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# THE BEDLAM FILES

*With Adam Groves*

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“Anything that doesn't take years of your life  
and drive you to suicide hardly seems worth doing.”

— Cormac McCarthy (RIP)

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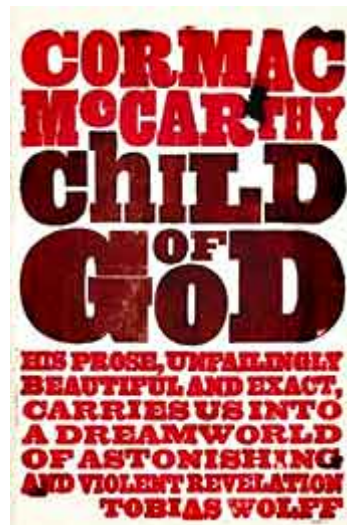
### 1. **DUNKIRK**



This may well be the masterpiece of Christopher Nolan, who's created a WWII epic like no other. Focusing on the evacuation of British troops from Dunkirk by civilian boaters in the wake of a resounding military defeat, it's a panoramic ensemble piece with a novelistic time-tripping structure. I'll complain about the repetitiveness of much of the action, particularly in the scenes involving Tom Hardy as a beleaguered fighter pilot (in which every shot looks the same). Offsetting that is the sheer physical scale, which is staggering, and the

## Adam's Picks

### 1. **CHILD OF GOD**



For those wondering what all the shouting is about regarding the late novelist Cormac McCarthy, CHILD OF GOD is an excellent starting point (although you can skip the lousy James Franco directed film adaptation). It's about one Lester Ballard, a mentally deficient man living in the wilds of East Tennessee. Following a stint in jail Ballard comes to indulge in random murder, cross dressing and necrophilia, which he practices in an underground cave where he lays out his deceased sex partners “like saints.” This is all

rawness of the visuals (the copious ocean scenes were clearly shot on a mighty choppy sea with what look like thousands of extras and non-CGI props), which impart a cumulative power that's undeniable. NETFLIX

## 2. AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON



An almost classic with good scares, good pacing and lots of laughs. AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON's mixture of comedy and horror was unprecedented in 1981, and still works its magic today. Equally noteworthy are the suspense and unflinching gore dished out by writer/director John Landis; for all its yucks, this is a REAL horror movie. The script, about a young American man (David Naughton) in London who after getting bitten by a werewolf finds himself becoming a bloodthirsty lycanthrope himself, could admittedly have used some work--how about that gorgeous nurse (Jenny Agutter) who not only invites the severely disturbed protagonist into her flat but takes him to bed that same night?--but exhibits great imagination, particularly in its presentation of the undead people who turn up to haunt Naughton with their gory wounds intact. SHUDDER

## 3. 1984

described in McCarthy's trademarked ultra-spare-yet-rhapsodic manner, with special attention paid to the profane and often racist dialogue spoken by Ballard and his fellows, which is authentic to the region and has a gritty poetry all its own.

BOOK

## 2. INAUGURATION OF THE PLEASURE DOME



One of the most striking films made by the late **Kenneth Anger**. The narrative (such as it is) is largely incoherent, but this 38-minute hallucination excels as a dreamy evocation of magic and madness on a mythological plane. The setting is a folkloric wonderland--actually a "Come as Your Madness" Hollywood party that featured such luminaries as novelist Anais Nin, filmmaker **Curtis Harrington**, counter-culture icon Cameron and Anger himself--where the Lord Shiva encounters several immortal figures. Featured is the boldest, most daring use of color in any Anger film (making INAUGURATION, by extension, one of the most strikingly visualized films ever made) and some profoundly bizarre costume design, most notably the birdcage headdress sported by Ms. Nin--which just happened to be what she wore to the party in question, so it ended up in the film.

FILM

## 3. LUCIFER RISING



It's now a given that the disturbing vision presented in George Orwell's dystopian 1949 masterpiece 1984 has proven quite prophetic. This film adaptation, filmed during the exact timeframe specified by the novel and in the actual locations where it took place, remains the definitive screen treatment. The term "Big Brother" is for some reason never spoken, but Orwell's bleakness and disillusionment are immaculately preserved, as is the 1940s-tinged architecture. The late John Hurt, with his eternally pained face, headlines, while Richard Burton (in what was to be his final role) plays the interrogator who gets Hurt to love his unspoken overseer. The photography by the great Roger Deakins also impresses, with an unforgettably washed-out, old-timey newsreel hue. AMAZON

#### 4. VALERIE

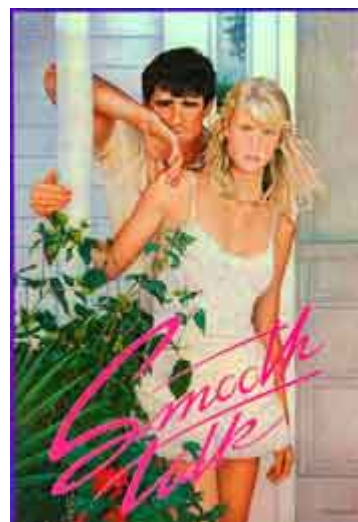


As in Valerie Perrine, a Vegas showgirl turned Hollywood starlet whose once



**Kenneth Anger's** magnum opus, a mini-epic that suffered numerous false starts and setbacks, and never got the planned sequel Anger spent much of the remainder of his life trying to mount. Thus, the fact that LUCIFER RISING was completed at all is pretty remarkable, even if the film's finished form isn't all it could have been. As in **INAUGURATION OF THE PLEASURE DOME** the characters are gods and goddess, with their ultimate goal being the invocation of Lucifer, presented here as the bringer of light. Taken as a visual poem the film is dazzling, bearing an atmosphere that shimmers with prehistoric mysticism and a trance-like evocation of light and sound, courtesy of one of the American cinema's true masters. FILM

#### 4. SMOOTH TALK



The recently deceased Treat Williams had one of his most memorable roles in this 1986 indie, adapted from Joyce Carol Oates' 1966 story "Where Are

red-hot career (highlights included an Oscar nominated turn in Bob Fosse's LENNY and the role of Miss Tessmacher in SUPERMAN: THE MOVIE) flamed out back in 1980 with **CAN'T STOP THE MUSIC**. Adding further upset is the fact that Perrin is now stricken with an especially severe form of Parkinson's disease. But the woman's indomitable spirit is on full display in this 38-minute documentary portrait; the film could have stood to be much longer, but was evidently hobbled by its subject's limited physical abilities. The ailing Perrine does at least offer an admirably frank self-assessment, admitting she was too selfish to ever have children and that her big break in Hollywood came about primarily because she was willing to go topless in SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE (1972). We also hear from colleagues like Jeff Bridges, Angie Dickinson, David Arquette, Stacey Keach and **Richard Donner**, all of whom offer suitably glowing testimonials. AMAZON

## 5. **ARNOLD**



Another documentary portrait that in contrast to the above film, which was too short, is, in its three-part miniseries whole, too damn long. It profiles the one and only Arnold Schwarzenegger, from his none-too-humble beginnings as an Austrian bodybuilder to the heights of showbusiness and politics. A puff piece to be sure, with the man himself on hand to narrate, and so

you Going, Where have You Been?" Williams was an established star at the time, lending his talents to a project created largely by newcomers, including Laura Dern in one of her earliest roles and director Joyce Chopra in her feature debut. The proceedings are hobbled somewhat by a distractingly uneven two-part structure (it plays like two entirely separate films), but the core drama, comprising a fateful meeting between the teenaged Dern and a charismatic sociopath played by Williams, is powerful and unsettling, and enhanced immeasurably by Williams' acting prowess.

FILM

## 5. **A PRAYER FOR HETMAN MAZEPA**



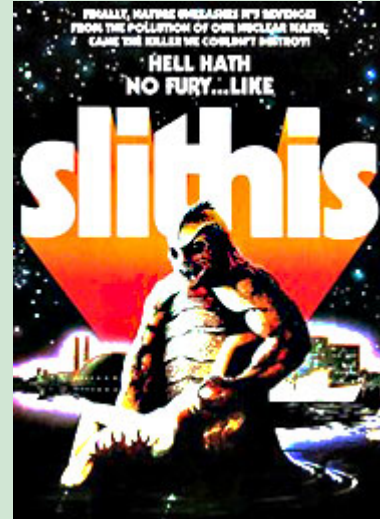
With the Russia-Ukraine war heating up, this 2002 film, about the perpetually dysfunctional dynamic between those countries, grows more relevant by the day. The final feature made by Ukraine's **Yuri Ilyenko**, it relates the story of Ivan Mazepa, the Ukrainian head of state from 1687 to 1708, in the form of an especially fevered dream. In this film's hallucinatory reality, a literal flood of severed heads are poured down a hillside, a procession of corpses are contorted into odd poses and arranged on floating platforms, and the title character rises from the dead to confront his Russian overseers. The net result is a frenzied muddle, albeit one that exerts a definite oft-kilter interest; Ilyenko was one of the

offer an extremely one-sided slant. On second thought, though, maybe this series truly says all that needs to be said about its subject, whose two defining traits--narcissism and self-importance--register loud and clear. NETFLIX

world's great cinematographers, and, acting (as usual) as his own cameraman, created a fantasia whose pictorial brilliance (unruly though it may be) simply cannot be denied. FILM

## Also New

- **SLITHIS** (Movie)
- **THE BUTCHER BOY**  
(with Sinead O'Conner)
- **TRANS-EUROP-EXPRESS** (Movie)
- **A WOMAN KILLS** (Film)
- **VHS VIDEO COVER ART** (Nonfiction)
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## Insider Info

Recently I purchased three graphic novels at a Washington state bookstore. The cost for this haul? A cool 98 bucks.



For the record, I can write off this sum, and anyway, the quality of the writing and artwork contained in those books made it an almost worthwhile purchase. So don't cry for me Argentina, but *do* cry for all the receptive readers destined to be denied the excellence of these books because of their insanely high price tags.

Understand: these are mainstream publications I'm referring to here. This is distinct from the collector's market, whose inflated costs I've come to grudgingly accept (the fact that I write for more than one such publisher being an admitted factor in that acceptance), and the used book trade, which has been democratized by the internet (meaning the price guides of old no

longer have any relevance, with used book dealers now charging whatever sum they think they can get way with).

This particular issue certainly isn't limited to comic books and graphic novels, but it does seem endemic to that sphere. No less a luminary than **Alan Moore** once lamented that (in essence) high pricing has turned comic books into an exclusively upper middle-class phenomenon. I'll have to agree with this statement, and Moore's follow-up claim that while there's nothing wrong with upper middle-class buyers, excluding everybody else is a bit limiting, especially for an industry that claims to value diversity.

Here's another, much more dire quote. It emerges from the mid-1990s, when a comic book industry colleague warned me that "comic book publishers are gonna price themselves out of business." Not long after this statement was uttered the **Great Comics Crash of 1996** occurred, from which the industry has yet to fully recover. Pricing wasn't the major cause of said crash (which came about primarily due to publishers attempting to fuse the mainstream and collector's markets), but it almost certainly played a role.

Fast forward to today, when following a boom period comic book sales are **once again experiencing a downturn**. Let's hope this downturn isn't as severe as that of the GCC, as another calamity of that magnitude could well take down the entire industry, this time permanently.

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



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### The Bedlam Files, Summer-2023

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