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THE BEDLAM FILES

With Adam Groves

"When you rule by fear, laughter is the most frightening sound in the world."

— Jerry Lewis, THE DAY THE CLOWN CRIED

Streaming Now

1. JODOROWSKY'S DUNE



There's no way I could possibly not like this film, an impassioned documentary about **Alejandro Jodorowsky's** attempted mid-1970s adaptation of **Frank Herbert's DUNE**. As directed by Frank Pavich, JODOROWSKY'S DUNE features extensive interviews with Jodorowsky, who comes off by turns as enthusiastic and (understandably) bitter, and many of the other participants in DUNE, including **Jean "Moebius" Giraud**, **H.R. Giger** and Douglas Trumbull. Pavich offers many eye-opening views of the film's wild conceptual art, and also some animated storyboards showing select

Adam's Picks

1. THEY LIVE



This was John Carpenter's 1988 follow-up to **PRINCE OF DARKNESS**, and as with that film THEY LIVE has improved markedly with age. Matter of fact, I'd now place it near the top of Carpenter's oeuvre, with the things that bothered me about it initially--namely the overwrought 1980s tough-guy posturing and uncertain quasi-comedic tone--now seeming like minor annoyances. What occupies the forefront is a shockingly moving performance by the late Roddy Piper, playing a homeless man who stumbles onto the truth about our world: it's being controlled by

scenes from the movie (such as an absolutely amazing universe-spanning opening shot) as they might have played out. The core argument presented by Pavich is that Jodorowsky's DUNE, even though it wasn't made, has exerted its influence on STAR WARS, ALIEN (which employed several of DUNE'S participants), **THE MATRIX** and many other films. I'm not entirely sure I buy that argument, but JODOROWSKY'S DUNE stands as an edifying document nonetheless.

HBO MAX

2. **PRINCE OF DARKNESS**



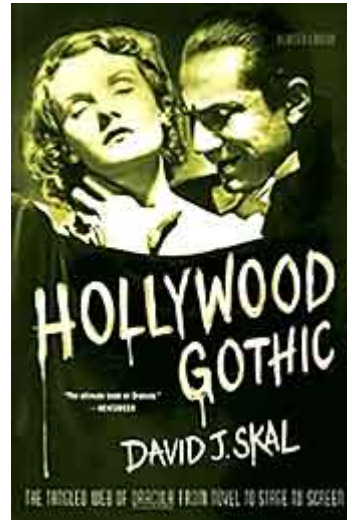
Some commentators would have you believe this 1987 low budgeter is one of **John Carpenter's** biggest failures, while others maintain that it's a masterwork. I say both views are wrong. PRINCE OF DARKNESS suffers from an uninspired set-up that essentially reframes **ASSAULT ON PRECINCT 13** as a supernatural drama, with the devil being raised in an inner city church as demonic homeless folk amass outside. Yet the quantum-based metaphysical overlay, which was quite revolutionary in 1987, places the film on a much brainier level than most eighties horror fare, and a plot strand involving transmissions from the future that take the form of present-day dreams is so haunting and provocative I'm amazed it hasn't been copied.

SHUDDER

aliens intent on making us compliant. That concept was intended by Carpenter as a critique of Reaganomics, but it works just as well, if not better, when applied to today's political landscape.

FILM

2. **HOLLYWOOD GOTHIC**



The **January 1 demise** of the much-revered genre historian David J. Skal began 2024 on a deeply tragic note. Looking back over Skal's literary output, HOLLYWOOD GOTHIC, the first of his nonfiction books (following **three very potent novels**), registers as one of the stand-outs. It explores the "Tangled Web" of Bram Stoker's immortal **DRACULA** from its initial inception to its later stage and screen incarnations, with its title character gaining a recognition factor that apparently "rivals, in its own perverse way, the familiarity of Santa Claus." Skal combines scrupulous research and highly erudite, laudably non-academic prose, resulting in what can be crowned the definitive print resource on all things DRACULA.

BOOK

3. **THE LONG TOMORROW AND OTHER SCIENCE FICTION STORIES**

3. BEBE'S KIDS



Based on monologues by the late standup comic Robin Harris, this film was meant to be a live action comedy, but Harris died before the project got under way and so BEBE'S KIDS was reformatted as an animated feature. That was a problem, as it was mistaken for a kids' movie, something it definitely isn't. It has Robin (voiced by Faizon Love) forced to take "Bebe's kids" to the Funworld amusement park because he's after their buxom babysitter (Vanessa Bell Calloway). These kids make the twerps from the PROBLEM CHILD flicks look like the Brady Bunch, and end up destroying Funworld while Robin repeatedly tries (and fails) to get into their guardian's pants. Standout bits include Robin's acting up at a funeral and a gut busting "Yo Mamma" session, while at the other end of the spectrum we have screenwriter Reginald Hudlin's insistence on injecting a ham-fisted message into just about every scene (yes, I *know* amusement parks are shrines to empty-headed consumerism, can we please move on?).

PARAMOUNT PLUS

4. THE FRIDGE



One of several noteworthy artistic endeavors to emerge from the wreckage of Jodorowsky's DUNE, "The Long Tomorrow" began as a story by Dan O'Bannon, written while working as a special effects supervisor on Jodorowsky's film. The tale was intended as a science fiction-tinged parody of 1940s detective fiction, but, as another participant in the film, French artist Jean "Moebius" Giraud, quickly discovered, it emerged as "something even more original than the original source material." This comic anthology contains Moebius' illustrated adaptation of O'Bannon's story, and showcases both men at their finest. The intricately detailed futuristic décor, which comes complete with corporate logos and a wholly unique fashion sense, is astonishing, as is an otherworldly creature that turns up in the final panels. Those things were furthered in the O'Bannon scripted ALIEN, upon which Moebius worked as a conceptual artist, and also BLADE RUNNER, which partook quite heavily of Moebius's artwork. The book's other stories, most of them emerging from the pages of France's METAL HURLANT magazine, aren't as strong, but "The Long Tomorrow" by itself makes for a worthwhile purchase.

BOOK

4. DARK MATTER



A decent addition to the small but potent category of **psycho fridge movies**. This short keeps things simple, depicting a nondescript young man (Viljo Hiutale) getting harassed by his refrigerator, in which food is found inexplicably half eaten and garish lights flash. The film isn't perfect by any means, with writer-director Antti Soderstrom vastly overestimating his ability to build suspense, but it definitely has its moments, particularly the unforgettable second-to-last shot. HEREDITARY's Ari Aster, FYI, is given a "Special Thanks" credit.

YOUTUBE

5. THE COURT JESTER



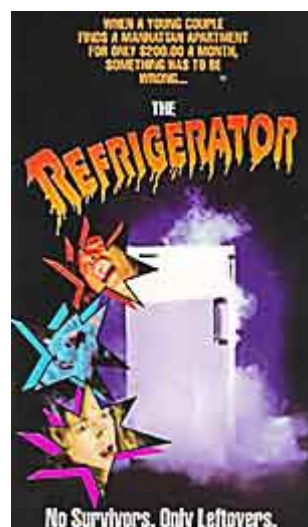
Pauly Shore is Richard Simmons! This short was made to drum up interest in a proposed Richard Simmons biopic starring Shore, who's seeking to reinvent himself as a serious thespian. Simmons has **spoken out against the film**, but Shore is taking the "If you build it they will come" approach.



This enormously popular 2016 novel introduced the concept of the multiverse, and has become the premiere fictional extrapolation of quantum physics. It offers up a story that's enjoyable and easy to follow (two things that aren't usually true of quantum-based narratives), with a physics professor getting abducted by a masked man who thrusts him out of his present reality and into another. Author Blake Crouch builds from there, introducing multiple realities and variants of the protagonist, accompanied by easy-digestible scientific rationales.

BOOK

5. THE REFRIGERATOR



Both the CITIZEN KANE and **PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE** of psycho fridge movies. THE REFRIGERATOR is a 1991 indie filmed on the streets of Manhattan, with a budget so sparse the filmmakers didn't even bother getting an **MPAA rating** (as doing so

About an overweight stage hand (Jesse Heiman) gaining a new lease on life after meeting Simmons backstage at a TV talk show, **THE COURT JESTER** is far from great, although it is fascinating watching the inimitable Richard Simmons being mimicked by a performer who's pretty inimitable himself.

YOUTUBE

costs around \$10-\$20 grand). The story: a young couple move to a NYC apartment containing a refrigerator that is in fact the gateway to Hell. The proceedings are bolstered by an adept Peter Jackson-esque mixture of comedy and horror, some of the most creative use of product placement you'll see in any film, and special effects that are quite impressive considering the limited resources.

FILM

Also New

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- **BEST/WORST 2023 MOVIES** (Commentary)
- **2023 INDUSTRY ROUNDUP** (Commentary)
- **EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF AND GOD AGAINST ALL: WERNER HERZOG** (Nonfiction)
- **RED ROOMS** (Film)
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Insider Info

2024, it seems, is set to be a momentous year. It will mark, **if recent internet chatter is to be believed**, the long-awaited unveiling of what is perhaps the most famous "lost" film of all time: Jerry Lewis' **THE DAY THE CLOWN CRIED**.



Some background: this film, in which Lewis played a disgraced circus clown in 1940s Germany who finds a new lease on life by

leading Jewish children into a gas chamber, was lensed in 1972. It was subject to all manner of funding and copyright issues, and the production was eventually shut down. The negative was impounded but Lewis allegedly stole it, and clandestinely pieced the film together. The finished product is said to be contained on a quarter inch videotape that Lewis periodically showed to friends (with comedian **Harry Shearer** and French critic **Jean-Michel Frodon** claiming to have viewed the completed film), and donated to the Library of Congress in 2014, with a proviso that it be kept under wraps for a decade.

That, at least, is the story we've been told. On the flipside are the naysayers who claim a complete version of the film **doesn't actually exist**, and that a widely disseminated **behind-the-scenes featurette** and clips from a German TV documentary--which were used to create a **30 minute reconstruction** that leaked in 2015--are **the most we're going to get**.

Regarding that reconstruction, it's probably wrong to use its thirty minutes' worth of cobbled-together footage to judge what is said to be (or was at least intended as) a 100 minute movie, but it's bad. Not so-bad-it's-good, just bad--or, as **Lewis himself has claimed**, "Bad, bad, bad," with pedestrian staging, threadbare set design and a lackluster star turn by a performer who lacked the dramatic chops demanded by the role. Perhaps most damning of all, the footage never attains the Colossal Train wreck status that's been portended. Once again: it's just bad.

Can we reasonably expect the full, or at least near-full, version of **THE DAY THE CLOWN CRIED** to be unveiled? If so it will only be (supposedly per Lewis' wishes) "available to scholars for viewing in the research center at the 45-acre Packard Campus in Culpeper, Va." What might the chances be of the film subsequently leaking onto the internet? I'd place them at 100 percent. For that matter, I'd expect it to have leaked already; the fact that it hasn't would appear to bolster the claims that it doesn't actually exist. We'll see.

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



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The Bedlam Files, January 2024

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