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THE BEDLAM FILES

With Adam Groves

“Man, I have LOVED being a writer & I’m grateful to those who’ve read me.”

— Ray Garton (R.I.P.)

Streaming Now



1. THE IMAGINARIUM OF DR. PARNASSUS

It’s downright shocking how this 2009 Terry Gilliam fantasy has been so completely ignored. It offers a visionary and expansive account of the thousand-year-old Dr. Parnassus (Christopher Plummer) and his traveling “Imaginarium,” a rickety carriage containing a mirror that due to powers granted by the Devil (Tom Waits) allows people to cavort in worlds of their own imagination. Also featured is the late Heath Ledger as a quirky amnesiac who’s attached himself to Parnassus, and a conceit in which Ledger’s character is played at

Adam's Picks



1. WERCKMEISTER HARMONIES

A typically arty and intriguing outing from Hungary’s Bela Tarr, with an apocalyptic arc and mystical overtones that put me in mind of Werner Herzog’s HEART OF GLASS (1976). It’s about the arrival of God, in the form of a stuffed whale toted by a sleazy traveling circus, into a provincial town whose inhabitants promptly disintegrate into violence and anarchy. Tarr doesn’t offer any explanations, letting his many virtuoso tracking shots speak for themselves. The film was lensed by a dozen cinematographers, yet the incredibly stark, shadowy black and

various points by Johnny Deep, Jude Law and Colin Farrell (the dramatic rationale for this is never made clear, with the reason being that Ledger died before his scenes were completed). The film is demanding, certainly, but also extremely rewarding, with a visual beauty and imaginative splendor that would have been unachievable by anyone other than Terry Gilliam. FREEVEE

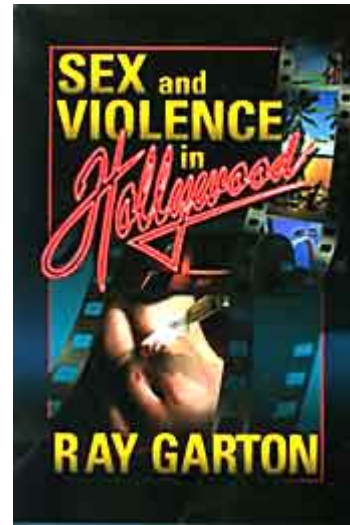


2. EXODUS

This, the third entry in YouTube's **THOUSAND SUNS**, a "mind-bending science fiction anthology series," followed **GOZILLA MINUS ONE**, which as we all know bested mainstream Hollywood on a tiny fraction of the budget of the average blockbuster. EXODUS, for its part, was made for a tiny fraction of **GODZILLA MINUS ONE**'s cost. Despite that, and the fact that (as with all the **THOUSAND SUNS** entries) it's only five minutes long, EXODUS contains digital effects that are on par with anything seen in current year Hollywood, and a thematic heft that leaves it the dust. It's a J.G. Ballardian concoction set in an environmentally depleted future Earth whose populace is deserting the planet in mass. The focus is on a young man desperate to join the exodus, but who for various reasons is unable to, despite residing within spitting distance of the spaceship launching pad. YOUTUBE

white photography has a flow and consistency worthy of the late Greg Toland. Yes, the proceedings are laughably pretentious at times, but I had trouble tearing my eyes from the screen.

FILM



2. SEX AND VIOLENCE IN HOLLYWOOD

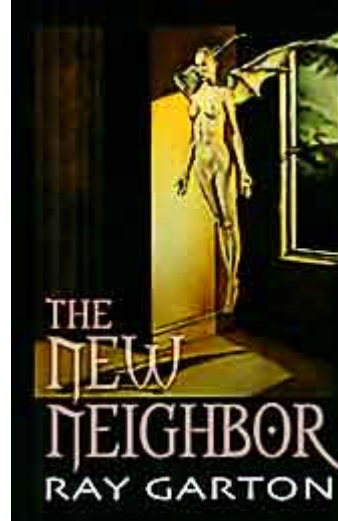
In my view the finest-ever book written by the recently deceased **Ray Garton**, a twisty and energetic horrorfest that also functions as a uniquely corrosive take on modern-day Hollywood. Featured are all the things that make Garton's work distinct, notably the page-turning storytelling and unsettling flair for the grotesque. It also boasts a consistently unpredictable narrative about a showbiz nepo-baby caught up in a twisted drama involving incest, murder and a trial that comes to rival that of O.J. Simpson in media sensationalism, with cameo appearances by Harrison Ford, Steven Spielberg, Cher and Jack Nicholson.

BOOK



3. THE TUNNEL

Widely proclaimed Australia's finest-ever found footage movie, 2011's THE TUNNEL takes the form of a documentary made by a renegade TV news crew looking to expose government corruption by descending into the abandoned subway tunnels beneath Sydney. Of course a dangerous someone (or something) is lurking in those tunnels, and the film quickly becomes an underground **BLAIR WITCH PROJECT**. The proceedings, happily, are quite inspired, and actually improve upon the former film in certain aspects. I find I'm flashing back to the late **Chas. Balun's** withering BWP criticism about how branches and twigs "aren't inherently scary things," whereas THE TUNNEL's age-old subterranean structures, lit only by the light of the video camera, ARE inherently horrific. The out-of-place sappy ending, however, was a definite misstep. SHUDDER



3. THE NEW NEIGHBOR

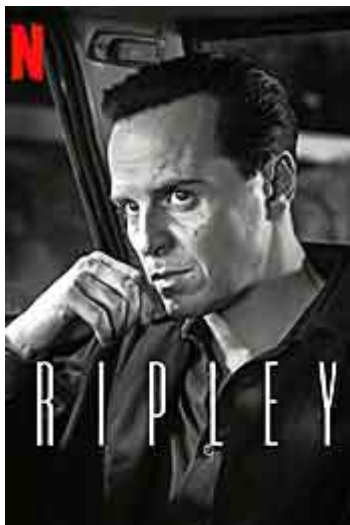
More **Garton goodness**: a pulpy X-rated treat for readers with strong constitutions. The focus is on a suburban family who have the misfortune to live across the street from an alluring young woman named Lorelle. She seduces the family's hard-working patriarch George, and moves onto his repressed wife Karen, their randy teenage son Robbie and stepdaughter Jen, who has an eye for Robbie. With Lorelle's help Jen is allowed to vent her incestuous longings just as Karen's buried sexual preferences, and those of their neighbors, rise to the surface. Nobody will ever confuse THE NEW NEIGHBOR with a Thomas Pynchon novel, but it has a depth and sensitivity that elevate it above most of today's scary stuff, with only the rushed and unsatisfying final pages keeping it from greatness.

BOOK



4. THE HOUSE OF THE DEVIL

The satanic panic of the eighties is given a nostalgic airing in this skilled exercise in old school minimalism. The setting is mid-1980s upstate New York, where college sophomore Samantha (Jocelin Donahue) finds herself stuck in an ominous mansion. To its credit, the filmmaking by writer-director Ti West is at odds with virtually every facet of modern horror cinema, being uncluttered, concentrated and pacing-wise extremely measured. West also did a thorough job recreating the look and feel of late-seventies/early-eighties horror cinema, evident in the deliberately archaic production design and the performances of Tom Noonan, Mary Woronov and Donahue, which are all modulated accordingly. The Satan-worshipping angle of the final third, alas, feels tacked-on and gratuitous. SHUDDER



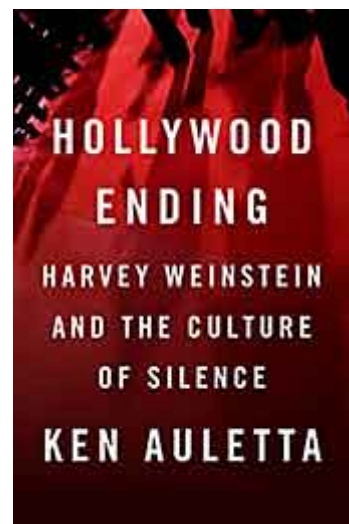
5. RIPLEY

I'll give this Netflix miniseries, based on the Patricia Highsmith Ripley books, a muted recommendation. If you've seen the previous Ripley films ([PURPLE NOON](#), [THE AMERICAN FRIEND](#), [THE TALENTED MR. RIPLEY](#), [RIPLEY'S GAME](#), etc.) then you know the set-up: in the 1950s a sociopathic young American named Ripley kills a wealthy Rome-based colleague and steals his identity, allowing Ripley to indulge his bad behavior on an expansive--and *expensive*--scale. The

4. MEGALOPOLIS

An unspecified 212-page draft of Francis Ford Coppola's much-delayed sci-fi passion project. An early description of the near-future NYC setting, in which mass violence and crucifixions run rampant, provides an unsubtle indicator of the script's orientation: "This is ROME of modern times." There an irrepressible forward-thinking inventor is hard at work on Megalopolis, a utopian city-within-a-city built with a plastic-like substance known as Megalon; opposing this ambitious project is a community called Cityworld, a monument to consumerism containing a mega-shopping mall and a casino. A fascinating, unprecedented and at times brilliant script that could conceivably make for a ground-breaking piece of cinema, but, frankly, it needs work.

SCRIPT



5. HOLLYWOOD ENDING: HARVEY WEINSTEIN AND THE CULTURE OF SILENCE

With [Harvey Weinstein back in the news](#) (only Donald Trump, it seems, has a greater hold on today's news media), here's the definitive nonfiction accounting of the man. Ken Auletta, a longtime [NEW YORKER](#) contributor, tried to detail Weinstein's shenanigans in a 2002 profile that left out the really ugly parts (due to

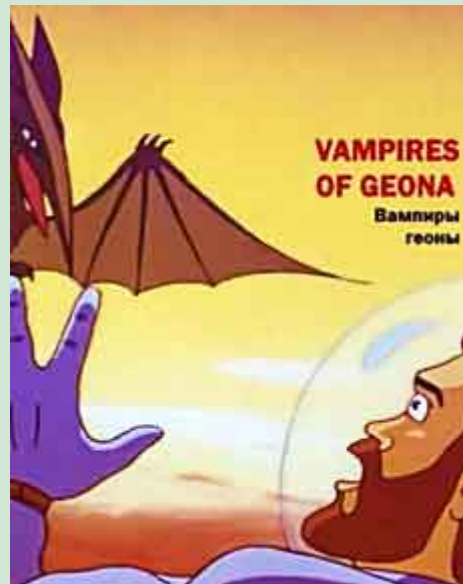
series, written and directed by Steven Zallian, looks great, has spot-on period detail and boasts an excellent Dakota Fanning led supporting cast. Yet it's also vastly overlong and drawn out (a typical Netflix series complaint), and suffers from a dour lead performance by Andrew Scott, who lacks the devilish charisma the character is supposed to project. NETFLIX

the fact that none of Weinstein's alleged victims would go on record). With HOLLYWOOD ENDING Auletta got to write the full expose he always intended, providing a reasonably thorough biographical portrait of Harvey Weinstein that doesn't quite succeed in revealing just how a scrappy New York boy grew up to become perhaps the most prolific serial rapist of all time (as Auletta acknowledges, no real explanation exists for that), but does provide a riveting and disturbing history that outdoes most horror fiction in sordidness and outrage.

BOOK

Also New

- **THE SECRET LIFE OF SARAH SHELDON** (Film)
- **LOT LIZARDS** (Fiction)
- **PURPLE NOON** (Film)
- **CANNIBAL ERROR** (Nonfiction)
- **VAMPIRES, GEONA, AND AMBA** (Commentary)
- **JERKBEAST**(Film)
- **RAY GARTON: 1962-2024** (Commentary)
- **Archived newsletters for easy reference**
- ***And Much More!***



Insider Info

If nothing else, 2024 has proven to be a banner year for long-in-works cinematic passion projects. No less than three such films are set to (maybe) be unveiled in the coming

months, for which I should probably be far more excited than I am.

There's Jerry Lewis' **THE DAY THE CLOWN CRIED**, perhaps the famous "lost" film of all time, which is supposed to (but **most likely won't**) make its long-awaited bow in a couple months. If this release does indeed occur it will follow



another nearly-as-famous delayed film: **THE PRIMEVALS**, the directorial debut of the late special effects ace David Allen. Production on this **Charles Band** produced time travel opus **began in the late seventies and took until last year** (24 years after Allen's death) to be completed. It was then that the film had its world premiere at the Fantasia Film Festival, followed by a limited theatrical run in March of this year and an upcoming Blu-ray release.

Finally, there's **MEGALOPOLIS**, the three-decades-in-development epic by Francis Ford Coppola. The film, self-financed by Coppola, is set to premiere at the Cannes Film Festival, and commercially released at some point after that, depending on if it manages to find a distributor (admittedly a big if).

Good news? Recent history suggests otherwise, having provided two none-too-encouraging 2018 templates in the form of **THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WIND**, Orson Welles' long-gestating final film whose finished form turned up on Netflix, and **THE MAN WHO KILLED DON QUIXOTE**, Terry Gilliam's 20-years-in-the-making fantasy epic. I was greatly looking forward to both, but Welles' film turned out to be not all that, while Gilliam's was a complete bust.

Another problem: the current trio hasn't been very well received. The thirty minutes' worth of lackluster footage from **THE DAY THE CLOWN CRIED** circulating online have given fair warning that there's a reason it was never released, while the best I've heard about **THE PRIMEVALS** is that it's "cheesy, but in a good way." Regarding **MEGALOPOLIS**, its **reception at a screening for potential distributors** wasn't exactly encouraging, with the film called "downright confounding," "batshit crazy" and the "work of a madman." Similar invectives, let's not forget, greeted the debut of Coppola's **APOCALYPSE NOW**, which is now considered a

consensus masterpiece, and also his ONE FROM THE HEART, which is not.

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



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The Bedlam Files, March/April-2024

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