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THE BEDLAM FILES

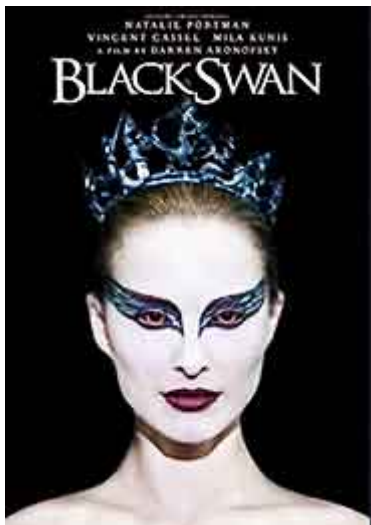
With Adam Groves

“Amateurs seek the sun...Power stays in the shadows”

— Christopher Nolan, *OPPENHEIMER*

Streaming Now

1. **BLACK SWAN**



One of the more surprising movie hits of the 2010s, an unflinching study of madness set in a world that to most moviegoers might as well be nonexistent: ballet. A large part of the brilliance of this Darren Aronofsky directed film is in how it renders that world, and the equally inscrutable one inside its protagonist's head, relatable. Natalie Portman (who won an Oscar for her efforts) plays that protagonist, a mentally unstable ballet dancer essaying the lead role in an avant-garde production of *SWAN LAKE*. Aronofsky, taking a cue from *REPULSION*, portrays Portman's

Adam's Picks

1. **BLACK SUNDAY**



This 1960 classic, currently streaming on Shudder, is very likely the finest film made by Italy's late Mario Bava. Serving as a bridge between the stately horror movies of the thirties and forties and the more graphic fare of the seventies and onward, *BLACK SUNDAY* is marked by superbly shadowy black and white photography, which remains among the finest of *any* movie in any genre, and a gore quotient that, while no longer particularly traumatizing, was quite strong for its time.

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gradual descent into schizophrenia in outsized yet disarmingly subtle fashion, with masterful handheld visuals that stay trained on the leading lady throughout. The end result is admirably fearless and appropriately operatic. NETFLIX

2. RIDING MEXICO'S DEADLY MIGRANT TRAIN: THE BEAST



An hour-long documentary from the British YouTuber Bald and Bankrupt, who likes putting himself in an extreme situations in a hostile climate. This is among his more interesting videos; indeed, I'd say it's one of the most moving things I've viewed in some time, with B&B illegally crossing into Mexico (following a previous video documenting his adventures in South America) and taking a highly dangerous ride atop "The Beast," a train carrying hundreds of migrants. Much of what we're shown--people throwing water and food up at the train riders, parents tying their children to the tops of tank cars--seems downright surreal, and would make ideal material for a Werner Herzog film. Until one arrives RIDING MEXICO'S DEADLY MIGRANT TRAIN will have to suffice. YOUTUBE

3. LEAVE THE WORLD BEHIND

2. AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON



This 1981 classic from writer/director John Landis remains a groundbreaking combination of comedy and balls-out horror (it was, for the record, also one of the major inspirations for the THRILLER video). The crummy ending aside, it's one of Landis' finest films, and among the eighties' standout horror movies. David Naughton stars as an American college student afoot in London who gets bitten by a werewolf...and what happens next is best experienced afresh by first-time viewers.

FILM

3. VACATION



No, I'm not referring to the Chevy Chase movie of that title but, rather, a seriously tripped out 2007 novel by "Bizarro" author Jeremy C. Shipp that never quite got the attention it deserves. About, nominally, an educator on a government-sponsored



This Netflix original, executive produced by the Obamas, isn't as radical as it's been cracked up to be. In fact, it's but the latest in a long line of suburban disaster movies focused on current anxieties. In the case of **PANIC IN YEAR ZERO** (1962) that anxiety was nuclear war, while in **RIGHT AT YOUR DOOR** (2006) it was biological terrorism. **LEAVE THE WORLD BEHIND's** targets are more scattershot, encompassing government conspiracy, cyberattacks and civil war (I'm surprised the filmmakers didn't find a way to work in pandemic jitters), but it's very much in the tradition set by those earlier films, taking place in a contained setting where a handful of apparently "normal" folk, played by names like Julia Roberts, Ethan Hawke and Mahershala Ali, attempt to subsist as society collapses around them. The film works reasonably well, inducing the intended alarm and anxiety despite being overwrought; the 2½ hour runtime is excessive, as are the ominous music cues and studiedly oft-kilter camerawork (writer-director Sam Esmail has clearly studied **THE HUMANS** quite closely). NETFLIX

4. **A DISTURBANCE IN THE FORCE**

world tour who gets kidnapped and brainwashed by a band of terrorists, it's related in the form of a lengthy missive by the protagonist, who it's clear is not an especially reliable narrator. From the start a potent reality-hallucinatory dichotomy is established that only grows increasingly pronounced, resulting in a labyrinthine entertainment through which every reader will have to make his or her own way.

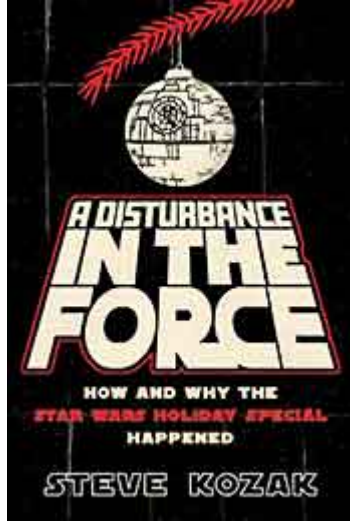
BOOK

4. **NIGHT OF THE GRIZZLIES**



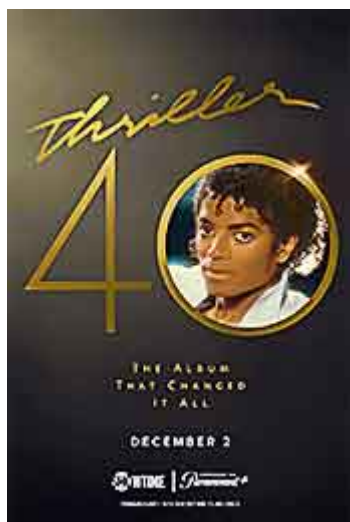
A 1968 nonfiction account, spun off from a series of **SPORTS ILLUSTRATED** articles by true crime maestro Jack Olson, which reads like an especially intense horror novel. **NIGHT OF THE GRIZZLIES** was reportedly a major inspiration on the late **Jack Ketchum**, and despite a fair amount of obvious padding (it's quite clear which portions were part of the initial series of articles, and which were add-ons) it remains a gut-wrencher. It describes what happened at Montana's Glacier National Park on the night of August 13, 1967, when human mismanagement and some seriously pissed-off grizzly bears made for a night of terror, the particulars of which are related (Ketchum-like) in an unnervingly methodical minute-by-minute manner.

BOOK



Yes, a doco has been made about the infamous **STAR WARS HOLIDAY SPECIAL**, and it offers nearly everything one could desire in its dissection of a program most would rather forget. Behind-the-scenes info is provided by many of the show's participants (unsurprisingly, they reveal that the production was something of a shit show), while nerd culture gurus like Kevin Smith, Patton Oswalt and Seth Green are on hand to impart snarky observations (with the late Gilbert Gottfried offering up the best line: "The STAR WARS special sucked so bad I'm amazed I wasn't in it!"). The tone is kept light and jokey, with archival footage giving voice to those who aren't interviewed, including George Lucas, who arguably hates THE STAR WARS HOLIDAY SPECIAL more than anyone else. [AMAZON](#)

5. **THRILLER 40**



Unadulterated puffery to be sure, but an enjoyable film, nonetheless.

5. **THE TRIGGER EFFECT**



This film, about a blackout that brings out the worst in the residents of an American city, was largely ignored during its initial 1996 release, but I feel it deserves a reappraisal. Kyle MacLachlan and Elizabeth Shue play a couple who discover just how tenuous the limits of civilized behavior truly are when they're caught up in a weekend-long blackout. No, **THE TRIGGER EFFECT** will never be mistaken for a Hitchcock product, but writer-director David Koepp has created a gripping and suspenseful film with a reasonably strong sense of realism. The many Hollywood-ish elements (distracting backlighting, overlit "night" shots, a forced happy ending) were probably inevitable given Koepp's big studio pedigree, and keep the proceedings from greatness.

FILM

COMING SOON!

Granted, that enjoyment likely pivots on one having been around in 1983, when Michael Jackson's 67 million copy selling **THRILLER** album and its accompanying music videos were the center of the pop culture universe. There is simply no modern-day equivalent to **THRILLER**'s success in the 1980s, and this documentary on the album's creation and reception offers a potent flashback. Included is a fair amount of info on the making of the **THRILLER video/short film**, which by itself renders this a worthwhile watch.

PARAMOUNT PLUS



Also New

- **THE AMAZING STORY BEHIND THE LEGEND OF BILLY JACK** (Nonfiction)
- **THE BARN OF FEAR** (Comics)
- **THE BIG DOLL HOUSE** (Film)
- **TV Flashback: YOGI AT THE MOVIES** (Commentary)
- **LITTLE SISTERS** (Film)
- **THE MONSTER SHOW: A CULTURAL HISTORY OF HORROR** (Nonfiction)
- **Archived newsletters for easy reference**
- ***And Much More!***



Insider Info

Last year's **OPPENHEIMER** wasn't just a monster success at the box office. The material has also proved quite popular in screenplay form, with a published script that achieved **sell-out status on Amazon**.

Written in the first person, that Christopher Nolan authored screenplay (containing screen directions like “I walk across campus to the physics department” and “Kitty comes downstairs to find me sitting at the kitchen table”) is an example of what I’d call a “fun” script. Further examples include the past tense potboilers of **John Milius** and the witty dramas of **Willim Goldman**, a novelist who packed his scripts with novelistic quirks.



I’ve never been especially partial to fun scripts, and even find them counterproductive. Take Shane Black, a fun screenwriter if ever there was one, whose \$4 million selling script for *THE LONG KISS GOODNIGHT* (1996), with its wild and exuberant descriptions, would appear to bolster director Renny Harlin’s promise of “the most spectacular action scenes you’ve ever seen!” The problem was that, although I enjoyed the movie, Black’s prose didn’t translate to film nearly as well as expected. Milius and Goldman’s scripts have encountered similar issues in their transition to the screen (with Milius having admitted that the filming of his *APOCALYPSE NOW* script, which deviated mightily from what was on the page, was the optimal take on the material).

The inverse form of scriptwriting is that which emphasizes technical aspects. Such writing isn’t too beloved by directors, who view camera and editing designations as infringing on their turf (the late **Ken Russell** was known to stop reading a script if it contained more than three technical directions), but it does impress financiers.

One such technically oriented screenwriter is England’s Peter Greenaway. Back in the eighties filmmaker **John Boorman** was asked to read Greenaway’s screenplay for *THE BELLY OF AN ARCHITECT* (1987) and give his opinion on whether British Screen should finance its filming. Boorman claims to have hated Greenaway’s “stifling” script, in which “There is no room for actors to breathe, let alone breathe life into these venal characters whose every move and thought he so ruthlessly dictates,” but recommended the film be financed, because

“Greenaway had a vision, however bleak, and if you don’t give money to him, who can you give it to?”

Ultimately, as any screenwriter can attest, a script must be a Good Read. That’s an area where Milius, Goldman, Black and Nolan deliver, turning out scripts that can be enjoyed as standalone books in addition to screen blueprints (something that from what I’ve seen can’t be said of Greenaway’s screenplays). Furthermore, in the case of OPPENHEIMER the first-person screenplay actually enhances the viewing of what is almost certainly the best film you’ll ever read.

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



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The Bedlam Files, New Years Extra 2024

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