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THE BEDLAM FILES

With Adam Groves

“There's no shame in the world, and without shame, you cannot have honor. Our world is ruled by consensus now. There is no sense of honor.”

—John Milius

Streaming Now



1. BLOW OUT

This 1981 thriller is [Brian De Palma](#)'s masterpiece, with a great performance by (no joke) John Travolta. He plays a soundman who becomes drawn into a BLOW UP/THE CONVERSATION-inspired narrative when during an outdoor recording session he witnesses a car crashing into a lake—and while playing back the recording becomes convinced he hears a gunshot. A stylish, compelling and heartfelt concoction, juggling character-based suspense and

Adam's Picks



1. DAS EXPERIMENT

This now 20 year old German freak-out remains an impressively lean and uncompromising dramatization of the 1971 Stanford Prison Experiment. In that unholy study random people were selected to be guards and prisoners in a carefully controlled prison setting, with the gambit called off early due to the fact that the guards turned fascistic extremely quickly. This film follows the experiment to its logical conclusion, which inevitably involves humiliation,

cinematic innovation with rare
dexterity. AMAZON



2. MARY

A most unique and unpredictable short film co-directed by actress/comedian/filmmaker Jocelyn Roueiheb, a.k.a. Jo Rou. The set-up: an insurance salesman (Logan Culter Smith) visits the home of an elderly woman (Juliette Regnier) who reminds him of his late mother, and who appears to have malevolent intentions. The film is interesting for its deft control of tone, beginning in fairly standard horror/mystery fashion—albeit with a hint of Rou’s stint in the Upright Citizens’ Brigade comedy troupe (and her previous film project **I ADORE DOLORES**, which won the "Most Outrageous" award at the Orlando Film Festival)—only to turn increasingly hallucinatory as guilt and disenchantment overtake the proceedings, which conclude in a manner I promise you won’t see coming. VIMEO

brutality and unbearable
suspense. FILM



2. I'M NOT SCARED

One of the most remarkable thrillers of recent years, and certainly one of the finest modern Italian films, a disturbing study of fear and complicity with an uncommonly absorbing narrative. It’s about Michele (Giuseppe Cristiano), a kid living in a rural Italian community who one day discovers a hollowed-out cavern containing a young boy. The latter, it transpires, has been kidnapped from his wealthy parents and is being held for ransom, with the entire town, including Michele’s parents, being in on the crime. FILM



3. BIG BAD JOHN: THE JOHN MILIUS INTERVIEWS by NAT SEGALOFF

Screenwriter-director John Milius has become an important figure recently, in both Hollywood and this eblast (see below). That means this 2021



3. APOLLO 10½: A SPACE-AGE CHILDHOOD

Wherein the Texas based Richard Linklater, having previously mined his past for DAZED AND CONFUSED, BOYHOOD and EVERYBODY WANTS SOME!!, once again dips into his youthful memories. Visualized via the unique rotoscope animation style employed in WAKING LIFE and A SCANNER DARKLY, it focuses on a young boy growing up in Austin, TX in the 1960s, the time of the Space Race, with his fantasies of being shot into the wild blue yonder intersecting with the real thing. The film is a highly unlikely concoction that actually works, although I say Linklater lathers on the sixties pop-culture nostalgia (of which there's enough here to fill an entire season of THE WONDER YEARS) a bit too thickly. NETFLIX



4. BLADE II

Not a very good movie, truth be told, but a striking one nonetheless. The

book of interviews with the man, conducted by extreme personality enthusiast Nat Segaloff (whose other subjects include William Friedkin and Harlan Ellison), has gone from recommended to required reading, providing as it does an excellent overview of the man, his background and his right-of-center politics. BOOK



4. THE VEGETARIAN by HAN KANG

Here's a novel for the more literarily inclined. Hailing from South Korea, it's at once a Kafkaesque horror story, a naturalistic family saga and a brutal critique of social norms that takes the form of a complex account of a woman who, in defiance of tradition, elects to stop eating meat. Drafted in elegant and precise prose (and smoothly translated by Deborah Smith), THE VEGETARIAN is extremely culturally specific in its depiction of post-millennium South Korea, yet the underlying issues it explores—familial dysfunction, conformity and personal obsession—are all quite universal. BOOK

director was Guillermo del Toro, who early-aughts Hollywood wasn't yet ready to give carte blanche, resulting in an underscripted and indifferently performed (by Wesley Snipes, who according to co-star Patton Oswalt only bothered to show up for the close-ups) film that Del Toro packs with bravura visual flourishes. Incidentally, BLADE II has become a trending topic lately for being the subject of a Harry Knowles write-up that has been called "the worst review ever written," a verdict with which I'm in full agreement. NETFLIX



5. 3 TRUE MCDONALD'S HORROR STORIES

A recent, and above average, entry in the [TRUE ANIMATED HORROR STORIES YouTube series](#). The focus, as the title portends, is on McDonald's, which figures in three animated stories inspired by true events (all introduced by actual security camera footage). The first segment, about a crazy woman stalking a McD's employee, will resonate with anyone who's ever done time in the service industry. The second part, about a freak dressed as Ronald McDonald who likes to guzzle peoples' fries, is shrill and unconvincing, while the third portion, about a pervert who targets children in a McDonald's outlet, may be a bit *too* real. YOUTUBE



5. TROLL 2

Is this truly the worst movie ever made? I don't know about that, but it is profoundly, and even otherworldly, awful. An in-name-only sequel to the ho-hum [1986 Charles Band production](#) (a film notable these days primarily because it featured a character named Harry Potter), TROLL 2 involves a family who move into a town inhabited by malevolent goblins (not trolls) disguised as humans. Featured are several "classic" scenes, such as a boy being told "Don't piss on hospitality!" after whizzing on the family dinner table, a teen girl getting transformed into a weed coffin and her male companion turned into a human plant. On second thought, maybe this IS the worst movie ever made! FILM

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Insider Info

On streaming services right now, it seems that everything eighties is new again. It's a fact that John Milius' infamous 1984 war film **RED DAWN** has experienced a **precipitous uptick in viewership** since the February 22 commencement of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as has 1985's **ROCKY IV**. For those unfamiliar with those movies, what they have in common is a staunch better-dead-than-red-stance, with the first being about a Russian takeover of America and the second depicting Sly Stallone's iconic Rocky personage taking on—and besting—a Soviet boxer (Dolph Lundgren).



Another newly popular product of that decade is **TOP GUN** (1986). That film's recent popularity stems largely from the fact that its long-awaited sequel is set to be unveiled soon, although **TOP GUN** is quite germane to this write-up in other respects. The "enemy" Tom Cruise and co. face off against may go unidentified, but the bad guys' nationality is very strongly implied (it's certainly no accident that the color red tends to recur) in a pic that at heart is

as rabidly anti-communist as RED DAWN, ROCKY IV or RAMBO III (1988).

In the latter, as you may recall, Rambo travels to Afghanistan to assist the locals in fighting off the Russkies. The lesson learned, as one broken-English afflicted character opines, is that “Alexander the Great tried to capture this country. Then Genghis Khan, then the British.



Now Russia. But Afghan people fight hard. They never be defeated” (prophetic words indeed!).

The point? That the eighties were the last period in which Hollywood engaged in unalloyed jingoism, and, politically correct or not, there is something to be said for that. Note that more subdued eighties products like AMAZING GRACE AND CHUCK and RUSSKIES (both 1987), each of which tried to add some brevity to the cold war tensions of the era, are now completely forgotten (although I’d argue that the former film is deserving of cult attention); likewise **post-9/11** war films like HOME OF THE BRAVE (2006), RENDITION (2007) and STOP-LOSS (2008), with their morose and apolitical (*i.e.* boring) approaches.

There does exist a filmmaker capable of uniting the two extremes, and one whose most representative work was done in the eighties: Oliver Stone, whose films SALVADOR (1985), PLATOON (1986) and BORN ON THE FOURTH OF JULY (1989) provided socially relevant cinema that was thoughtful *and* visceral in equal measure. Unfortunately Stone has gone silent (cinematically speaking) in recent years, although given that he’s an outspoken Vladimir Putin supporter, that fact may be a blessing in non-disguise.

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