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# THE BEDLAM FILES

*With Adam Groves*

“Cassandra Peterson went on to make millions of dollars as Elvira, while Maila Nurmi (as Vampira) didn’t even have a phone.”

— Sandra Niemi

## Streaming Now



### 1. **DUNE**

The cinema of the spectacle gets a good airing in this, the second mega-budgeted feature to be adapted from **Frank Herbert's science fiction masterpiece DUNE**. Director Denis Villeneuve has been criticized for putting pictorial splendor before character development, but when you have visuals as impressive as those on display here is that *really* such a terrible thing? Villeneuve also deserves credit for respecting his source material (especially in light of Apple TV's FOUNDATION, which all-but threw out the Isaac Asimov stories it purported to adapt), resulting in a film

## Adam's Picks



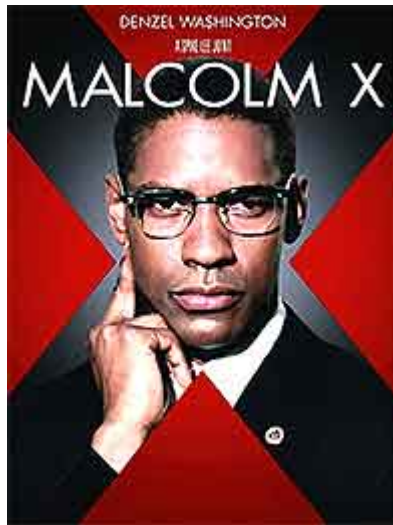
### 1. **SAVE THE GREEN PLANET!**

Many people believe the success of SQUID GAME will lead to a Korean movie craze in America. If so then here's a good starting point for you Korean film novices, a crazed black comedy about the corrupt CEO of a pharmaceutical company who gets abducted and tortured by a nutty employee who believes his boss is an alien. With an atmosphere at once gritty and cartoonishly over-the-top (a combination that's about as harmonious as it sounds), this isn't a perfect film by any means, but it is a one-of-a-kind viewing experience. FILM

that mostly satisfies, with my major complaint being that it only dramatizes the novel's first half, and so ends on an unresolved note.

HBO MAX

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## 2. MALCOLM X

This (after DO THE RIGHT THING) is the greatest of Spike Lee's films. Running over three hours and adroitly accomplishing Lee's stated goal to dramatize the life of Malcolm X in the manner of a David Lean epic, the film is a tad self-indulgent (what Spike Lee movie isn't?), but does an excellent job capturing the high and low points of its subject's life and political career. And Denzel Washington? At the risk of being un-PC, I'm going to say that I prefer his interpretation of Malcolm X to the real thing.

NETFLIX

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## 3. OBSERVE AND REPORT

The concept here was definitely intriguing: a comedic variant on TAXI



## 2. BATTLE ROYALE

Continuing with SQUID GAME, here's its major inspiration. One of the final films directed by Japan's late Kinji Fukasaku, BATTLE ROYALE (2000) was enormously popular in its native land and the US, and provided the uncredited template for THE HUNGER GAMES. As my review indicates, I wasn't entirely thrilled with Fukasaku's film, which to me always seemed overly melodramatic and implausible. Yet I also contend there's a reason for its popularity, with it functioning as a fittingly extreme metaphor for an extreme age.

FILM

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## 3. DEATH MAKES A HOLIDAY: A CULTURAL HISTORY OF HALLOWEEN by DAVID J. SKAL

A quirky and idiosyncratic "Cultural History" of All Hallows by the renowned **novelist** and horror movie historian David J. Skal. Provided is a good history of the holiday, which

DRIVER. The film wasn't much of a success, mostly due to the fact that it's about a mall cop (played by a surprisingly endearing Seth Rogan) and was released around the same time as another, much shallower (though far more lucrative) mall cop-themed movie. Let's hope OBSERVE AND REPORT'S long overdue bow on Netflix helps attract the audience it deserves but hasn't yet found.

NETFLIX

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#### 4. CRYPTOZOO

The most shocking thing about this feature-length animated oddity? That it wasn't made in Europe or Asia, but, rather, right here in the US of A. Commencing with a naked hippie impaled by a unicorn's horn, followed by said unicorn getting its head bashed in by the hippie's outraged GF, CRYPTOZOO won't ever be mistaken for a Disney film. It's a staunchly adult oriented exploration of the freakier edges of mythology and folklore, with crude-but-inventive animation that flaunts its two-dimensionality, recalling the **surrealist collage art of Max Ernst**.

AMAZON

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“has its essential roots in the terrors of the primitive mind,” and its offshoots, detailed in chapters on the “Yard Haunting” DIY haunted house craze, San Francisco’s infamously rowdy Halloween parades, **HALLOWEEN** (1978) and its sequels, and the intersection of Halloween and the **events of September 11, 2001**.

BOOK

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#### 4. MARS & APRIL

The French-Canadian Martin Villeneuve, the younger brother of DUNE's helmer Denis, acquitted himself quite well in this 2012 film, creating a science fiction epic whose budget was equivalent to what DUNE spent on catering. Interstellar travel, teleportation, otherworldly musical instruments and the unconscious made manifest are among the concepts explored in MARS & APRIL, a film that, more than nearly any other, gives budget-lite sci fi a good name.

FILM

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## 5. SQUID GAME

A most unlikely worldwide sensation. I'm sure you're at least partially familiar with the premise of this ultra-bleak South Korean mini-series, and also its iconography (the giant spinning doll, etc.), which in recent weeks has become ubiquitous in the media. SQUID GAME is indeed a powerful and disturbing program with many impossible-to-forget images, although it suffers from a severely protracted nine hour-plus narrative that could have been encompassed in two.

NETFLIX

## 5. HALLOWEEN III: SEASON OF THE WITCH

HALLOWEEN III is the nuttiest of the HALLOWEEN sequels, a Michael Myers-less account, conceived by the legendary **Nigel Kneale**, about an evil dude inserting pieces of Stonehenge into Halloween masks that when exposed to a special TV signal kill the wearers and cause deadly snakes to erupt from their heads. *Fun fact:* the late lamented **Dennis Etchison** (writing under his "**Jack Martin**" pseudonym) novelized this silliness, a job for which he (like Kneale) was vastly overqualified.

BOOK

## Also NEW on the Site!

- **Faces of Fear**
- **House of Psychotic Women**
- **Love Me Deadly**
- **Glamour Ghoul: Passions and Pain of the Real Vampira**
- **Hellstrom's Hive**
- **And Much More!**





**Vampira** versus **Elvira**: it's undoubtedly one of the great rivalries of our time, a three decade long feud that concluded with the 2008 demise of Vampira, a.k.a. Maila Nurmi. She and Elvira, a.k.a. Cassandra Peterson, both had worthwhile books about them published in 2021, and I think



you can guess which of them sold better. Elvira, after all, remains a mainstream success forty years after her debut, while Vampira is a cult figure at best--in the words of author **John Gilmore**, "Poor Maila. She'd wanted fame, and gone around expanding broadly upon her friendship with Jimmy Dean, but found only Ed Wood and a taxidermied Dracula."

That quote refers to the fact that Nurmi, despite her status as the world's first-ever TV horror movie host (and her James Dean connection), remains best known for appearing in Ed Wood's **PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE**, which also featured a taxidermist pretending to be a deceased Bela Lugosi. I can recall attending a screening of that film hosted by a very old, but still quite spunky, Vampira, during which more than one guy turned up asking "Where's Elvira?" The doorman attempted to explain that the patrons had the wrong "ira," and offered brief history lessons about Vampira's accomplishments as an enticement, but to no avail: the confused Elvira fans invariably left, resulting in a very sparse crowd.

Vampira, at least, fared better than forgotten TV horror hosts like Moona Lisa, Sinister Seymour and the Cleveland based Ghoulardi, a.k.a. Ernie Anderson. He was the father of writer-director Paul Thomas Anderson, who I'll always remember for a chat I had with a TV producer back in the mid-nineties. Touting the benefits of being a production assistant, the producer mentioned PTA, who had apparently been doing just that for several years until getting a self-directed independent feature, **HARD EIGHT**, into production with Rysher Entertainment. Long story short: that film was a bomb whose failure helped take down Rysher (Anderson: "I was happy that I aided their downfall in some way"), but it succeeded in jump-starting a moviemaking career whose latest film, **LICORICE PIZZA**, is set to be released in December.

That TV producer encounter, FYI, took place not long after the Vampira hosted **PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE** screening. Of her

remarks that day I remember little, outside a promise that  
“You’re in for a thrill!” She wasn’t lying.

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