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THE BEDLAM FILES

With Adam Groves

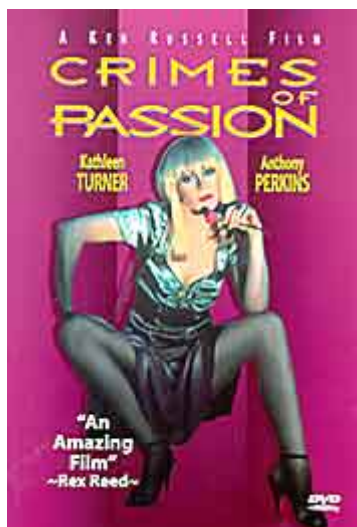
“Either you're born crazy or you're born boring.”

—Oliver Stone

Streaming Now

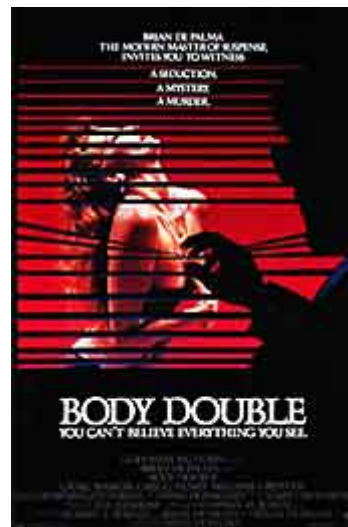
Adam's Picks

1. **CRIMES OF PASSION**



One of the more inexplicable cinematic concoctions of the 1980s, a trashy sex thriller into whose fold New World Pictures somehow managed to lure director **Ken Russell** (coming off *ALTERED STATES*) and Kathleen Turner (at the height of her stardom). Less surprising is the inclusion of Anthony Perkins, about whom **Roger Ebert stated** “there is probably no role he would turn down because it would be bad for his image.” Perkins plays a demented preacher in what Ebert dubbed a “lurid film noir world of flashing red neon signs, garter belts, squirming

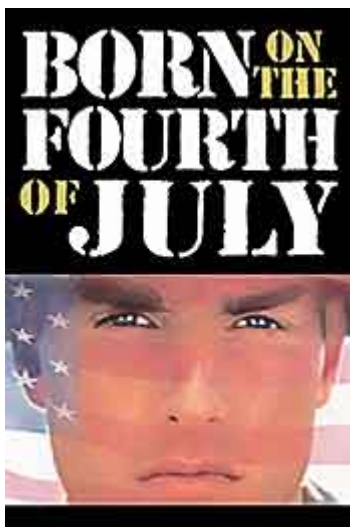
1. **BODY DOUBLE**



This 1984 erotic thriller had the misfortune to be released a week after Ken Russell’s aforementioned *CRIMES OF PASSION*, which sucked up all the attention, and controversy, Brian De Palma’s *BODY DOUBLE* should have received (it took until the 1991 publication of **AMERICAN PSYCHO**, whose unhinged protagonist religiously watches De Palma’s film, for it to get its rightful due). De Palma certainly gave Russell a run for his money in a perverse thriller that places themes from *REAR WINDOW* and *VERTIGO* in a debauched swirl of voyeurism, pornography and murder.

sadomasochists, and perverts.” Turner plays a chic fashion designer who doubles as a street corner hooker (who knew fashion designers had so much free time?), and in so doing attracts the attentions of Perkins and a young square (John Laughlin) looking to expend his sexual horizons. The film works largely because Russell, Turner and Perkins lean into rather than resist the material’s inherent sleaziness, but don’t entirely neglect their arty bonafides. CRITERION

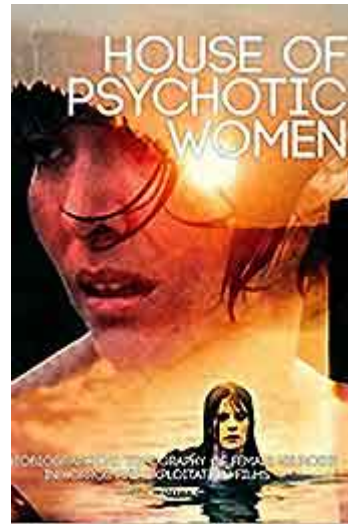
2. BORN ON THE FOURTH OF JULY



“Good corn” was how this film’s initial director **William Friedkin** summed up its **Oliver Stone** script, adapted from a 1976 memoir by Ron Kovic. Stone himself ended up directing BORN ON THE FOURTH OF JULY in 1989, fashioning it into a most unlikely popcorn epic—and (continuing the corn theme) as George Lucas once stated, “If it’s a popcorn movie it needs a lot of corn.” Mission accomplished! Stone presents Kovic’s story, of how he was severely wounded in Vietnam and found redemption (of a sort) by joining the anti-war movement, with a full dose of Hollywood bombast that incorporates glitzy widescreen visuals, a pumped-up Tom Cruise in the lead role and bloody combat footage that was considered envelope-pushing in ‘89. Best experienced on a big screen,

It’s impeccably visualized, memorably acted (with Melanie Griffith handily stealing the show as the impossible-to-forget Holly Body) and bearing a streak of pitch-dark comedy. The only problem: I don’t think it was meant to be funny. FILM

2. HOUSE OF PSYCHOTIC WOMEN



"NonFiction"

This eleven-year-old “Autobiographical Topography of Female Neurosis in Horror and Exploitation Films” has become a canonical movie text. Mining her own unsettled upbringing in relation to woman-centered psychological horror films like **REPULSION**, **LET’S SCARE JESSICA TO DEATH**, **3 WOMEN** and **POSSESSION**, author Kier-La Janisse has created something unique and fascinating that’s well worth your time (although I can’t speak for the recently published expanded edition).

BOOK

3. THE STRANGE THING ABOUT THE JOHNSONS

although the Netflix looks pretty damn good. NETFLIX

3. WITCHFINDER GENERAL



I feel it's a tad overrated, but will concede that this 1968 gut-wrencher contains perhaps the best-ever performance by the legendary Vincent Price. He plays a self-ordained attorney in the year 1645, looking to ferret out witches through gruesome "examinations." For unadorned brutality this film, over fifty years after its inception, has few rivals, with numerous graphic torture sequences depicted with a minimum of cutaways. The point was (I believe) to demonstrate how bloodlust spreads like a contagion, although WITCHFINDER GENERAL is less a pure horror film than a violent action drama—or perhaps even, as has been repeatedly stressed by various commentators, a western. SHUDDER

4. I MELT WITH YOU



Ari Aster, currently represented in movie theaters by BEAU IS AFRAID, began horrifying audiences with this genuinely disturbing 2011 mini-feature. The horror it promotes is incest, albeit with the expected perpetrator-victim dynamic inverted: here a young man (Brandon Greenhouse) entraps his father (the late Billy Mayo) in a depraved sexual morass. Aster relates this account in garish horror movie fashion, which may be questionable from a moral standpoint (think THE BURNING BED done in the style of FRIDAY THE 13th) but doesn't obscure the deeply upsetting reality-based resonance.

FILM

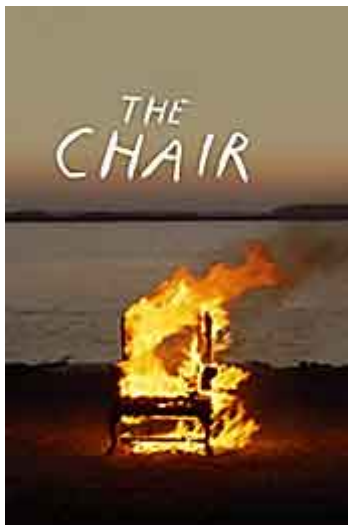
4. LINNEA QUIGLEY'S HORROR WORKOUT



At long last a Blu-ray edition of this hour long 1990 anti-classic is being released, courtesy of Terror Vision (who are also putting out a soundtrack LP!). A spoof of those

Who'd have thought this Rob Lowe vehicle from the director of THE MOTHMAN PHOPHECIES would turn out to be one of the most powerfully nihilistic movies...ever? The subject is male ennui, as experienced by a quartet of dissatisfied 42-year-olds (Lowe, Jeremy Piven, Thomas Jane and Christian McKay) on a drug-fueled bender in a secluded beach house. Seems pretty wild, and indeed it is, but then around the halfway point McKay is found dead, an old letter is brought up and things turn very dark indeed. Critics had hissy fits (predictably, they were more upset by the drug use of the first half than the bloodletting of the second), and there is indeed plenty to criticize in this agonizingly self-indulgent film. It hits its mark, though, however uncomfortable that mark might be. AMAZON

5. THE CHAIR

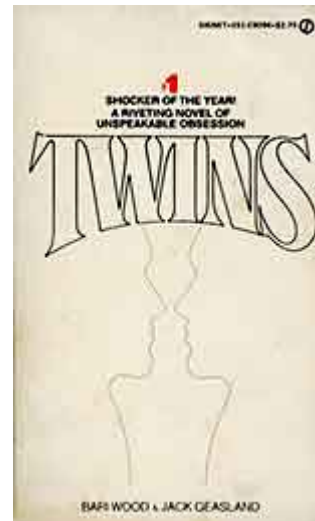


The dangers of bringing discarded furniture into one's home are memorably dramatized in this short film "from the mind of Curry Barker." No, I've never heard of him either, but with this film Mr. Barker (no relation to the other guy bearing that name) proves himself a gifted horromeister, offering up a precisely visualized, subtly unnerving depiction of reality displacement. The acting isn't even bad, with Anthony Pavone, as the suburbanite who brings home the accursed chair, making for a compelling anchor, and Haley

celebrity workout videos popular in the eighties, it features B-movie legend Linnea Quigley doing aerobic workouts with zombies and several gal pals, amid clips from her films and some poorly staged slasher business. Too imbecilic to work even as a parody, but too stupid to be ignored.

FILM

5. TWINS

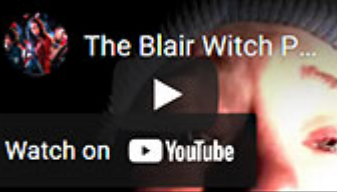



With DEAD RINGERS — the 1988 David Cronenberg feature and the more recent Amazon series — currently in the public eye, let's take a look back at the 1977 Bari Wood and Jack Geasland authored novel that started it all. The book is far more sexually frank than either adaptation, being a lurid thriller about twin gynecologists harboring a fatal attraction for each other. It lacks the grandeur and complexity of the Cronenberg film, but is leagues better than the Amazon series (with which, as you've probably guessed, I'm not too impressed), and stands as a provocative relic from an age when mainstream fiction was much wilder than it is now.

BOOK


Schwartz, as Pavone's harried mate, performing one of the most memorable scare scenes I've seen in some time: she's called upon to shift suddenly from screams to smiles, an effect that was attempted in **SMILE** but which **THE CHAIR** actually pulls off. **YOUTUBE**

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Posts with movie trailers attached!

Also New

- **INFINITY POOL** (Film)
- **SUPER MARIO BROS.** (Film)
- **TEN ECCENTRIC FILMS FOR EASTER** (Commentary)
- **DONOVAN'S BRAIN** (Film)
- **MAMA** (Film)
- **PORTABLE GRINDHOUSE** (Nonfiction)
- **Archived eblasts for easy reference**
- ***And Much More!***



Insider Info

I say now is a good time for a look forward at some upcoming Bedlam Files-minded publications (and their release dates). Speaking as one who has access to forthcoming books, I can report there's not much in the upcoming months that's worth anticipating, yet a close look does yield a few interesting, and even vital, texts.



THE CITY OF UNSPEAKABLE FEAR by Jean Ray

From Wakefield Press, the long-in-the-works (its publication was initially announced over a decade ago by a different, and now

defunct, publisher) English translation of a 1943 novel by Belgium's Jean Ray, which has been described as "Miss Marple meets H.P. Lovecraft."

July 25

CORMAN/POE by Chris Alexander

All about Roger Corman's 1960s-era Edgar Allan Poe film cycle, complete with extensive analyses, interviews, stills and ad slicks. If you're not interested in Corman or Poe this book probably isn't for you, but if you are it's an absolute must own.

June 6

THE EXORCIST LEGACY: 50 YEARS OF FEAR by Nat Segaloff

Yes, **THE EXORCIST** has been picked over nearly to death in the five decades since its initial release, but the fact that this book was written by the shrewd and erudite Nat Segaloff, the flick's initial publicist and the biographer of its director William Friedkin (and also **Harlan Ellison**), renders it a definite title of interest.

July 25

THE EXOTIC ONES by Jimmy McDonough

This is something I believe we all need: a biographical portrait of the Ormond family, "a Nashville mother-father-son trio who cranked out a wild bunch of movies, from Lash LaRue westerns to the stripper-gore-musical outrage **THE EXOTIC ONES**, then, finally...Baptist extravaganzas."

May 30

THE MYSTERIES by Bill Watterson, John Kascht

An illustrated "fable for grown-ups" by **CALVIN AND HOBBS** creator Bill Watterson and caricaturist John Kascht, involving a "long-ago kingdom afflicted with unexplainable calamities."

October 10

NAKED THEATER & UNCENSORED HORROR by Stuart Gordon

A memoir by the late theatrical impresario and horror movie legend **Stuart Gordon**, who had a pretty eclectic career regardless of what you might think of his films, which include classics like **RE-ANIMATOR** and **FROM BEYOND**, and the less-than-classic (dis)likes of **ROBOT JOX** and **SPACE TRUCKERS**.

July 20

WHERE THE NIGHTMARE ENDS by Robin Wood

A horror novel by the late Canadian critic Robin Wood, who in the famed **AMERICAN NIGHTMARE** and other publications offered learned dissertations on horror cinema. The editor was the UK's

Ramsey Campbell, if that means anything.
TBA (Tt's currently "at the printer.")

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



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The Bedlam Files, 4-2023

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