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THE BEDLAM FILES

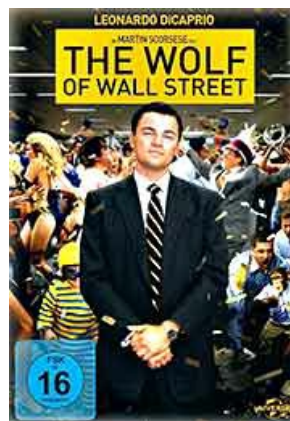
With Adam Groves

“I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use.”

— Galileo Galilei

Streaming Now

1. THE WOLF OF WALL STREET



With the October 20 opening of Martin Scorsese's *KILLERS OF THE FLOWER MOON* creeping up, I feel it's a good time to get reacquainted with Scorsese's raunchiest film. Here he provided a 2013 dramatization of the life of Jordan Belfort (Leonardo DiCaprio), who thrived on Wall Street by utilizing mob-approved criminal tactics. The film shows, in concise and enjoyable fashion, how Belfort and his colleagues reveled in debauchery and excess to a degree that strains the R rating, with enough nudity, drug taking and miscellaneous bad behavior to filal a dozen *GIRLS GONE WILD* videos. The film is quite true to the mentality of Wall Street's citizenry, which may explain all the bad reviews it received; to those of us who came of age in the eighties, Belfort and co. are precisely the sort of self-made go-getters we were taught to revere, but revealed here as the greedy slobs they truly are. Beyond that the film has some flaws, mainly an overly drawn-out three hour runtime and some less-than-convincing period detail. But its power cannot be denied, and for once DiCaprio proves ideally cast, as a man whose narcissism and superiority fit him like the proverbial glove.

2. **KILLER KLOWNS FROM OUTER SPACE**



One of the most satisfying horror-comedies of the eighties. **KILLER KLOWNS FROM OUTER SPACE** has a number of failings common to low budget films from its era--namely poorly developed characters, bad acting, and perfunctory direction--but all that is nearly forgiven due to the wondrous title critters, which are at once hilarious and authentically terrifying, and nonstop invention. Extraterrestrial clown monsters in a circus tent spaceship? Guns that shoot acid ice cream? Seeing-eye balloon dogs? Carnivorous jack in the boxes? Consider yourself warned!

SHUDDER

3. **PUBLIC ENEMIES**



Easily the finest of Michael Mann's post-**HEAT** films, **PUBLIC ENEMIES** is essentially a remake of that 1995 masterwork, with Johnny Depp's John Dillinger and Christian Bale's Melvin Purvis in the Robert De Niro and Al Pacino roles of a criminal and cop caught in a twisted cycle of pursuit and barely-concealed admiration. And despite a secondary cast (which includes iconic figures like "Pretty Boy" Floyd and "Baby Face" Nelson) that has a tendency to be introduced and then more often than not immediately killed off, the film is damned impressive. It's involving, suspenseful, superbly acted and digitally lensed in a wholly unique manner. Cinematically this is Mann's boldest-ever work, with a visual syntax all its own. Still, I

say the definitive Dillinger-Purvis movie is John Milius' **DILLINGER** from 1973, a giddy blast of B-movie mayhem whose bloody brilliance remains unrivalled.

NETFLIX

4. **DOG SOLDIERS**



Fun low budget action-horror from early-aughts England. There's little in the way of depth or originality, but the premise is an irresistible one: a band of soldiers on a combat exercise (a la **SOUTHERN COMFORT**) find themselves besieged by werewolves who can see in the dark (a la **PREDATOR**), and end up barricaded in a house with the baddies massing outside (a la **STRAW DOGS**). The film is never especially scary, but the action is fast and furious, and writer/director Neil Marshall (who's first feature this was) never skimps on the red stuff.

SHUDDER

5. **AIMEE: THE VISITOR**



2023 has given us a number of "important" films, but I contend that this **Charles Band** production is the most important. That's not because of what it has to say (which adds up to very little) but because the release of **AIMEE: THE VISITOR** will be viewed by future generations as the true opening of Pandora's Box in cinema's AI revolution. This is in reference to the widely publicized fact that the title character is the first in history to be entirely computer generated. **AIMEE**, who exists solely as a face on a computer monitor, is a striking creation that won't ever be confused for an actual human, meaning there's no immediate

worry about actors being replaced by computerized simulations. This personage, however, displays a fair amount of charm and sex appeal--more so, in fact, than any of the all-too-human performers surrounding it. The narrative they find themselves caught up in, involving a porn-obsessed hacker (Dallas Schaefer) becoming smitten with AIMEE, who is in fact an elaborate computer virus, is clichéd and perfunctory, and at just 69 minutes isn't nearly substantial enough. Regardless, the film is a historical landmark, albeit not an especially positive or encouraging one.

AMAZON

Adam's Picks

1. MASSACRE AT CENTRAL HIGH



As far as I'm concerned this 1976 exploiter is the granddaddy of modern-day teensploitation cinema: a smart, stylish and provocative kill-a-thon set almost entirely on the grounds of a suburban high school. This particular school is ruled by a ruthless band of bullies, until a new kid (Derrel Maury) arrives to challenge the traditional order. Things quickly turn violent, with the bullies all dying in a suspicious series of "accidents." So far so standard, but that's only the beginning, as it seems that new cliques are forming in place of the old, making the school an even more unpleasant place to be--and leading, of course, to a fresh round of killings. Writer-director Renee Daalder (**HABITAT**) keeps the sex and violence at acceptable levels throughout while giving the mind a satisfying workout. You might not realize until after it's over just how intelligent the film is in its creation of a LORD OF THE FLIES-type political allegory that completely omits teachers and parents. MASSACRE AT CENTRAL HIGH was the true predecessor of HEATHERS, DANGEROUSLY CLOSE, SCREAM, etc., and remains at the head of the pack. FILM

2. AMERICA'S DEADLIEST HOME VIDEO



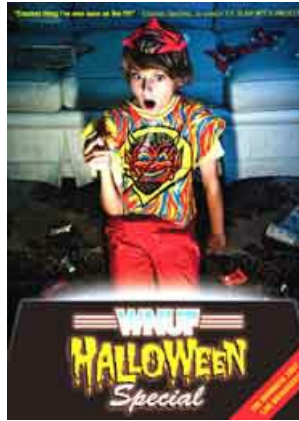
Currently making its long-awaited **Blu-ray bow**, this formerly obscure SOV-er is an unsung classic. Made nearly a decade prior to **THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT**, AMERICA'S DEADLIEST HOME VIDEO presents itself as the video diary of a guy (Danny Bonaduce) who during an aimless cross-country jaunt stumbles onto a motley band of hoods. This group, whose ranks include a wannabe stud (Mick Wynnhoff), his GF (MAGNOLIA'S Melora Walters) and a trigger-happy woman (Mollena Williams, who also co-scripted), drag Danny along with them, his video camera capturing the whole twisted jaunt. The nastiness begins with Williams shooting a convenience store clerk in a botched hold-up, and spirals steadily downward as a fairly innocent crime spree becomes a murderous rampage. The acting (Bonaduce's included) is strong, and the video-within-the-video angle extremely well executed with (mostly) convincing realism. FILM

3. MANIAC



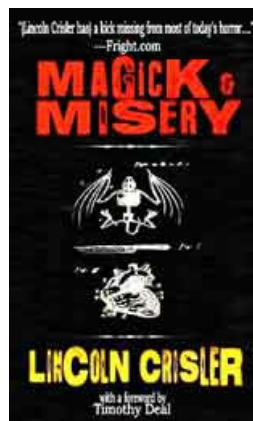
For some reason this 2018 program, a rare example of a Netflix science fiction series that's actually worth your while, has in recent weeks been crowned a "criminally overlooked" gem. In truth the show, starring Emma Stone and Jonah Hill as participants in a hallucinatory pharmaceutical trial, received a fair amount of attention back in the day, but it does deserve a watch if you haven't done so already (and perhaps even a rewatch, although I haven't yet attempted one). FYI, the 2015 Norwegian series that inspired MANIAC (and is covered in my two-fer review) is also deserving of your

4. WNUF HALLOWEEN SPECIAL



Another newly minted **Blu-ray release**, a Baltimore-lensed 2013 video project that was made to play like a VHS recording of a 1987 Halloween TV special. It begins with a newscast, whose costumed hosts report on several regional news stories, including a Baptist Church group that believes Halloween is inherently satanic and a tour of an apparently haunted house. It must be said that director Chris LaMartina (who like the rest of the cast and crew goes uncredited) impeccably captures the look and feel of a late 1980s TV channel, down to the satanic panic themed news reports (warning us that devil worship is “on the rise”) and animated bumpers that precede the commercial breaks (containing screams and blood covering the image), and also the commercials themselves (put together by a variety of directors with eighties-era stock footage), which are made to periodically interrupt the program. What neither the commercials nor the main portion of the broadcast are is particularly scary, being intended, it would seem, as parody--in which form the film doesn't quite work. FILM

5. MAGICK AND MISERY by LINCOLN CRISLER



A 2009 collection of eleven short pieces by a three time Iraq War veteran. This explains the impact of these ostensibly escapist tales, which aren't unusually graphic or excessive but have a kick missing from most of today's horror fiction.

None of the stories deal explicitly with war, yet its specter would appear to be present in "Making the Grade," about a schoolboy whose parents literally bet his life on his usefulness to a murderous government, and "Old Stooping Lugh," a memorably brutal tale of Irish mobsters and an age-old demon. Violent death is a common element, being present in the perverse Isaac Asimov pastiche "Seymour's Descent," about a robot that learns to kill and enjoys it. There's also "The Gambler," a tender account of a severely traumatized man's train-bound meeting with an ex-hobo who's experienced his own share of trauma, so there is some range to be found in what isn't the greatest collection I've ever read, but is far from the worst. BOOK

Also New

- **THE EYES OF LAURA MARS** (Film)
- **DIABOLIQUE** (Film)
- **OLD DEATH** (Book)
- **THE LAST TEMPTATION OF CHRIST at 35** (Commentary)
- **MISERY** (Film)
- **Archived newsletters for easy reference**
- ***And Much More!***



Insider Info

Back in May, as you may recall, Netflix released **QUEEN CLEOPATRA**, an alleged docu-series that portrayed Cleopatra as an African warrior queen.

Executive produced by that noted historian Jada Pinkett Smith, the

series drew widespread condemnation (it currently has a 1.1 rating on the [imdb](#)) and even **legal action from a prominent Egyptian lawyer**. Now an upcoming film, **THE BOOK OF CLARENCE**, has begun to attract notice due to the fact that it essentially does what the aforementioned Netflix series did, this time to Jesus Christ



The idea of a black Jesus is nothing new (there exist two films with just such a depiction: 1994's little-known GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN and 2006's **COLOR OF THE CROSS**), but THE BOOK OF CLARENCE's subversion reportedly goes a lot further, depicting Israel's entire populace as dark skinned and having its title character fake his miracles--and it's a fact that nearly any deviation from Biblical "truth" in a depiction of Jesus Christ is bound to cause controversy.

The late 20th Century provided quite a few instances of pop culture-inspired Christian outrage, including John Lennon's much-contested 1966 statement that the Beatles were "more popular than Jesus" (note how in many **alleged first-person accounts of Hell** Mr. Lennon is always foremost among the sufferers) and the same year's "IS GOD DEAD?" TIME magazine cover. Then there was **THE LAST TEMPTATION OF CHRIST**, both the 1955 Nikos Kazantzakis novel and **1988 Martin Scorsese film adaptation**, which led to ire that hadn't been seen since the days of Oscar Wilde's SALOME and Cecil B. DeMille's SIGN OF THE CROSS.

Other late Twentieth Century examples? There was the 1965 book THE PASSOVER PLOT, which upset many with its claims that JC was a cunning opportunist who meticulously planned out his crucifixion and resurrection. The 1970 rock opera JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR was, according to Billy Graham, "bordering on blasphemy and sacrilege," and **protested by both Christian and Jewish groups**, with its concept album banned by the BBC; the hippified Jesus musical GODSPELL, which premiered a year later, was also controversial, although not quite as much, as JCS had essentially sucked all the air out of the room (to the point that two potentially combustible publications, BEHOLD THE MAN by Michael Moorcock, about a time traveler getting nailed up in JC's place, and THE MEMOIRS OF JESUS CHRIST by Marcus Harrison, which dramatizes the claims of THE PASSOVER PLOT, passed largely without incident).

Yet there was still plenty of ire to be had, with the 1976 film adaptation of THE PASSOVER PLOT eliciting controversy during its brief release, when, according to its star Zalman King, protesters "almost burned the theaters down." Monty Python's biblical spoof LIFE OF BRIAN (1979) was **hit with bans throughout the US and Britain**, while Jean-Luc Godard's HAIL MARY/Le livre de Marie (1985), which attempted to retell the story of the virgin birth, **received bans, bomb threats and condemnation from the Vatican**, leading Godard to quip that the pope was his press agent.

And the fun didn't end there. Protests greeted the releases of the randy religioso drama PRIEST (1994), Kevin Smith's Catholic satire **DOGMA** (1999), and, moving into the 2000s, THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST (2004), with the upset in that case hailing from Jewish rather than Christian groups.

So evangelical outrage remains alive and well, and will very likely rear its head once again when THE BOOK OF CLARENCE is unveiled in January '24. You think QUEEN CLEOPATRA was controversial? To borrow a quote from **NATURAL BORN KILLERS**, you ain't seen nothing yet.

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



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The Bedlam Files, September/October-2023

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