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THE BEDLAM FILES

With Adam Groves

“People really act weird at Christmas time! What other time of year do you sit in front of a dead tree in the living room and eat nuts and seeds out of your socks?”

— Anonymous

NEW NEW NEW

The Bedlam Files news is now archived on the website! Same links and information you've come to expect, just a lot easier to find.

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Streaming Now



1. **CLOUD ATLAS**

I know many of you think I'm crazy for proclaiming this the best film of the 2010s. I stand by my superlatives, as no more audacious, wide-ranging, genre-busting movie was released in

Adam's Picks



1. **GREMLINS 2: THE NEW BATCH** by **DAVID BISCHOFF**

GREMLINS 2 (1990) was a scaled-down sequel to the Christmas horror classic **GREMLINS**. What's interesting about that sequel is the way in which

that era (or too many others).

Featuring over a dozen protagonists and nearly as many historical settings, the film is a first class mind-bender that I'm certain would have been labeled a masterpiece had it been dubbed into a foreign language and released with subtitles.

NETFLIX



2. THE BONES

A 14 minute astonishment from Chile's Joaquín Cociña and Cristóbal León (of [THE WOLF HOUSE](#)), who've created an altogether dazzling black and white animated reverie that purports to be a restored relic from the early 1900s. Mixing Claymation, traditional animation, puppetry and stop motion, it depicts a puppet girl performing an arcane ritual involving a collection of severed human heads and limbs (belonging, apparently, to deceased politicians). The opening scenes suggest the abstraction of Patrick Bokanowski and the Brothers Quay, while the later ones are redolent of [FRANKENSTEIN](#)—or more accurately [THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN](#) in the uncanny romance that comes to predominate.

MUBI

its director Joe Dante ran wild with his limited resources, creating a goofy free-for-all whose likes hadn't been seen in Hollywood since the days of [HELLZAPOPPIN'](#) (1941). This fun novelization replicates the film's anything-goes spirit with a mountain of self-referential gags and, in place of the fake film break of the flick, a section in which the author is tied up and one of the titular critters takes over writing duties.

BOOK



2. NUTCRACKER FANTASY

From Japan, a 1979 stop motion epic in the mold of the classic Rankin-Bass Christmas specials. The major difference between them and [NUTCRACKER FANTASY](#) is that the latter film is deeply, thoroughly, and profoundly weird. There are some striking visual flourishes—such as the foreground glare a stop-motion candle makes and a dance sequence in which the participants transform into animated butterflies—that demonstrate an artistic sensibility, and the film *is* genuinely artistic, even if ultimately (as a lyric from one of its songs states), “Confusion is in command.”

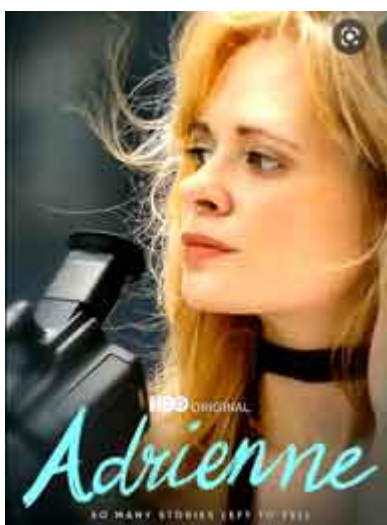
FILM



3. THE POWER OF THE DOG

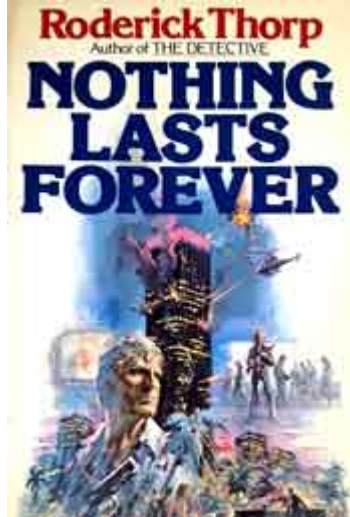
The first feature in 12 years by New Zealand's Jane Campion, who's created a film that's a mite annoying (the glacial pacing and uneventful narrative are downright perverse) but also oddly compelling. Featured is Kristen Dunst as a widowed restaurateur in 1925 Montana who marries into a family that includes Benedict Cumberbatch as a bullying asshole. The exotic Kiwi scenery is never an especially convincing stand-in for Montana, but Campion deserves credit for creating a tough-minded atmosphere that (unlike so many westerns these days) doesn't present the Wild West as a liberal haven but, rather, a profoundly bleak and unforgiving—and gorgeously photographed—environ.

NETFLIX



4. ADRIENNE

The late actress/director Adrienne Shelley (1966–2006) is celebrated in this alternately inspiring and deeply



3. NOTHING LASTS FOREVER by RODERICK THORP

A 1979 novel that was supposed to be a sequel to the 1968 Frank Sinatra starrer THE DETECTIVE. That film adaptation never happened, although NOTHING LASTS FOREVER did make it to the screen in 1987, as a movie you may know: DIE HARD. You're probably also familiar with the story, which was taken largely verbatim from this novel. Where the book and film differ is in the former's painstakingly achieved sense of realism, despite the fact that its particulars are otherwise a mite implausible.

BOOK



4. WIND CHILL

This 2006 horror fest is not a great movie, but it is a solid exercise in minimalism with fine location work, some decent scares, and expert performances by Ashton Holmes (of A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE) and a young Emily Blunt. They play college students on a Christmas Eve drive

sad film, made by her husband Andy Ostroy. His portrayal may err a bit on the worshipful side, but I say Ostroy can be forgiven for that, as his wife does appear to have been a pure-hearted individual whose life was cut short far, far too soon. Appearing in this film is seemingly everyone who ever knew Ms. Shelley, including her family, filmmaker Hal Hartley, the cast of the Shelley directed film WAITRESS, and, unbelievably enough, her killer (interviewed in the prison where's currently interred).

HBO



5. THE HUMANS

A new candidate for the ideal dysfunctional Thanksgiving movie, a beautifully observed, deeply unsettling adaptation of the Tony Award winning play by Stephen Karam, who also directed this movie. Featured is a family getting together for Turkey Day in an ancient NYC apartment whose crumbling architecture mirrors the fraying human dynamic being played out within. My only problem: none of the actors, who include Beanie Feldstein, Amy Schumer and Richard Jenkins, look like family members.

SHOWTIME

through Delaware who encounter a bevy of ghosts after their car breaks down.

FILM



5. CHRISTMAS CRUELTY!

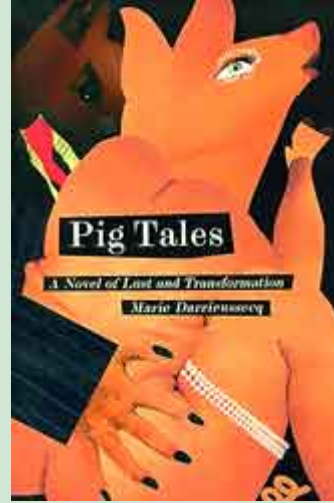
Very likely the nastiest **Christmas-themed horror movie** ever made, a Norwegian freak-out about a homicidal nut dressed as Santa who embarks on a murder spree. This entails much over-the-top splatter (of course), accompanied by a highly incongruous up-tempo score and lots of mundane footage of people going about their daily lives (*i.e.* the stuff most slasher flicks leave out), in an intriguing but ultimately unsatisfying cinematic experiment.

FILM

Also NEW on the Site!

- **Kirk Cameron's Saving Xmas**
- **Santa's Xmas Elf (Named Calvin)**

- **Fun in BalloonLand**
- **Red Spider White Web (Book)**
- **Remembering that which is Better Forgotten: Santa Claus (The Movie)**
- **Nightmare of Ecstasy: the Life and Art of Edward D. Wood Jr. (Book)**
- **Pig Tales (Book)**
- ***And Much More!***



Insider Info

What is there to say about the **now-deceased Anne Rice**? In my case not much, as I've only read two of her books: **INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE** and **THE VAMPIRE LESTAT**. That was back in high school, when I enjoyed both enormously, although upon attempting to reread them years later I found **INTERVIEW** a lugubrious slog and wasn't able to finish **LESTAT**. I had a similar problem when I tried to peruse other Rice novels like **THE QUEEN OF THE DAMNED**, **THE MUMMY** and **THE WITCHING HOUR**, into which I didn't get very far.



I don't mean to bemoan Miss Rice's literary shortcomings here, although I'm not alone in finding her books lacking. Bookish types, such as a bookstore owner I once knew who dubbed her a "female Stephen King," tended to be quite dismissive, as did the literary horror community, from whose ranks you faced immediate and permanent expulsion for the crime of liking Anne Rice.

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The horror community's attitude toward Ms. Rice needs some unpacking. Clearly there was a great deal of jealousy at Rice's enormous success (it's no exaggeration to say that during the nineties she, along with Stephen King and Dean Koontz, essentially *was* the horror fiction market in America), but the true reason for all the resentment, I believe, had do with the changes she wreaked on vampire fiction. In an introductory note to his

2005 vampire thriller MIDNIGHT MASS, horror scribe F. Paul Wilson bemoaned the “tortured romantic aesthetes who have been passing lately for vampires,” and I think we all know the source of *that* complaint.

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How might Anne Rice have felt about this? Frankly I doubt she much cared. Her strength was in her defiantly iconoclastic stance, displayed toward the horror community and her own fans (who she upset by abandoning her standard fare in the early aughts to write a two volume series about the life of Christ).

Rice's novelist son Christopher credits his mother with imploring him to “Refuse to accept failure,” because “if she had listened to critics, she wouldn't be where she is today.” Such nonconformity is laudable, even if her writing isn't.

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The Bedlam Files

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