled to arrive on Blu-ray and DVD and is available on Target, but the listing doesn't appear to be on Amazon yet. Overall, reaction toward the film has been positive. A small number of reviewers found it a bit over-baked and asserted that the simple story didn't justify a full feature. Still, far more were impressed by the photography, thought the film really detailed the dangers that farmers face daily and called it remarkably tense. It stars Jeremy Holm, Jill Paice and Jack DiFalco.

SLAXX: This horror/comedy certainly has a unique concept. Set in a popular clothing company's flagship store, a group of trendy and fashion-obsessed employees work the nightshift. They're assigned to set the shop up for the release of a big new product line the following day. Little do they know that among the items on the shelves is a possessed pair of jeans ready to murder them for their unethical business practices and their behavior.

This film debuted earlier in the year as a streaming title and is now arriving as a DVD exclusive. Critics were generally amused by what they witnessed. One or two of them hated the self-obsessed characters. But everyone else wrote that there was a lot of satire and enough of the gags worked to earn the flick a recommendation. The cast includes Romane Denis, Brett Donahue, Sehar Bhojani and Stephen Bogaert.

TOGETHER TOGETHER: A single man in his 40s decides that he wants to become a father. Without a significant other to conceive a child with, he comes into contact with a stranger who agrees to be a surrogate. While remaining platonic pals, as the pregnancy progresses and the two get to know each other better, they find their relationship changing and developing in complex and unexpected ways. Notices were excellent for this independent comedy/drama.

There was a small group who didn't like the ending and criticized the screenplay for failing to wrap things up in a satisfying manner. However, the majority thought the movie was sweet, were blown away by the performances, and believed it would spark interesting discussion among viewers. For the time being, this is a DVD only release. Patti Harrison, Ed Helms, Nora Dunn, Tig Notaro and Rosalind Chao headline the feature.

YOU SHOULD HAVE LEFT: Here's yet another feature that warns audiences not to spend their vacations staying at isolated and eerie locales. This chiller involves a banker whose previous wife passed away under suspicious circumstance. Remarried to a young actress, he heads out with his new spouse and daughter to a Welsh manor. Once they arrive, the tourists begin to feel uneasy and start becoming convinced that an evil figure is haunting the place.

Generally, this picture failed to intrigue members of the press. Some of them complimented it for maintaining an eerie atmosphere and also offered kind words to the game cast who helped deliver a couple of jolts. Still, the consensus was that this picture didn't generate enough thrills to recommend, and felt clichéd and predictable. The cast includes Kevin Bacon, Amanda Seyfried, Avery Tiiu Essex and Colin Blumenau.

ZACH SNYDER'S JUSTICE LEAGUE: Back in 2017, the DC superhero team-up film, "Justice League" was released in theaters. It featured "Batman," "Wonder Woman," "Aquaman," "The Flash," "Superman" and "Cyborg" teaming up to face a potentially world-ending threat. Most were underwhelmed by the results and the movie was generally considered to have been a missed opportunity. During the recent pandemic, director Zach Snyder went back to the editing room to reassemble his original vision for the movie.

Running at 4 hours (twice the running time of the original), this new version tries to fill in some plot holes and fix issues with the earlier cut. It recently premiered on HBO Max and can now be picked up as either a regular Blu-ray or separately in 4K Ultra HD. Overall, critics have suggested that it is better than the previous version. A large number suggested that even if the narrative problems had been rectified, it was an overlong slog and still an ineffective superhero movie.

However, more thought that the changes made the film a much more cohesive and entertaining experience. It stars Ben Affleck, Gal Gadot, Amy Adams, Jason Momoa, Ezra Miller, Henry Cavill and Jesse Eisenberg.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST!

Lots of interesting older films are receiving upgrades this week. Kino is releasing a Blu-ray of the 1973 cult horror flick, "Theater of Blood." Made in the UK, this feature stars Vincent Price as

a Shakespearean actor who is so irritated by scathing reviews from the press that he sets out to murder his harshest critics in diabolical and ironic ways. The movie is grimly funny and this Special Edition Blu-ray comes with a new audio commentary featuring the film's screenwriter/producer, a film historian audio track, as well as multiple trailers and promotional materials.

"The Tomb of Ligeia" (1964) is another Price title about a man obsessed with his deceased wife. His strange behavior continues after remarrying, much to the concern of his new bride. This Special Edition disc arrives in high definition with multiple commentaries. One features a film historian who tells background information on the production, another is an archived track with producer/director Roger Corman and a third includes cast member Elizabeth Shepherd.

You'll also get some trailers for the film. Collectors should also take note that both of these releases arrive with a limited slipcase.

Ronin Flix often gives wonderful treatment to obscure genre films. This week, they are putting out, "Adrenaline: Fear the Rush" (1996) on Blu-ray. It's a thriller featuring two cops (played by Christopher Lambert and Natasha Henstridge), hunting down a serial killer who operates out of a labyrinth-like dungeon. This title includes a trailer.

You can also pick up "Lawnmower Man 2: Jobe's War" (1996) aka "Lawnmower Man 2: Beyond Cyberspace." The title character from the previous horror film now lives in a digital world and decides to battle for world control with another individual. In truth, it's a pretty terrible sequel to a not-so-great original movie, but those looking for B-movie laughs may get a kick out of the outdated technology and computer-based shenanigans. It also arrives on disc with a trailer.

Universal is digging deep into its vaults for some classic titles to present on Blu-ray. This week, they have the 1946 Deanna Durbin romantic musical comedy, "Because of Him." If you're looking for more in the same vein, you can also see Durbin in "Can't Help Singing" (1944), as well as "For the Love of Mary" (1948), and "Something in the Wind" (1947), which are also arriving on disc.

The studio is also giving a few titles 4K upgrades. This week, they are presenting the Alfred Hitchcock classics "Rear Window" (1954) and "Vertigo" (1958) as Ultra HD titles (with a regular

Blu-ray and digital copy included for those who don't feel like upgrading their TVs just yet). These two films were a part of a recent Hitchcock box set and are both being made available individually.

And those who love the work of horror maestro John Carpenter (director of, "Halloween," "Big Trouble in Little China," "They Live," and, "In the Mouth of Madness"), will be thrilled to see a 4K Ultra HD/Blu-ray/Digital edition, "The Thing" (1982), an epic chiller. It's one of the filmmaker's best titles, a literally chilling tale of a shape-shifting alien attacking a group of men stationed at an Antarctic base. The discs include the previously released commentary track with Carpenter and star Kurt Russell. Additionally, the set also comes with a lengthy documentary on the movie and outtakes.

If you shop at Best Buy, the 4K release can be purchased there in exclusive Steelbook packaging.

Code Red is releasing the action flick, "Death Ring" (1992) on Blu-ray. It's inspired by the classic 1932 film "The Most Dangerous Game" and follows an extraordinarily wealthy aristocrat who spends his spare time hunting and murdering humans on an uncharted island. Of course, his latest target turns out to be much harder to kill than anticipated. The disc comes with a trailer.

And Film Detective is putting out a Blu-ray of "A Life at Stake" (1955), a well-regarded film noir. It follows an architect who begins an affair, only to learn that his new girlfriend's previous lover died under ... odd circumstances. Angela Lansbury (more familiar to younger viewers as the lead in the TV-series, "Murder, She Wrote"), plays the femme fatale. The movie has been given a 4K restoration and comes with a film scholar commentary, a documentary, and an illustrated booklet with an essay on the film.

Paramount is rereleasing some catalog titles, as well as a few Miramax films to which they have acquired the rights. You can pick up, "Mission: Impossible - Rogue Nation" (2015) and the horror sequels "Scream 2" (1997), and "Scream 3" (2000) on Blu-ray. "Star Trek Into Darkness," (2013) and "Star Trek: The Motion Picture" (1979) are also being made available, along with "State of the Union" (1948), "Terminator: Genisys" (2015), and "The Wolf of Wall Street" (2013), from director Martin Scorsese.

If you noted the Star Trek rereleases above, then you'll also be excited by the new box set, "Star Trek: The Original 4-Movie Collection." It contains upgraded 4K Ultra HD versions of "Star Trek: The Motion Picture" (1979), as well as "Star Trek II: The Wrath of Kahn" (1982), and "Star Trek III: The Search for Spock" (1984), not to mention, "Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home" (1986) alongside plenty of bonuses. The set includes alternate cuts of some of the titles and hours of special features. Naturally, the release also comes with regular Blu-rays and digital copies of the films.

Finally, Lightyear Video has a DVD-only release of the sequel "The Return of the Swamp Thing" (1989), which is based on the DC comic book character. This is a campy follow-up to the 1982 original film adaptation. The story features the heroic swamp monster doing battle with various evildoers (including the villain from the first picture). It stars Heather Locklear and Louis Jordan.

This "30th Anniversary Collector's Edition" must have been delayed for some time, since it's already a couple of years out-of-date, but the disc includes a nice, new digital restoration of the film.

YOU KNOW, FOR KIDS!

There are a couple of new titles that may be of interest for young children.

"PBS Kids: 15 Girl Power Adventures!" DVD

"The Woody Woodpecker Screwball Collection" (1941 - 1972) (includes 25 Original Theatrical Cartoons)

ON THE TUBE!

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

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“As Luck Would Have It” (Hallmark Channel) DVD

“Dangerous Assignment” The Complete Series

“Frankie Drake Mysteries” Season 4

“Hallmark 2-Movie Collection: Just My Type & Harvest Love” DVD

“Love Alaska” (Hallmark Channel) DVD

“PBS Kids: 15 Girl Power Adventures!” DVD

“SEAL Team” Season 4

“The Soul of The Midnight Special” 10 DVD Set

“Sweet Carolina” (Hallmark Channel) DVD

“Young Sheldon” Season 4

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