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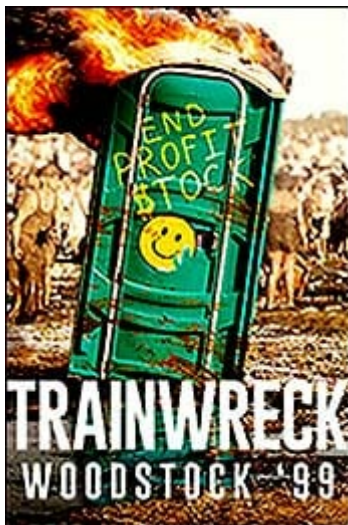
THE BEDLAM FILES

With Adam Groves

“In a strange way, Video Archives in Manhattan Beach was a primer to what it would be like to be famous...I couldn’t walk down the street without people yelling ‘Hey, Quentin! Hey, Quentin!’”

—Quentin Tarantino

Streaming Now



1. **TRAINWRECK: WOODSTOCK '99**

As good an accounting as any of how the 1999 Woodstock music festival went from a well-intentioned three day lovefest to a nightmarish free-for-all that made the Rolling Stones’ infamous 1969 Altamont concert look like a picnic. Over the course of a three episode docu-series we’re taken through each stage of the festival, in which poor sanitation, price gouging, lax security and overall mismanagement combined to light a fuse that culminated in mass

Adam's Picks



1. **THE REZ**

I’ve already covered this TV series in a previous update, but in light of the popular Hulu series RESERVATION DOGS (now in its second season) I feel THE REZ deserves another mention. I have yet to catch up with RESERVATION DOGS, which is said to be a comedic depiction of young Native Americans living on an Indian reservation, and apparently “the first show of its kind.” *Ahem!* The Canadian made THE REZ beat it to the punch by over twenty years, and stands as a

violence, vandalism and sexual assault. Director Jamie Crawford insists on having an arsenal of media pundits, singers and eyewitnesses talk us through each and every stage, which quickly grows annoying (as opposed to Albert and David Maysles' classic Altamont doco GIMME SHELTER, which allowed its visuals to speak for themselves). Yet the series ultimately does its job, and does it admirably. NETFLIX



2. SMILES

The most skilled and imaginative horror short I've seen in some time. Hailing from Spain, it has a guy (Luis Miguel Jara) meeting his fiancée's family, all of whom are mute and wear yellow smiley face masks, something Jara's better half (Loreto S. Santamria) doesn't appear to notice. Writer/director Javier Chavanel relates this bizarre tale with a fine eye for the unexpected, mixed with comedy of the darkest possible hue and a double twist ending. Of those twists the first I admittedly saw coming from quite a distance, but the second not at all. YOUTUBE

terrific program in its own right. A two season spin-off of the 1994 film DANCE ME OUTSIDE, THE REZ is likeable, unassuming, well characterized and probably the finest series of its kind (once again: I haven't yet seen RESERVATION DOGS, and so can't say precisely how it stacks up). TV SERIES



2. THE INTERFACE SERIES

Yes, this is the famed horror-science fiction novel, written by an individual who identifies as "9MOTHER9HORSE9EYES9," that was related entirely in the form of Reddit posts. It's since been collected, in which form it's not entirely satisfying; the copious typos and grammatical errors might have seemed acceptable in internet postings but are a constant irritant in eBook format, as is the scatterbrained storytelling. Those things, however, don't detract from the audacious narrative, which mixes cyberpunk sci fi, Lovecraftian horror and (seemingly) autobiographical musings that gradually coalesce into an intense series of intertwined accounts, only to conclude in much the same way it all began, in fragmented and somewhat abstract form. BOOK

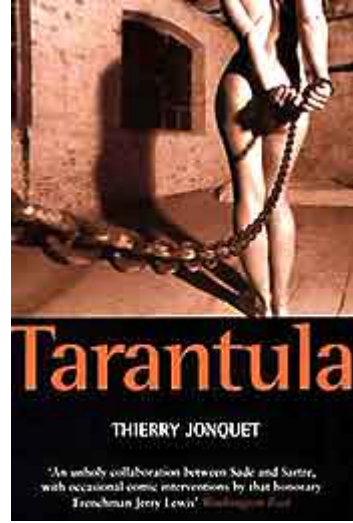


3. **HARDCORE HENRY**

This ambitious Russian-American co-production was all-but completely ignored upon its theatrical release in 2016. Admittedly, **HARDCORE HENRY** is a rough watch on the big screen, but works fine on a TV monitor. Why? Because it's an extremely intense sci-fi-action film done entirely in first person POV manner *a la* **LADY IN THE LAKE** (1946) and **ENTER THE VOID** (2009), with the camera assuming the viewpoint of a highly agile cyber-enhanced protagonist (Sharlto Copley) who spends the entire movie getting chased through Moscow and beating people up. This makes for a ceaseless barrage of swirling, darting and spinning fisheye-lensed visuals. A mind-boggling technical achievement to be sure, even if the film is undeniably thin from a conceptual standpoint. NETFLIX



4. **PREY**



3. **TARANTULA By THIERRY JONQUET**

This 1999 novel is known primarily as the source for Pedro Almodovar's acclaimed 2011 feature **THE SKIN I LIVE IN**, but **TARANTULA** deserves to be viewed as the standalone oddity it is. As befits the title, the narrative construction is akin to a spider's web in its cunning juxtaposition of the exploits of a callous surgeon, a petty criminal and a captive man. I won't reveal precisely how these characters interrelate, or how the narrative ultimately plays out, but be advised that many of the developments are deeply and thoroughly perverse. BOOK



4. **THE QUIET FAMILY**

That title is ironic, as the family depicted in this South Korean import is quite loud. This clan resides in a rural lodge, where they can't seem to keep from killing their guests. Remade by Japan's Takashi Miike as the horror-

The best of the PREDATOR sequels, but that's not saying much. About a spunky Native American girl (Amber Midthunder) going up against the big guy (Dane DiLiegro) in the early 1700s, it features a heroine who, as is the case with so many action movies these days, is impossibly tough, virtuous, resourceful and intelligent, in direct contrast to her male cohorts (who knew Native American men were such arrogant buffoons?). There's also the unfortunate fact that, simply, this franchise is a loser, with yet *another* Predator being dropped off on Earth and getting its ass kicked. Yet the film is never less than fully absorbing, and Miss Midthunder is quite engaging in the lead role; I didn't find her climactic *mano-a-mano* with the Predator entirely convincing, but did admire the fierceness and agility she exudes. HULU



5. THE SANDMAN

It pains me to admit this, as it's based on a comic series of which I'm a longtime fan, but something is seriously off with the Netflix SANDMAN program. The problem may be with a miscast Tom Sturridge in the title role, who comes off as more of a petulant adolescent than an eons-old mythological deity. Or possibly the issue is poor storytelling, making for a series I never found the slightest bit compelling. Or maybe my beef is with the telltale Netflix-quality (read:

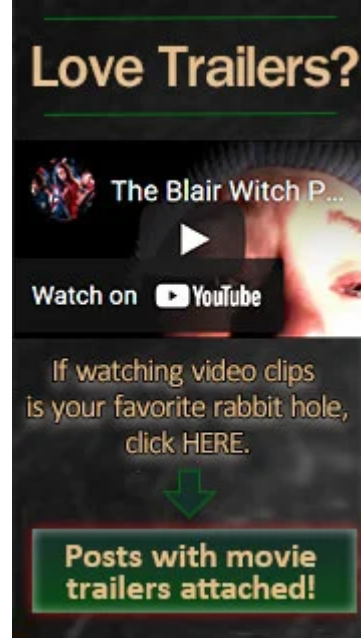
musical THE HAPPINESS OF THE KATARURIS (2001), THE QUIET FAMILY is worth experiencing in its original and intended format, even if the oft-uneven and repetitive filmmaking isn't all it could be. FILM



5. THE KEEP

Please stop calling this 1983 bomb, the first and only horror movie directed by the (usually) great Michael Mann, a neglected masterpiece. It is, in fact, a fiasco, although not an entirely uninteresting one. Mann made a valiant attempt at creating an expressionistic horror-fest, but the film's incoherence (it having been cut down from an initial 3½ hour runtime to just 96 minutes), bad special effects (the FX supervisor Wally Veevers died in the middle of post-production) and poorly calibrated performances (including Scott Glenn as possibly the most off-putting "hero" in film history) drag it down. FILM

cheap) lighting. On the plus side, the series is stunningly ambitious, and, unlike so many other modern comic book adaptations, treats its source material with great respect. NETFLIX



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Insider Info

Quentin Tarantino is known primarily as a moviemaker, but I'd argue that *talking* about movies is his true passion. In recent years Tarantino's filmmaking has tapered off (his last feature was three years ago, and to my



knowledge there are no definite plans for a follow-up), with his time increasingly devoted to [online film criticism](#), an upcoming [film review book](#) and the [VIDEO ARCHIVES podcast](#). In the latter, which debuted on June 19, Tarantino is joined by fellow obsessive (and PULP FICTION co-scripiter) Roger Avary, who got his start with Tarantino working behind the counter at Manhattan Beach's late [Video Archives](#).

In the wake of that establishment's 1994 closure Tarantino purchased its VHS inventory (and also the shelving), and has preserved it in his Hollywood Hills home. Each episode of the podcast features Tarantino and Avary discussing three films culled from that collection, with accompanying commentary from Avary's daughter Gala, who introduces the show and provides info on where to obtain the movies covered.

Having rented movies at Video Archives back in the day, I was afforded a firsthand look at the motor-mouthed pontification on display in the podcast. Tarantino's boundless enthusiasm about all things film-related is infectious and unapologetically nerdy; there are plenty of things you can say about Tarantino, but you can't say he isn't entertaining.

That's a good thing, because given my personal history with Video Archives, tuning in to this podcast isn't a matter of choice but, in essence, the law. Put another way, I've done my part to keep the Archives' legacy alive, and feel duty-bound to listen in on Tarantino and Avary doing theirs.

On the not-so-good side, the recommendations offered up on the podcast don't always justify Tarantino's enthusiasm. I vividly remember him regaling my 12 year old self about the transcendent greatness of DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER (1971), thus raising my expectations unreasonably high. At least it was an okay movie, something that can't be said for the German-made snooze-fest COCAINE COWBOYS (1979), about which he and Avary make some pretty grandiose claims in VIDEO ARCHIVES' first episode, or the middling Clint Eastwood vehicle FIREFOX (1983), which Tarantino talks up incessantly in episode two.

About Roger Avary (who I don't remember from back in the day), he deserves points merely for getting a word in edgewise. He's more thoughtful and soft-spoken than the irrepressible Tarantino, but possesses an undeniable intelligence; Avary's learned audio commentary on the 2008 DVD release of Stanley Kubrick's THE SEAFARERS (1953) is excellent, and that knowledgeable air is fully evident in his chatter on VIDEO ARCHIVES.

In closing I'll offer Messrs. Tarantino and Avary some unasked-for advice. I say they'd do well to expand their dissertations from the exploitation sphere in which they've thus far been concentrated. Take it from one who's tried it: profiling obscure down-market fair won't attract much of an audience (there's a reason *Psychotronic* magazine, one of Tarantino's major reference sources, is no longer in business), and VIDEO ARCHIVES is eminently deserving of the biggest listenership it can find.

Adam's recommendations organized by year/month in the ***NEWSLETTER ARCHIVE***.



I'm done reading. To the website!

The Bedlam Files, 08-2022

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