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# THE BEDLAM FILES

*With Adam Groves*

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“A good science fiction story should be able to predict not the automobile but the traffic jam.”

—Frederick Pohl

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## Streaming Now

### 1. **HEAT**



Michael Mann has long been one of Hollywood’s most exciting filmmakers, and 1995’s *HEAT* is the apotheosis of his work, despite not having dated as well as I hoped it might. All the trademarks of the creator of *MIAMI VICE* are on display: good-looking men in expensive suits, flashy gunplay, scenic big-city locations and numerous “guest” cameos (from the likes of Tom Noonan, Henry Rollins, Natalie Portman, Jeremy Piven, Buck Henry, Bud Cort and many others). That latter aspect lessens the realism

## Adam's Picks

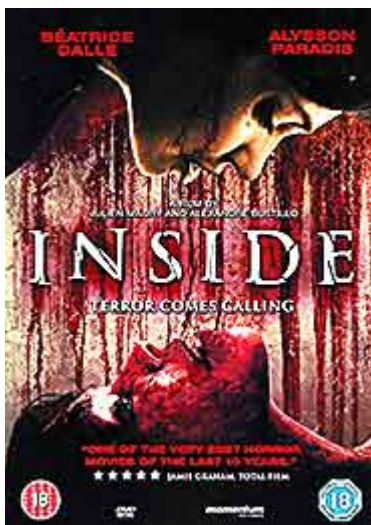
### 1. **THE COOK, THE THIEF, HIS WIFE AND HER LOVER**



Hooray! It seems that, with Severin Films’ recent much-hyped Blu-ray release of *DROWNING BY NUMBERS*, we’re now allowed to like its creator Peter Greenaway. A highly contentious figure, Greenaway tends to go in and out of favor with cineastes due to his emotional detachment, conceited worldview and overall love of shock. I’m not entirely enamored with those things myself, but fully recognize the painterly brilliance of Greenaway’s filmmaking, and the skill of his collaborators, who here include

considerably (as not all those performers were on their game), and the script (an expansion of a TV pilot called L.A. TAKEDOWN that Mann created back in 1989) now seems a mite protracted and episodic. Yet the many grandiose set-pieces, which include the outrageous armored car ramming, the much imitated bank shootout, the legendary Robert De Niro-Al Pacino coffee shop encounter and the climactic foot-chase around an LAX runway, fully retain their excellence. NETFLIX

## 2. INSIDE



One of the undoubted highlights of the “New French Extremity” movement of the aughts was this ground-breakingly gory depiction of maternal anxiety that may not approach **ROSEMARY’S BABY** or **ERASERHEAD** in complexity, but far outdoes them in nastiness and sheer intensity. The situation: an expectant, and recently widowed, mother (Alysson Paradis) is pursued through her house by a deranged woman (Beatrice Dalle) who for some reason wants the unborn child, and will stop at nothing to get it. Directors Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury provide an alternately repellent and, for those of a receptive mindset (read: sick fucks), enormously engaging viewing experience, marred only by the fact that, as is the case with far too many modern European films, there’s a not a single likeable character to be found. SHUDDER

cinematographer Sacha Vierney, composer Michael Nyman and actors Michael Gambon, Helen Mirren and Tim Roth. Inspired by the excesses of Jacobian drama, the Grand Guignol theater of blood and the real-life reign of terror waged by England’s Kray brothers in the 1950s and 60s, **THE COOK, THE THIEF, HIS WIFE AND HER LOVER** is a dark and frequently unpleasant film, but also an artful one whose infernal excellence has never been matched, even by its own writer-director. FILM

## 2. MESSIAH OF EVIL



The now fifty year old **MESSIAH OF EVIL** was and remains one of the great unknown horror films of the 1970s. Created, surprisingly, by the late husband-wife team Willard Huyck and Gloria Katz (of **BEST DEFENSE** and **HOWARD THE DUCK**), it’s eerie, surreal and authentically Lovecraftian in its depiction of an ancient evil menacing a Northern California coastal community. The film suffers from a truncated budget (evident in the climactic depiction of the supposed Unspeakable Horror Destined to Destroy Humanity that, well, isn’t very unspeakable), but the evocative staging and atmospheric visuals combine to create a singular could-only-have-been-made-in-the-seventies viewing experience. FILM

## 3. MARTYRS

### 3. TIGER CAGE



One of the squishiest of the ultraviolent cop thrillers that overtook Hong Kong cinema in the late 1980s (others include THE BIG HEAT and ON THE RUN), TIGER CAGE is a splat-happy adrenaline-fest about police corruption and the mob starring the HK action movie mainstays Simon Yam and Donnie Yen. There's really no point going into the story, which as usual with this sort of fare functions as a clothesline on which to hang the action sequences. As directed by the great Yuen Wo Ping (the action choreographer of the MATRIX and KILL BILL movies) those sequences are fast and brutal, combining martial arts expertise with copious gunplay and lots of spilled blood. PARAMOUNT PLUS

### 4. FRESH



1994 contained more than its share of violent films (NATURAL BORN KILLERS, PULP FICTION, SHALLOW



This 2008 French-language gut-wrencher initially appeared (and is currently screening on Shudder) alongside INSIDE, making for the most impacting horror two punch since the back-to-back releases of ALIENS and THE FLY in the summer of 1986. I know I'll always remember a moderator telling the audience at the end of a FANGORIA convention screening of MARTYRS that "I think we can all agree the French are really fucked up!" French Canadian, actually, which explains why MARTYRS, in direct contrast to the demented exhilaration of INSIDE, is about as much fun as a proctology exam (Canadian cinema being among the most depressing in existence). Torture and its consequences are the subjects of a film that also works as a gripping thriller, albeit one with a profoundly bleak trajectory that writer-director Pascal Laugier claims was meant to be "uplifting." FILM

### 4. INVASION OF THE SPACE INVADERS

GRAVE, etc.), but the absolutely nastiest English language film released that year was this this little-seen indie made by longtime Quentin Tarantino associate Boaz Yakin. About a young boy (Sean Nelson) who, horrified by the mayhem he witnesses in his ghetto neighborhood, puts into motion a complex plan to take down his criminal overlords, FRESH is much like its main character: tough, intelligent and deeply enigmatic. It's also downright perverse in its upsetting of audience sensibilities, with its most shocking acts of violence visited upon (no joke) a little girl and a dog. PARAMOUNT PLUS

### 5. GLOBAL GROOVE



For a change of pace from the nastiness of the preceding entries, here's a comparatively benign made-for-TV offering from the famed experimentalist Nam June Paik. GLOBAL GROOVE is a video collage, shown on WNET'S Channel 13 back in 1973 (and heretofore very difficult to find, making this **recent release**, as part of PBS' AMERICAN MASTERS series, a big deal), that provided a stream-of-consciousness barrage of people dancing, a Japanese Pepsi commercial, interview snippets with Alan Ginsburg and John Cage and other once-contemporary ephemera, much it enhanced with bleeding and morphing effects that were state-of-the-art in '73. Obviously the pic, an early example of what would now



The recently deceased British novelist Martin Amis was never one of my favorites, but his skilled wielding of the written word cannot be denied. I know I'll always remember him best for this 1982 book, an enjoyable dissertation on the then-burgeoning video game phenomenon with an introduction by no less an authority on the subject than Steven Spielberg. It's a deeply nostalgic read, not just because the coin-fueled world it describes no longer exists, but because of the enthusiasm displayed by its youthful author, who in 1982 was a far cry from the grumpy old fart he grew into. The fact that Amis disowned INVASION OF THE SPACE INVADERS in his later years should be recommendation enough. BOOK

### 5. RED SPIDER, WHITE WEB



A highlight of cyberpunk literature from 1990 that seems especially relevant to today's world. The only novel written by the Native American Misha, RED SPIDER, WHITE WEB is set

termed an Essay Film, was very much a product of its time, and so functions best as a time capsule—but what a time capsule it is. PBS.ORG

in a future America where the haves and have-nots have become outrageously divided, with the cities having become lethal hellholes and the rich spending their lives in cloistered utopias (in short, a highly prophetic vision). Not an easy read by any means, but a satisfying one nonetheless, revealing a unique and magisterial literary voice from whom we really need to hear more. For that matter, this novel could really do with a new edition, as it's been out of print far too long. BOOK

## Also New

- **GOKE, BODYSNATCHER FROM HELL** (Film)
- **KENNETH ANGER: 1927-2023** (Commentary)
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## Insider Info

Speaking of science fiction's supposed predictive abilities, Isaac Asimov once pointed out that while early twentieth century science fiction writers

predicted mankind would land on the moon, and foresaw the advent of television long before it became a reality, none ever managed to foresee that we'd one day reach the moon while people on Earth watched the event on television. A similar claim can be made about sci-fi's depictions of virtual reality and the rise of the tech billionaire: both those things were predicted far in advance by sci fi authors, but none of those authors managed



to foresee that VR's initial iteration would be informed by the whims of an eccentric tech billionaire.

I'm referring, as you've probably guessed, to the virtual reality **Metaverse and its creator Mark Zuckerberg**. Science fiction is an entirely appropriate comparison, I say, because so much of what's been written about the Metaverse seems informed by sci-fi, particularly the widely-shared claim that **by the year 2030 much of humanity will have quit the real world in favor of the 'verse**.

The problem with this reasoning was foreshadowed in one of the earliest fictional treatments of VR (or at least an approximation of it): 1964's **THE THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRICH** by **Philip K. Dick**, in which much of humanity is lured into a drug-induced hallucinatory reality dominated by a doll-woman named Perky Pat. Clever concept, but the problem with it is that, as described by Dick, Perky Pat and her world never seem terribly alluring. So too the Metaverse, which sports a dated TRON-ish look that seems geared toward a ten-year-old mentality. Sorry, but if I'm expected to forsake reality in favor of this universe it will need to be a bit more enticing.

A seemingly more accurate science fiction prediction of the future of virtual reality, and the entirety of our modern technoscape, occurred in Daniel F. Galouye's twice-filmed **SIMULACRON-3** (a.k.a. COUNTERFEIT UNIVERSE), which like Dick's novel hailed from 1964. One of the first-ever fictional treatments of VR, SIMULACRON-3 depicted a simulated universe created for marketing purposes that grew far beyond its initial perimeters, drawing the attention of corrupt politicians and engulfing the "reality" of its protagonist. It sounds like what occurred with social media, an initially benign technology that spiraled horrifically out of control—and something tells me virtual reality will follow a similar trajectory (doubtless with a heretofore unforeseen Asimovian twist).

But to get back to the Metaverse: the consensus is that **it's now officially dead**, with Zuck having turned his attention to the technoscape's latest shiny new object: AI. That subject has of course been covered quite extensively in science fiction, and the predictions offered up have by and large not been very optimistic. Let's hope they're wrong.



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