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THE BEDLAM FILES

With Adam Groves

“Those whom the gods would destroy, they first make successful in show business”

— David Brown

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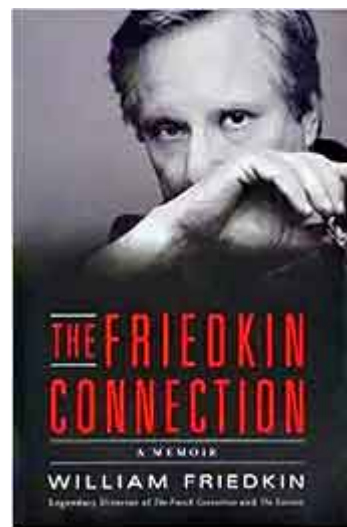
1. THE BLACK STALLION



Hiring the grumpy documentarian Carroll Ballard to direct a kids movie was an odd but, it turns out, mighty good choice. The film puts Ballard’s documentary experience to excellent use, and features career-best work by cinematographer Caleb Deschanel and sound designer Alan Splet (despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that Ballard was by his own admission a “horrible asshole” on set). It’s a good thing the film is so finely crafted, because the story, involving a young boy (Kelly Reno) bonding with a wild stallion on a desert island and somehow becoming

Adam's Picks

1. THE FRIEDKIN CONNECTION



There’s no better way to learn about the life and career of the late **William Friedkin** than through the voice of the man himself, as put down in this terrific 2013 memoir. Friedkin takes us through his sixty-plus year directorial career with solid storytelling instincts and many never-before-revealed factual tidbits, including a claim that Al Pacino was lazy and unprepared when making *CRUISING* (1980) and an unnerving description of an early-1980s heart attack. Ultimately *THE FRIEDKIN CONNECTION* is much like William Friedkin’s best films: tough, intense

a jockey in a professional horse race, is completely ludicrous.

AMAZON

2. DAGON



A nifty H.P. Lovecraft pastiche from the late **Stuart Gordon**. DAGON may not as strong as Gordon's previous Lovecraft adaptations RE-ANIMATOR and **FROM BEYOND**, but registers nonetheless as one of the director's better efforts. The narrative, taken from Lovecraft's similarly titled 6-page story (as well as the novella-length SHADOW OVER INSMOUTH), concerns a dorky American man (Ezra Godden) lost in a weird Spanish community where everyone is descended from the fish god Dagon (pronounced *Day-gone*). The film consists mostly of an extended chase through the town, leading to much repetitive action (how many narrow escapes can the protagonist effect?), but the peerlessly nutty climax is pure B-movie bliss, with a naked woman lowered into a pit and the hero turning into a fish. It's that kind of movie.

SHUDDER

3. NOT WITHOUT MY DAUGHTER

and very difficult to look away from. BOOK

2. BUG



Based on my own un-scientific tally, I say this is the most contentious film ever made by Mr. Friedkin. I'll always remember the young woman who sold me my admission ticket during this film's brief theatrical run asserting that "it's not a very good movie" and imploring me to see something else--which of course only made me that much more anxious to experience BUG. About a woman (Ashley Judd) who meets up with a deranged war veteran (Michael Shannon) whose paranoid delusions prove extremely contagious, it's disjointed, overwrought, excessive and plain nutty. Yet there's a crazed brilliance to it that harkens back to uninhibited auteurs like **Ken Russell** and Andrzej Zulawski, although a full appreciation of that brilliance seems to be a matter of personal taste--in other words, if you like Russell and Zulawski's films then by all means dive right in, but if not you'll want to steer clear. FILM

3. THE GHASTLY ONE



A most unexpected curiosity, this: a 1991 French made chunk of American-oriented jingoism, directed by British TV ace Brian Gilbert and starring a desperate-to-change-her-image Sally Field. She plays an American woman accompanying her Iranian immigrant hubbie (Alfred Molina) to his homeland for a vacation, only to have him turn controlling and abusive (traits that according to this movie are endemic to Muslim men), and demand she and their little girl (Sheila Rosenthal) stay with him in Iran. Sally resists but learns that in Iran the husband's wants are law, to a dangerous escape. An unabashedly racist and xenophobic, but undeniably exciting, film that's based on a true story (the particulars of which I know very little). It is, in short, the MIDNIGHT EXPRESS of the nineties.

AMAZON

4. AMOR BANDIDO



Many years before his must-read Ormond family biography, **THE EXOTIC ONES**, saw print, author **Jimmy McDonough** profiled another iconic trash movie auteur: Andy Milligan (1929-1991). In so doing McDonough broke at least one fundamental biographical rule in the way he blithely forsook the pretense-of-objectivity standard, admitting up front that he knew and loved Milligan, and actually took care of him in his final years (“Not many biographers get to wipe the ass of their subject,” the author candidly admits, “but I did, more than a few times”). Yet McDonough’s affection for Milligan and his films doesn’t blind him to the shortcomings of either. A chief virtue of **THE GHASTLY ONE** is its unblinking depiction of Milligan’s near-psychotic assholery, as well as the beyond-seedy exploitation milieu in which he thrived, turning out crap-taculars like **THE NAKED WITCH** (1961), **THE MAN WITH TWO HEADS** (1972) and **CARNAGE** (1984). His final HIV-ridden years were as torturous as can be imagined, making for a uniquely sordid and depressing, and so entirely appropriate, caper to the Andy Milligan saga. BOOK

4. IF FOOTMEN TIRE YOU, WHAT WILL HORSES DO?

A torrid erotic thriller of a type in which nineties-era Hollywood specialized; obviously that's no longer the case, which explains why this film hails from Argentina. It's nothing special, but quite diverting, being a lively account of a teenager (Renato Quattordio) involved in an amorous relationship with a much older teacher (Romina Ricci). The two head off to a secluded mansion for an extended bang-a-thon, but then a strange man turns up and the eroticism gives way to noirish intrigue. The sexual content, in direct contrast to most Hollywood attempts, is actually erotic, and director Daniel Andres Werner lends the proceedings a richly atmospheric charge. I just wish there were more to the film; an added twist of two might have livened up a script that despite its virtues feels under-baked.

AMAZON

5. **BLACK SNAKE MOAN**



A must-be-seen-to-be-disbelieved product of the aughts, when things were much wilder. It stars Samuel L. Jackson as a humble preacher obsessed with reforming a troubled nymphomaniac (Christina Ricci) by keeping her chained up in his house. The film isn't nearly as clever or unique as it thinks it is--in fact it's often downright annoying in its constant grabs for Tarantino-esque cool and (in the final scenes) cuteness. Still, it has a low-key charm



Continuing with **Jimmy McDonough**, here's an astounding 1971 artifact that's discussed at some length in his new book. IF FOOTMEN TIRE YOU... is unadulterated Christian propaganda, spiced with enough violence and bloodletting to satisfy the most jaded gore hound. The subject is a communist takeover of America, related in the form of a 50-minute sermon by the Mississippi preacher Estus Pirkle (1930-2005) that's intercut with lurid dramatizations. People gunned down in the streets! Alters festooned with the bodies of slaughtered children! A young boy (caught listening too intently to the word of God) skewered ear to ear with a sharp stick! And worst of all: children sent to special schools where they're encouraged to renounce Jesus Christ and pray instead to "Our Lord Fidel Castro!" The epitome of "Christian scare" cinema, and lots more fun than **RED DAWN**. FILM

5. **ESCAPE FROM TOMORROW**



that grows increasingly ingratiating. The real revelation is the always-excellent Ricci, who turns in a gloriously uninhibited, ferociously alluring firecracker of a performance.

PARAMOUNT+

Be sure to visit [The Bedlam Files Facebook page](#) for musing and commentary.

With all the current talk about Disney's (mis)fortunes, this now ten year old indie, filmed surreptitiously at Disney World, has taken on a new relevance. It involves a contented suburbanite (Roy Abramsohn) losing his mind during a family vacation at the park, marked by striking black-and-white photography that transforms smiling cartoon characters into leering demons and high spirited music that counterpoints the horror. Without the documentary overlay, alas, the proceedings don't work, as is evident in the listless scenes that take place outside the park. I'm referring specifically to the sci fi-tinged final third, involving a B-movieish laboratory and an evil princess, which is far less surreal than the amusement park set footage. FILM

Also New

- **BARBIE, MOVIE STAR?** (Commentary)
- **AESTHETIC DEVIATIONS: A CRITICAL VIEW OF AMERICAN SHOT-ON-VIDEO HORROR, 1984-1994**
(Nonfiction)
- **TWISTED ISSUES** (Movie)
- **DEDICATED TO THE AEGEAN SEA**
(Movie)
- **TRIP TO MOON** (Movie)
- **Archived newsletters for easy reference**
- ***And Much More!***



Insider Info

The biggest news item right now? That, it seems, would be **the comments made by actress Rachel Zegler about**

Disney's upcoming SNOW

WHITE remake, with she

dismissing the 1937 original as

"weird" and "scary," and with

"a big focus on her love story

with a guy who literally stalks

her." Zegler promises that in

the new version "she's not

going to be saved by the

prince, and she's not going to

be dreaming about true love," becoming instead "the leader that

her late father told her that she could be if she was fearless, fair,

brave and true." With these comments Ms. Zegler accomplished

the unheard-of feat of uniting the right and the left in outrage,

and single-handedly precipitating a civil war within the Mouse

Factory, with the son of the original SNOW WHITE's director and

lyricist Tim Rice publicly **condemning the film and Disney's**

current orientation.



This is a studio that really seems to hate its past output, and which delights in antagonizing its viewers, traits shared by Hollywood overall. Hollywood tends to follow the lead of Disney, which was the first of the big studios to "go woke" in the late 2010s, and also the first to purge its DEI staff earlier this year, two moves (out of several) that were directly emulated by Disney's fellows. Its bleak financial trajectory is also being copied by the rest of Hollywood, which on the whole has **lost a reported \$1.5 billion during the summer of '23.**

This begs a question a lot of us have been pondering for some time: what the Hell is going on with Hollywood? Why in recent years can't this industry seem to do anything right? Why is it so antagonistic toward its audiences (calling one's fan base racist and sexist doesn't strike me as a good way to entice them)? Why is it so insistent on pushing divisive political stances ("Get woke, go broke" may not be a valid statement, but it certainly isn't making anyone rich)? And why can't it acknowledge, much less learn from, its mistakes (which in recent months have reached epidemic proportions)?

If there's a definitive answer to these questions I have yet to find it, but a recently posted YouTube video from Disney commentator WDW Pro has at least provided some much-needed clarity. The video's focus is on the leadership of the Writer's Guild of America and the current, seemingly never-ending strike. Regarding that strike, I'm solidly on the side of the creatives, although I can't

help but suspect that (as revealed by WDW Pro) the WGA currently being run by a 24 year old woman whose sole work experience is as a social media influencer may help explain why the conflict has dragged on for so long.

Inexperienced hires? They're something Hollywood, an industry that bases its hiring on how many Instagram followers a person has on Instagram, has more than its share of, with the likely reason so many Hollywoodians have been behaving like overgrown adolescents lately is because they *are* in fact overgrown adolescents. Case in point: Ms. Rachel Zegler, who is admittedly quite talented, but maturity-wise has yet to prove herself a "fearless, fair, brave and true" individual, with "weird" and "scary" (not to mention entitled and obnoxious) being more appropriate adjectives.

HOLLYWOOD'S TERRIBLE NO GOOD HORRIBLE SUMMER

with Greg Owen

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



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The Bedlam Files, August-2023

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