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THE BEDLAM FILES

With Adam Groves

“If voting made a difference they wouldn’t let us do it”

—George Carlin

Streaming Now



1. **SPLICE**

This film, the magnum opus of Canada’s Vincenzo Natali (who remains best known for **CUBE**), was a box office flop upon its initial release in 2010, but has become a deserved cult favorite. About the creation of a constantly mutating, sexually voracious human-animal hybrid that (surprise!) becomes increasingly difficult to control, **SPLICE** is far from a traditional horror movie, or even a traditional horror-sci fi movie. What it is is an absorbing, curiously touching and repellant creation, with enough blood and slime to fill three David Cronenberg films. **FREEVE**

Adam's Picks



1. **THE KINGDOM**

Another example of a long in the works project finally coming to fruition. **THE KINGDOM** (or **RIGET**) is a mind-roasting Danish TV series from director-creator Lars von Trier that to this day remains unique (it was given a Stephen King scripted Americanized remake in the form of **KINGDOM HOSPITAL**, which failed to capture the crazed brilliance of the original). Featured are a haunted hospital, sex mad doctors, a xenophobic brain surgeon, a ghost girl, a down syndrome afflicted Greek chorus and handheld camerawork that was considered quite radical when the series first appeared in 1994. Now, with



2. ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT

A war movie masterpiece? Not quite, but this adaptation of Erich Maria Remarque's classic WWI novel is a standout in the category of combat cinema, not least because the film (unlike the previous adaptations) hails from Remarque's native Germany. Director Edward Berger's staging of trench warfare is tough and unsparing (if a mite over-choreographed), just as it was in the novel, with a blanket refutation of conventional wartime movie heroism and a scale that belies what by Hollywood standards was a shockingly low budget. NETFLIX



3. 5-25-77

At long last we have the completion of writer-director Patrick Read Johnson's nearly twenty-years-in-the-making autobiographical depiction of growing up a **2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY** and **STAR WARS** obsessed

THE KINGDOM's arc completed at last (the third and apparently final season is currently streaming on Hulu), we're afforded an ideal chance to see just how well this series holds up (spoiler: I recently rewatched the first two seasons, and can attest they hold up pretty damn well).

TV SHOW



2. RINGU

Perhaps the most positive thing to come out of the inexplicable **SMILE** phenomenon is the fact that this 1998 Japanese import, which **SMILE** copies rather shamelessly, has come back into the spotlight. Adapted from the bestselling novel by Koji Suzuki and spun off into a seemingly never-ending movie cycle, **RINGU** remains an imaginative, unpredictable and, of course, **SCARY** film. The story involves a bootleg VHS circulating among a group of teenagers, each of whom dies a week after viewing it; a woman reporter attempts to ferret out what's happening, and in the process contracts the "Ring virus" herself (sound familiar, **SMILE** fans?).

FILM

nerd. I'd like to say 5-25-77 is an unqualified triumph, but that would be inaccurate. At least I can state it's not a failure, with an excellent performance by John Francis Daley as the teenaged Johnson, spot-on 1970s period detail and an aura of heartfelt sincerity. Offsetting those things are the vastly inflated two hour plus runtime and flighty narrative, which like the protagonist is easily distracted and prone to pointless detours. AMAZON



3. THE MIST

This 2007 Stephen King adaptation just turned 15, and remains a singular example of situational horror. It's got monsters, madness and gore, but all anyone seems to remember is the legendarily bleak ending, which writer-director Frank Darabont is **still having to defend**. Think of it as the antithesis of Darabont's earlier, and far less controversial, **SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION**, with THE MIST standing as one of the feel-bad films of its decade, if not the century.

FILM



4. NEMESIS

Fans of the recently deceased Albert Pyun tend to proclaim this now 30 year old film his "masterpiece," and that assessment may well be correct. The low budget NEMESIS is a cyberpunk-tinged account of a partial cyborg cop (Olivier Gruner) assigned to track down a rogue colleague. The film contains some diverting action sequences (most notably a bit where Gruner machine guns his way through several floors of a high rise) and stylish camerawork by Pyun, who was in a more visually evocative mood than usual. As for the French kickboxer-turned-B movie-impresario Gruner, he's just as you'd expect in one of his first-ever films: emotionally remote and burdened with an oft-impenetrable accent. CRACKLE



4. THE MANSION OF MADNESS

1970s Mexi madness from the late Juan Lopez Moctezuma, who offers a crazed expansion of **Edgar Allan Poe's** classic inmates-taking-over-the-asylum tale "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether." Moctezuma is best known as the producer of Alejandro Jodorowsky's FANDO & LIS, and in DR.



5. IS THAT BLACK ENOUGH FOR YOU?!?

In which film critic Elvis Mitchell provides a quirky history of African American filmmaking. Mitchell's overview tends to play down or ignore those things that don't support his overall thesis that the 1970s were a unique, never-to-be-repeated boom period for black performers and filmmakers. Furthermore, Mitchell vastly overrates many of the films he discusses in an effort to (again) support his thesis, although he deserves credit for illuminating the era's more unsavory aspects, such as the fact that shockingly little of the money made by these films went into the pockets of their creators. Yet the "Blaxploitation" era Mitchell explores was undoubtedly a vital period in film history, with an output that includes revolutionary screeds (SWEET SWEETBACK'S BAADASSSSS SONG), comedies (COOLEY HIGH), actioners (COFFY), horror movies (GANJA AND HESS) and even a feature-length cartoon (COONSKIN), all of which are covered here. NETFLIX

TARR'S TORTURE DUNGEON he appears to have been attempting to outdo Jodorowsky in arcane symbolism and unfettered weirdness. As an imdb commentator said of it, "That was definitely one of the movies I have ever watched." That it most definitely was! FILM



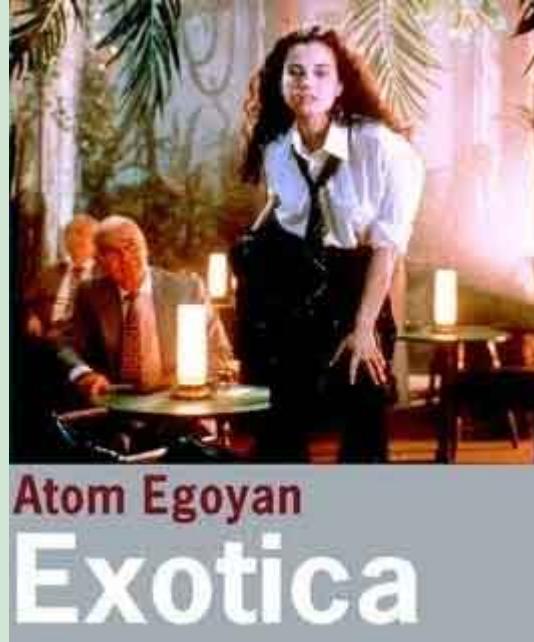
5. NOTHING

A little-known 2003 Canadian import that deserves some love. It was the third feature by SPLICE's Vincenzo Natali, and remains one of his wildest concoctions. Featured are the Natali regulars David Hewlett and Andrew Miller, a.k.a. "The Drews," as a pair of goofballs who one day find their house situated in a featureless white expanse; events progress from there in a consistently inventive and technically assured manner. The Drews admittedly aren't the comedy dream team Natali seems to believe they are, but this is a film in which the director and his special effects crew are the true stars. FILM

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Insider Info

Let's talk about Amazon's **LORD OF THE RINGS: RINGS OF POWER**. Much has been said about the show, for which Amazon splashed out a reported \$1 billion and hired inexperienced showrunners to oversee it. A puzzling state of affairs, yes, but not an unprecedented one.



It would seem Amazon was aping the approach taken by New Line Cinema in the late 1990s, when it committed the then-princely sum of \$180 million (which eventually ballooned to \$280 million) to make the LORD OF THE RINGS trilogy, under the direction of **Peter Jackson**, a New Zealander known at the time for a **handful of low budget horror movies**. Quite a gamble, yes, but it paid off critically, financially and at the Oscars, things to which Amazon almost certainly paid close attention. What they appear to have missed is the calamity that occurred afterward.

It's a widely known fact that LOTR was a huge factor in the 2008 dissolution of New Line as a standalone entity. It's been claimed that the **handling of the film's earnings**, which was sleazy and underhanded even by Hollywood standards, weakened New Line in the eyes of its corporate overseer Warner Bros. LOTR has also proven something of a drag on Jackson, whose formerly immaculate reputation was tarnished by the awfulness of the subsequent HOBBIT trilogy.

For that matter, Ralph Bakshi, who first adapted LOTR to the screen—and in the process cut many a corner—in the 1970s, also had his career negatively impacted (although Bakshi’s producing partner Saul Zaentz **apparently made out quite well**). The luckiest person to come out of this mess (aside from Zaentz), it would seem, is John Boorman, who attempted an adaptation of LOTR back in the early 1970s but wisely abandoned it—although Boorman did end up making the disastrous **ZARDOZ** in its place, and then **EXORCIST II: THE HERETIC**, so maybe he wasn’t too lucky after all.

The idea of a “cursed” film has been around for some time. Alleged examples include **ROSEMARY’S BABY** (due to the misfortunes that befell its principal creators) **POLTERGEIST** (due to the fact that many cast members from it and its sequel died suddenly) and **SUPERMAN: THE MOVIE** (because its leading man ended up incapacitated, its leading lady was felled by mental illness and its major supporting players Gene Hackman and Marlon Brando remained Gene Hackman and Marlon Brando). In light of those “curses” the idea of a **LORD OF THE RINGS** curse isn’t too farfetched.

Recipients of that curse include Amazon, which has been on the defensive ever since **RINGS OF POWER** premiered in September. **Declining ratings** and “**toxic fandom**” have beset the program, and those things don’t appear to be going away—meaning you can expect more of the same when season two premieres late next year.

Might the show do to Amazon what LOTR did to New Line? Given all the money Amazon has committed that’s not entirely out of the realm of possibility, with the fate of many of Amazon’s services, such as Prime Video, directly tied to the performance of **RINGS OF POWER**—so when it resumes broadcasting, do be nice.

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



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The Bedlam Files, 11-2022

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