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# THE BEDLAM FILES

*With Adam Groves*

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“If you continue to deny life’s realities, you will continue to be defeated by life’s realities.”

— Cassandra Mack

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## Streaming Now

### 1. **COFFY**



A highlight of the Blaxploitation film cycle, and for me Pam Grier’s greatest pre-JACKIE BROWN role. She plays Coffy, a tough-but-sexy nurse out for revenge against the drug dealers who caused her sister’s death. Much outrageous carnage ensues--a guy’s head blown is apart via shotgun, another guy gets dragged behind a car, a woman’s hands are cut up by razor blades in Coffy’s hair, etc.--in an unfailingly entertaining sleaze-a-thon marked by writer/director Jack Hill’s gift for outrageously profane streetwise dialogue (“You want to spit on me

## Adam's Picks

### 1. **PONTYPOOL**

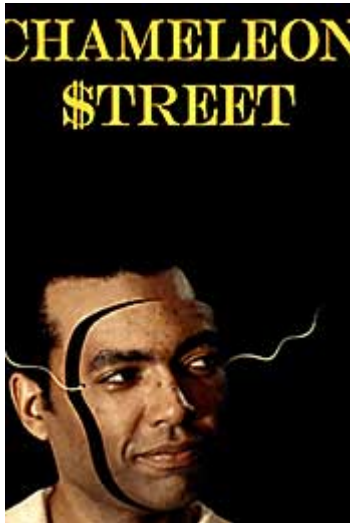


There’s never been a zombie movie quite like this a funny and intense Canadian import from **HIGHWAY 61**’s Bruce McDonald. It stars Stephen McHattie (A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE) as a disgraced shock jock stationed in Pontypool, Ontario, where people are being turned into babbling zombies. The reason? The English language itself, which has apparently become infected with a horrific contagion. PONTYPOOL isn’t a great film by any means, but as a tight, claustrophobic chamber piece it works quite well. Over ninety percent of the film takes place in McHattie’s besieged radio

and make me crawl? I'm gonna piss on your grave tomorrow!") and Grier's commanding screen presence.

AMAZON

## 2. CHAMELEON STREET



One of the great unknown independent films of the eighties, CHAMELEON STREET (1989) was based on the true story of William D. Street, a black ex-con who scammed his way into various professions through a natural talent for mimicry. Writer-director-star Wendell B. Harris, Jr. relates this story in a uniquely funky, innovative manner, and delivers an unforgettable performance as Street (Harris's deep voice alone is a marvel). I say CHAMELEON STREET ranks with the new wave films of the sixties in freshness and innovation, with moments of laugh-out-loud hilarity and nail-biting suspense (particularly during an excruciating scene in which Street, pretending to be a surgeon, fakes his way through an operation).

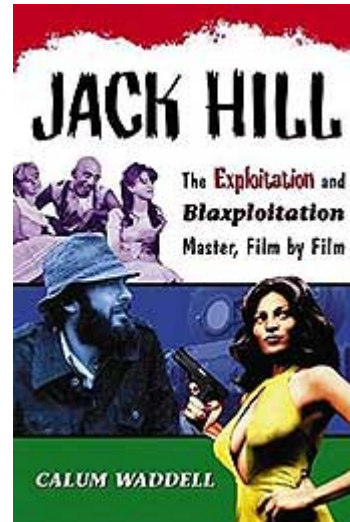
CRITERION CHANNEL

## 3. BIRTH/REBIRTH

station, with much of the "action" conveyed through dialogue. McDonald maintains attention by keeping his camera mobile, particularly in the early scenes, but never excessively or distractingly so.

FILM

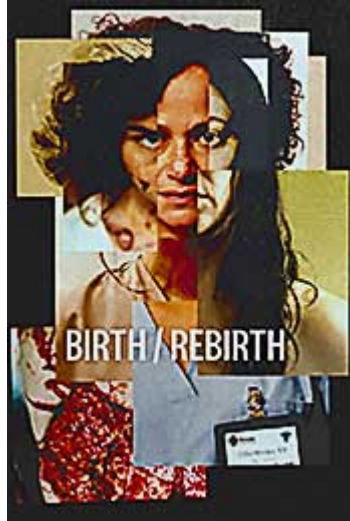
## 2. JACK HILL: THE EXPLOITATION AND BLAXPLOITATION MASTER, FILM BY FILM



The first and only book dedicated to Jack Hill, who made COFFY, THE BIG DOLL HOUSE, SWITCHBLADE SISTERS and several few other grindhouse classics. Author Calum Waddell provides in-depth coverage of each of Hill's films (including obscure efforts like TRACK OF THE VAMPIRE and I A GROUPIE), and features copious interviews with Hill and several of his colleagues. On the downside, Waddell has a tendency to overstate the sociopolitical subtexts of his subject's films, and never succeeds in answering the biggest question surrounding Jack Hill: why he, in contrast to his colleagues Francis Ford Coppola, Peter Bogdonovich and Jonathan Demme, never succeeded in breaching the mainstream, instead spending the entirety of his career mired in the exploitation sphere. The most likely answer is that, simply, Hill did his job a little too well, which was his (ironic) loss but our gain.

BOOK

## 3. LADY EXTERMINATOR



A horror indie that accomplishes three mighty impressive feats: 1). It's a Shudder original that's actually worthwhile, 2). It partakes of Hollywood's current "No Men November" feminist orientation without any pandering or grandstanding, and 3). It's a (very) rare example of non-boring character-based horror. Marin Ireland stars as a doctor performing unholy experiments designed to conquer death, and SCRUBS' Judy Reyes plays a nurse who learns that her recently deceased daughter is Ireland's latest subject. Despite being quite different in temperament, the ladies strike up a close bond over the fact that both have a vested interest in the girl being resurrected. The trajectory is predictable (the resurrected girl's post-mortem behavior, as you might guess, is in keeping with that of the zombified humans of PET SEMATARY), but the expert performances and stylish direction by Laura Moss rivet one's attention.

SHUDDER

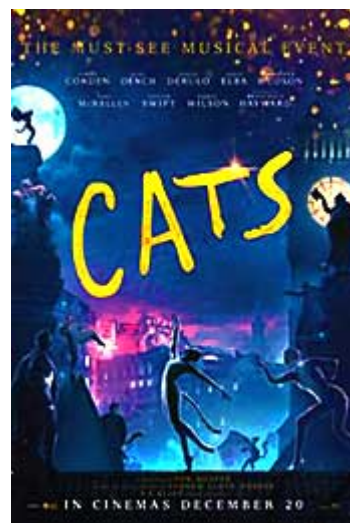
#### 4. **CHATTY**



The Shaw Brothers shepherded remake (rip-off, actually) of COFFY. About a pure-hearted nurse (Ping Chen) who becomes a gun-toting vigilante after her sister gets hooked on drugs, LADY EXTERMINATOR is quite sleazy and violent (as you'd expect), but far from exceptional--still, the mere fact that the film is cohesive renders it above-average amid late-1970s Shaw Brothers films. In the title role the vibrant and sexy Ping Chen, who headlined many a Shaw production, is strong (although she can't hope to compete with Pam Grier), and director Chung Sun keeps things lively, with insanely fast pacing bolstered by highly energetic, zoom lens-happy visuals.

FILM

#### 4. **CATS**



This was the MARVELS of the 2010s, a severely bloated, cat-happy mega-flop. Featured are Idris Elba, Taylor Swift, Jennifer Hudson and numerous



For those who claim there exist no original concepts, this short will set you straight. It's about a shy young woman (Carlena Britch) working late one night who's harassed by talking balloons with faces drawn on 'em. Writer-director Kit Garchow forsakes the campy/comedic route, accomplishing the far more difficult task of getting viewers to take his nutty concept seriously. The proceedings, unfortunately, kind of fall apart in the final scenes, which shoehorn astral telepathy into an ill-defined supernatural rationale.

YOUTUBE

### 5. THE KILLER



The umpteenth example of filmdom's boundless fascination with hit men. As in *LE SAMORAI*, *THE PROFESSIONAL* and quite a few others, David Fincher's *THE KILLER* follows a professional hitman (Michael Fassbender) going about his nasty business. Fincher and

other embarrassed looking performers clad in goofy-looking cat suits, caterwauling their way through a fumbled adaptation of Andrew Lloyd Webber's stage extravaganza. As with all truly bad movies, *CATS* is misguided, misconceived and mistaken in literally every aspect; you'd think Hollywood would have learned something from this disaster, but as *THE MARVELS* proves, it didn't (and likely never will).

FILM

### 5. FUN IN BALLOON LAND



Here's another balloon themed horror movie, although the horror in this case is unintentional. *FUN IN BALLOON LAND*'s overall effect is summed up by this anonymous quote: "If you've ever wondered what it would be like to eat a mushroom, lick a frog or eat peyote, watch this movie, and I think (it might resemble) the hallucinogenic nightmares you would experience if you did all three simultaneously!" Filming took place at a Christmas parade in Davenport, Iowa, and the "story" involves a young boy finding himself in a land of outrageously unreal painted backdrops, where he chats with a balloon prince, witnesses a bad ballet dance and explores an "underwater kingdom" denoted by women in tacky mermaid outfits lounging on a blow-up octopus. At least it only lasts 53 minutes.

FILM



screenwriter Kevin Andrew Walker (adapting a graphic novel by Alexis Nolent and Luc Jacamon) were evidently so enamored with the subject matter they couldn't be bothered with things like narrative progression, as the focus throughout is on the minutiae of the protagonist's lonely existence, with Fassbender providing quasi-professorial narration that often makes the film sound like an extended episode of BURN NOTICE. Still, for all its problems THE KILLER is extremely watchable due to Fincher and cinematographer Erik Messerschmidt's meticulously wrought visuals, and a cast that includes talents like Tilda Swinton, Charles Parnell and Arliss Howard.

NETFLIX

## Also New

- **GODZILLA MINUS ONE** (Film)
- **OPPOSABLE THUMBS: HOW SISKEL & EBERT CHANGED MOVIES FOREVER** (Book)
- **NAKED THEATRE AND UNCENSORED HORROR** (Book)
- **TV FLASHBACK: A GHOST STORY FOR XMAS** (Commentary)
- **THE PASSIONS OF CAROL** (Adult Film)
- **Archived newsletters for easy reference**
- ***And Much More!***



## Insider Info

For me **1987** was a seminal year. Why? Because it was then that I, an enthusiastic young film buff, became disenchanted with Hollywood's output. Sure, '87 may have given us ROBOCOP, FULL METAL JACKET and PLANES, TRAINS

AND AUTOMOBILES, but it also excreted CRITICAL CONDITION, POLICE ACADEMY 4, MILLION DOLLAR MYSTERY and **JAWS: THE REVENGE**.

I recall the Steven Spielberg production BATTERIES NOT INCLUDED being a particular sticking point. Naïve though I was, I fully recognized that deadening film for the cynical cash-grab it is, and was inspired to do something that back then seemed unthinkable, namely checking out those films I'd previously shunned--films labelled *foreign, cult* and *independent*.

So there you have it: my obsession with *cinema du unique* came about not due to genetic predisposition or youthful precocity, but simply because the mainstream offerings ceased to interest me. I never entirely abandoned big studio moviemaking, but never entirely returned to it, as in the ensuing 36 years my movie going preferences have been focused primarily on off-Hollywood fare.

I've long wondered if and when a similar epiphany might strike everyone else, and it seems the answer may have finally arrived. Over the summer SOUND OF FREEDOM, a glorified TV movie released by a scrappy evangelical outfit after being rejected by Fox, was a \$242 million smash, and its streaming rights have since **been the subject of a costly bidding war (with Amazon being the winner)**. That success can be put down to right wing anti-woke backlash, but SOUND OF FREEDOM's release was succeeded by TAYLOR SWIFT: THE ERAS TOUR, a concert movie from a very mainstream performer who bypassed Hollywood, cutting a deal directly with AMC Theaters. The film was, once again, a monster success, raking in \$247 million thus far, and blowing Pandora's Box wide open.

Add to this the fact that **many of 2023's big ticket movies have underperformed, if not flopped outright** (with THE MARVELS and WISH being the latest entries in a sorry lineup that includes THE LITTLE MERMAID, THE FLASH, INDIANA JONES AND THE DIAL OF DESTINY and BLUE BEETLE), and I'd say the evidence is pretty conclusive that today's moviescape is very much a buyer's market--and those buyers have voted with their wallets.

This means Hollywood would be well advised to cease with the pandering, cynical, elitist crap they've been putting out lately



and get back to making good movies. Whether it's too late for that or not I can't say, but it's a proven fact that if you don't give audiences what they want they'll look elsewhere, and that if you leave money on the table, as Hollywood has been doing, somebody is going to pick it up.

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



I'm done reading. To the website!

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