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# THE BEDLAM FILES

*With Adam Groves*

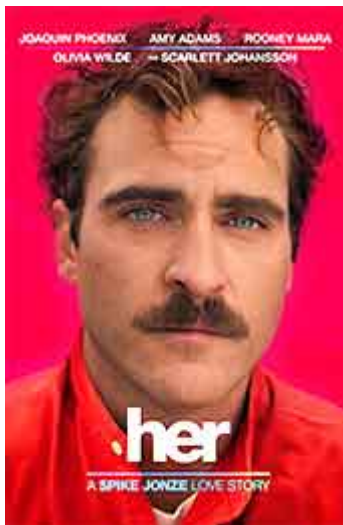
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“There's something liberating about watching someone not following the rules.”

—Nikolaj Coster-Waldau

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## Streaming Now



### 1. HER

The finest performance ever given by Scarlett Johansson, IMHO, can be found in this 2013 film about a lonely young man (Joaquin Phoenix) and his relationship with a computerized construct voiced of ScarJo. HER'S publicity campaign focused on Phoenix, which I say was a mistake. It should have highlighted his co-star, delivering an audio-only turn that's extremely well handled by writer-director Spike Jonze, who refrains from enhancing Johansson's voice with mechanical reverb and wisely leaves her very un-robotic vocal

## Adam's Picks



### 1. BLOOD SIMPLE

Given the many lame neo-noir “thrillers” released in March ‘22 (WINDFALL, DEEP WATER, etc.), I say it's an ideal time to revisit this 1984 classic, which represents the pinnacle of the form. A triumph of imagination and ingenuity from the Coen brothers and cinematographer Barry Sonnenfeld, BLOOD SIMPLE is a visual marvel with a deeply oppressive yet playful aura that many, *many* subsequent films have tried (and failed) to emulate. FILM

quirks—screechiness, raspiness, etc.—intact. NETFLIX



## 2. ARREBATO

It's great to see this 1979 Spanish masterwork, which until recently was all-but unknown in the English speaking world, finally getting some play here. The absolute last word on visual addiction, ARREBATO (RAPTURE) has a powerful air of brooding mystery, an absorbing narrative that encompasses drugs and vampirism, and a deeply haunting final scene that can be viewed as a poetic dissertation on the uneasy relationship between cinema and reality. CRITERION



## 3. STARSHIP TROOPERS

Director Paul Verhoeven and screenwriter Ed Neumeier tried to recapture the satiric nastiness of their still-unsurpassed work on **ROBOCOP** with this 1997 adaptation of Robert Heinlein's 1959 novel. This is to say that Verhoeven and Neumeier sought to deliver both a militaristic thrill ride



## 2. THE HORDE by IGOR BARANKO

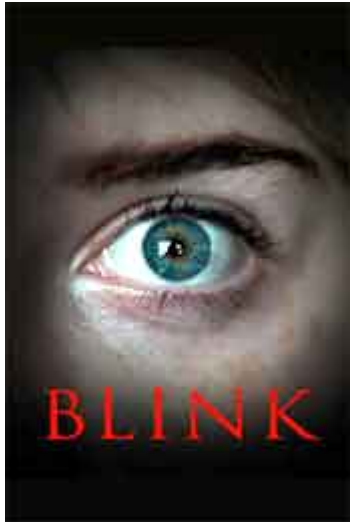
With all the newfound interest in Ukrainian culture, I present to you the work of Igor Baranko, a comic artist from Kiev. This 2004 mind-roaster, the first of Baranko's graphic novels to see print in English, is about a future Russian dictator attempting to resurrect Genghis Khan. This results in a wild Jodorowskian mix of seemingly incompatible religious beliefs within a science fiction framework, served up with a penchant for the freakish and grotesque, and an overall love of outrage. BOOK



## 3. THE EVE OF IVAN KUPALO

More madness from Ukraine, courtesy of the late **Yuri Ilyenko**, a visual maestro on the level of **Andrei Tarkovsky** or Ilyenko's late colleague **Sergei Paradjanov**. Based on a story by Nikolai Gogol and steeped in Ukrainian folklore, THE EVE OF IVAN KUPALO contains tripped-out handheld camerawork, whiplash changes in tone (from horror to slapstick to action to religious drama)

and a pithy deconstruction of same, a mix that doesn't quite work. There's also the unfortunate fact that Heinlein's novel was already given the (unauthorized) filmic treatment in the form of ALIENS, a much stronger film than this one. Still, STARSHIP TROOPERS is great fun, and, in a rarity for a late nineties blockbuster, flaunts its R rating unabashedly. NETFLIX



#### 4. BLINK

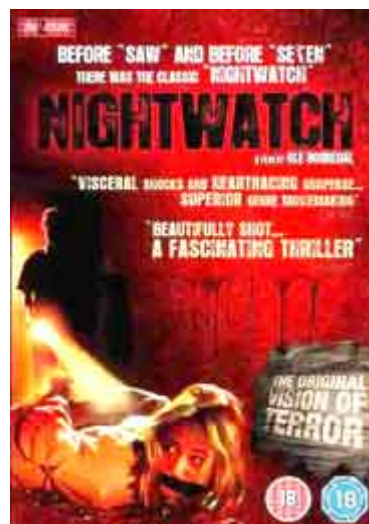
This short film's co-writer/director Spenser Cohen was a screenwriter on MOONFALL, but don't hold *that* against him. Not to be confused with the crappy 1993 feature of the same name, BLINK is a nifty chunk of minimalist horror featuring a paralyzed young woman (Sophie Thatcher) confined to a hospital bed. The victim of some horrific past trauma, she can communicate only by blinking her eyes; a sympathetic nurse (Alicia Coppola) attempts to use eye blinks to get Thatcher to reveal what is it that landed her in the ER, not realizing that *something* is loose in the room with them. A slick, superbly paced and deeply unnerving little film that proves old school horror is alive and well. YOUTUBE

and a bewildering variety of cinematic techniques (negative exposure, superimpositions, fast motion, etc.). The film is a must-see, although it may take multiple viewings to fully comprehend Ilyenko's defiantly off-kilter approach. FILM



#### 4. BATMAN: THE COMPLETE HISTORY by LES DANIELS

With Batman mania once again sweeping the land, this profusely illustrated 1999 tome by the late Les Daniels is eminently worth revisiting. The book is obviously a bit out of date, but is admirably exhaustive nonetheless, taking us through the Caped Crusader's 1939 inception (as the dark inverse of Superman), followed by quite a few changes in orientation, with Batman portrayed as a cuddly, flamboyant and, finally, quasi-psychotic personage. BOOK



#### 5. NIGHTWATCH

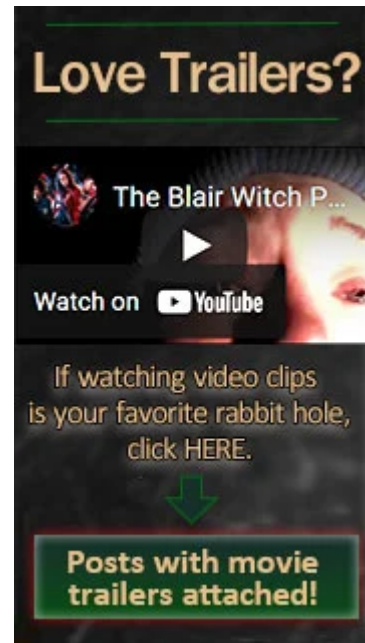
For those of you wondering who the Hell Nikolaj Coster-Waldau might be, here's one of the talented fellow's more



## 5. **AGAINST THE ICE**

This Danish import is tough and unsparring, just as it should be. About two explorers left to fend for themselves in the wake of a botched 19<sup>th</sup> Century expedition in Iceland, it stars the always-watchable Nikolaj Coster-Waldau (who also co-wrote the script) as one of the two protagonists (Joe Cole is the other), who are forced to confront the Arctic wilderness with a bunch of dogs (none of which are long for this world) and an ever-dwindling cache of supplies. Powerful, but the intercutting between the desperate protagonists and the cozy meetings held by their minister (Charles Dance) to discuss the fate of the two men deflates the tension considerably. NETFLIX

popular films. It never received much play in the US, but this 1994 Danish chiller, the feature debut of director Ole Bornedal, was a massive success in its native land—and remains a potent and atmospheric exercise in unease. Waldau plays a young man who takes a job as a night watchman in a morgue, where a necrophiliac serial killer is afoot. FILM



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## Insider Info

Celebrities, it seems, just can't stay out of trouble. In recent weeks we've seen Jane Campion rile up the woke mobs with her (admittedly obnoxious) **DGA acceptance speech**, Patricia Arquette demand that we "**Kick Russia out of NATO**," Brie Larson **troll for the metaverse**, Kanye West tweet a racial slur, Willow Smith **publish a novel that portrays Muslims in a less-than-effusive light**, and her father **perpetrate a "slap heard around the world."** Then there was last month's release of Disney's DEATH ON THE NILE, which had been held back a year due to the **controversy engendered by its star Armie Hammer**, only to have three more of its cast members join the woke shitlist in the interim. This is a rather pressing issue, given that, according to one prominent producer, Hollywood executives' current decision making is "85 percent about the fear of being attacked on social media or in places like the Hollywood press or *The New York Times*."



That quote comes from an already-infamous **January 11 substack article** about the "explosion of wokeness" that has supposedly overtaken modern Hollywood. I'd dispute the scope of the "ideological and cultural transformation" claimed by the article, and the assertion that if things don't change audiences might "decide that we are telling stories set in a fantasyland instead of a world they know and live in." *That* particular ship, I'd say, has long since sailed.

Furthermore, the culture of fear and mistrust described in the article, summed up by the quote "I'm sitting in a room trying to run a show with a collection of people I don't totally trust," pretty much sums up my experience working in television back in the nineties. I even got fired with the excuse that, to borrow another quote from the article, "they had to hire a minority writer" (which I recognized as an indirect way of saying "Get out and stay out"). Still, the article's overall gist, that the "new dogma" it describes has become fully entrenched (and so won't be going away anytime soon), is persuasive.

With that in mind, here's a not-

so-modest proposal: that Hollywood creatives be completely sequestered, with their every movement and outside communication closely monitored. This isn't an especially outrageous or unprecedented idea, as it's been successfully implemented elsewhere.



Back in the 1960s and 70s **Hong Kong's Shaw Brothers** Studio was fearful that its talents' off-screen exploits might affect box office receipts. Hence, the Shaws forced that talent into strict seven year contracts, during which time they were confined to the Shaws' studio dormitory, a.k.a. "Movietown." The experience wasn't as unpleasant as it might seem; according to actress Ching Li, "It was there that I spent the most beautiful times of my youth," while martial arts legend Ti Lung called Movietown "My paradise." Given that the woke mobs to whom Hollywood is so beholden are becoming increasingly intolerant and unforgiving, I say a cloistered "paradise" akin to that created by the Shaws is a sound consideration.

That proposal, of course, is aimed at entertainment industry gatekeepers. For the rest of us I have another suggestion: that it's time to find a new, less restrictive base of operation. There is (once again) a precedent for this, in a certain Hollywood, CA, based industry created by mavericks who sought to escape the stranglehold placed on film exhibition by Thomas Edison. In truth Edison's early 1900s reign over all aspects of the motion picture business isn't too dissimilar to that of modern-day Hollywood, and I believe it's about time this monopoly was broken up, regardless of how the woke mobs might feel about it.

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