

Just take me to the website, please.

THE BEDLAM FILES

With Adam Groves

“I make a film like I cook for friends. I hope they like it, but if they don’t, I’m prepared to enjoy it all by myself.”

—Melvin Van Peebles

Streaming Now

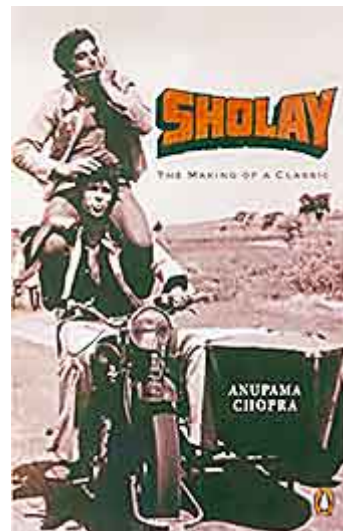
1. **SKINAMARINK**



This, it would seem, is the **BLAIR WITCH PROJECT** and/or **PARANORMAL ACTIVITY** of the 2020s: a highly innovative no-budget horror-fest that owes its notoriety almost entirely to the internet. Unlike those other films, however, which relied on elaborate online publicity campaigns to generate interest, **SKINAMARINK** found its fame in a far simpler manner, having been leaked onto the web and quickly going viral. I’m sure you know the film’s particulars by now: two young children are stuck in a dark house with an unseen something that makes all the doors

Adam's Picks

1. **SHOLAY: THE MAKING OF A CLASSIC** By **ANUPAMA CHOPRA**



It’s been said that Indian film history can be divided into *SHOLAY BC* and *SHOLAY AD* and this book offers an informative biography of this iconic 1975 epic. Anupama Chopra adroitly guides us through *SHOLAY*’S inception by the screenwriting team Javed Akhtar and Salim Khan—a.k.a. Salim-Javed, who’d go on to become quite a force in **Bollywood**—and its production, a massive affair that was lensed in 70mm (a previously unheard-of practice in Indian cinema) and went considerably over budget. Yet producer G.P. Sippy forged ahead,

and windows disappear, in addition to the kids' parents. It's a mood piece, and one that's often downright obnoxious in its nonlinear irrationality, but there's a reason the film has had such resonance.

SHUDDER

2. **HOMEBODIES**



Geezer horror? HOMEBODIES is easily the finest example of such, being a funny, stylish and deeply menacing lark. About several old folk resorting to desperate (as in deadly) measures to save a Cincinnati apartment building from demolition, the film is deceptively quiet and stately, with pacing that's quite deliberate—not slow, mind you, just deliberate—and real ingenuity in the gross-out bits (particularly a priceless gag involving a corpse foot). The performances are uniformly excellent, particularly that of the 74-year-old **Paula Trueman** (of THE OUTLAW JOSEY WALES), who's both scary and loveable as the ringleader of the mayhem. SHUDDER

3. **BABY BLOOD**

as did his director-son Ramesh, and also the cast, which included Amitabh Bachchan and Amjad Khan—neither of whom had much name value at the time but both of whom went on to become massive stars. The results of their labors are evident in the finished film, which more than speaks for itself. BOOK

2. **PURANA MANDIR**



This 1984 scare-fest is to Bollywood what **THE EXORCIST** was to Hollywood: a monster success that has gone on to become quite iconic. Furthermore, PURANA MANDIR's Dracula-esque villain Saamri (Ajay Agarwal) has attained the status of a Hindi-centric Freddy Krueger. The film was made by India's top horrormeisters Tulsi and Shyam Ramsay, who provide a family curse, star-crossed love, a murder feud, creepy hallucinations, a femme fatale, demonic possession, a reanimated corpse, several large-scale action sequences and (this being a Bollywood product) lots of musical numbers. 145 minutes may seem like a needlessly protracted run time, but given the jam-packed narrative it's actually economical; indeed, I can't help but wonder how the Ramsays managed to fit everything in. FILM

3. **VEERANA**



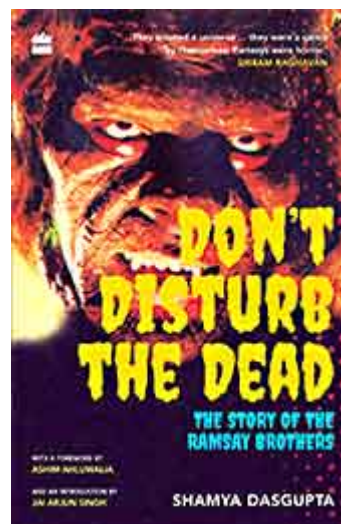
The French horror movie renaissance of the 2000s owes its existence in large part to this 1990 gore fest, a perverse variant on LOOK WHO'S TALKING that proved, after a lengthy absence of Gallic horror cinema, that French accented scares are among the most potent in existence. Featured is a young circus hand (Emmanuelle Escourrou) impregnated by an otherworldly creature, with the child communicating from its mother's womb. This fast-growing fetus turns out to be quite the chatterbox, interrogating Mom on sex, breast feeding and pretty much everything else. In addition, the baby needs blood to stay alive, forcing ma to embark on a murder-and-mutilation spree. The bloodletting on display is fast, relentless and quite messy, and there are not one but two spectacularly nasty ALIEN-esque mutant birth scenes. SHUDDER

4. THE ROMANTICS



Another Ramsay Brothers horror-fest, and one of their more accomplished efforts. VEERANA isn't quite as strong as PURANA MANDIR, but it is a colorful and energetic swirl of vampire movie madness that attempted to replicate Jose Larraz's erotic vampire classic VAMPYRES (and also THE EXORCIST and SUSPIRIA). It's about a young woman (Jasmin) possessed by the spirit of a long-deceased witch (Kamal), leading to an excess-happy cavalcade of martial arts, fire, exploding heads and an extremely active statue of the Goddess Kali. FILM

4. DON'T DISTURB THE DEAD By SHAMYA DASGUPTA



While on the subject of the Ramsay Brothers, here's the first-ever English language book devoted to them. On balance DON'T DISTURB THE DEAD is a solid and informative read, offering admirably thorough personality profiles of each of the brothers and interviews with several of their stock

A multi-part documentary about Yash Chopra, the “Father of Romance” in Hindi cinema, a.k.a. Bollywood. My standard docuseries complaint—that the whole thing could have been easily compressed into a single episode—applies, but THE ROMANTICS is an otherwise terrific program. Mr. Chopra’s output as producer/director includes classics like DAAG (1973), DEEWAR (1975) and DARR (1993), as well as quite a few less-than-classic films, but his high ranking in the industry is fully earned, as evidenced by the many iconic Bollywood stars gathered here to sing his praises, including Shah Rukh Khan, Juhi Chawla and “Big B” himself, a.k.a. Amitabh Bachchan. NETFLIX

5. MILF MANOR



Aren’t we lucky? This program’s January 15 debut allows us to pinpoint exactly when Western Civilization began its inevitable decline. For the two or three of you who don’t know, MILF MANOR is a reality program broadcast (ironically enough) on The Learning Channel about horny middle aged women in a tropical resort competing for the favors of several young men, who just happen to be the ladies’ own sons. As in most such programs, the “reality” designation is questionable (how convenient that these gals all have hunky twentyish sons, each of whom is into older women), but the show, whatever its true nature, is

actors. Be forewarned, though, that a working knowledge of Hindi cinema is a requisite, as the book offers little explanation for Bollywood novices. In other words, if you’re unfamiliar with Amitabh Bachchan, Mithun Chakraborty, the Filmfare Awards or the Indian movie ratings system you’re likely to be a mite perplexed. BOOK

5. BLUEBEARD



Those wanting to see the recently deceased Raquel Welch at the pinnacle of her career are advised to track down this 1972 camp fest starring a hammier-than-usual Richard Burton. He plays the title character, an eccentric Austrian aristocrat with a most unfortunate habit of marrying beautiful women and then, due to his own impotency, murdering them. Raquel plays one of those women, a sultry ex-nun who talks incessantly, leading Bluebeard to asphyxiate her in a coffin (with impalement, beheading and drowning being other methods he uses to dispatch his spouses). It’s all extremely silly and overwrought, and so on par with other Raquel Welch “classics” like ONE MILLION YEARS B.C. and MYRA BRECKINRIDGE. FILM

repellent, immoral, sleazy, sophomoric, unpleasant to sit through and impossible to ignore. TLC.COM

Also New

- **Myra Breckenridge** (Film)
- **Thankyou for Letting Me be Myself** (Nonfiction)
- **On SWEET SWEETBACK'S BAADASSSSS SONG** (Commentary)
- **Three O'Clock High** (Film)
- **AU HASARD BALTHAZAR vs. EO** (Commentary)
- **Cry for Me Billy** (Film)
- **Vroom Vroom Vroom** (Film)
- **Archived eblasts for easy reference**
- **And Much More!**



Insider Info

The enormous success of the Telugu language—or **Tollywood**—extravaganza **RRR** (RISE ROAR REVOLT) at the box office (it's currently the third top grossing Indian film of all time, and still climbing) and awards circuit (it was the first-ever Indian film to score an Oscar nomination for Best Original Song) proves the resilience of the Indian film industry. India turns out more films on an annual basis than any other country, and boasts what is arguably the only film industry that can truly be said to rival Hollywood in influence and popularity.

How curious, then, that these films are so little regarded in the United States. Outside the Indian immigrant community, Indian cinema in the minds of most American cineastes seems to begin and end with the films of Satyajit Ray (1921-1992), who made the Tollywood equivalent of what we in the west term art films.



Commercial Indian cinema—Bollywood, Nollywood, Tollywood, Lollywood, etc.—tends to be ignored, with even RRR’s American distributor Netflix having for years been oddly skittish about promoting the many Bollywood films it’s acquired (tracking down those films on Netflix menus, I’ve found, takes some doing).

India turns out more films on an annual basis than any other country.

To be sure, there have been attempts at popularizing Indian cinema on our shores. The 1988 horror-fest **BLOODSTONE**,



the 2002 comedy **BOLLYWOOD/ HOLLYWOOD**,

and the aborted 2011 **Paul Schrader** thriller XTREME CITY all tried to unite Eastern and Western filmmaking traditions and none were successful. Nor was the **Seattle-based Scarecrow Video Store in 1995**, when it started a VHS line to distribute the 1993 Hindi epic KHUDA GAWA—under the title GOD IS MY WITNESS—in the US. Its financial fate was indicated by the fact that GOD IS MY WITNESS was the first and last Scarecrow Video release.

That makes for quite a contrast with the fortunes of another Eastern film industry. Those of you who remember the glory days of Hong Kong action cinema may also recall the splash it made in the US. Back in the early nineties it wasn’t at all unusual to see LA-area Chinese video rental stores packed with college-aged white guys partaking of the Hong Kong movie phenomenon, a situation that was far different when roughly a decade later I made my way to an Indian community in search of Bollywood DVDs. I found the DVDs, yes, but not the expected crossover patronage.

To be sure, there have been attempts at popularizing Indian cinema on our shores and none were successful.

Fast-forward to the current post-RRR era. RRR, to be sure, isn’t lacking in the elements that seem to turn off so many western viewers to Indian cinema: it’s over three hours long, recklessly

straddles genres, revels in excess (in every conceivable aspect) and contains a plethora of culturally specific touchstones. Yet for whatever reason **the film appears to be bridging the East-West divide**, with the currently-in-release Bollywood epic **PATHAAN attracting a fair amount of spillover attention** and the abovementioned documentary **THE ROMANTICS** getting reasonably high-profile support from (of all places) Netflix. It's about time.

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



I'm done reading. [To the website!](#)

The Bedlam Files, 2-2023

Visit [The Bedlam Files](#) website. Feel free to share this newsletter as well.

You received this email because you signed up on our website. We hope you enjoy it.

[Unsubscribe](#)

