

MAY 2024 | Just take me to the website, please.

THE BEDLAM FILES

With Adam Groves

“Storytelling is the well-orchestrated withholding of information. It goes back to: What does the audience need to know, and when does it need to know it?”

— George Miller

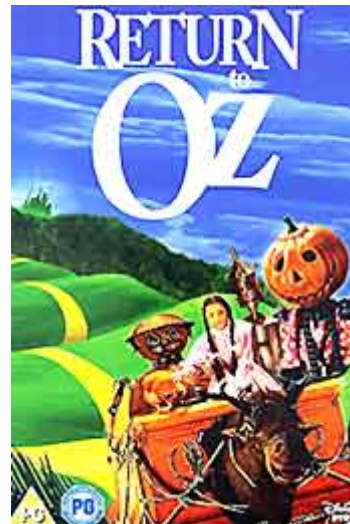
Streaming Now



1. HOPE AND GLORY: A MAD MAX FAN FILM

With director George Miller’s latest MAD MAX(less) **movie currently bombing** in theaters, let’s take a look at this newly minted MAD MAX fan film, which attained legendary status before it was even completed. Three years in the making and boasting a budget that by fan film standards was reportedly quite hefty, HOPE AND GLORY captures the look and feel of MAD MAX: FURY ROAD (2015) with striking exactitude and a great deal of energy. The underachieving script and dour lead performance of Daniel Grave likewise match the

Adam's Picks



1. RETURN TO OZ

May 21-27 was, according to vampirologist **Martin V. Riccardo**, the “Week of Deathless Darkness,” incorporating World Goth Day (May 22) and the birthdays of Peter Cushing (May 26), Christopher Lee and Vincent Price (both May 27). Its premiere event was the May 21 birthday of actress Fairuza Balk, a horror icon due to her performances in THE CRAFT and **THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU** (both 1996), and also RETURN TO OZ (1985), which marked Balk’s screen debut. It deserves to be grouped with those other films, as it’s genuinely horrific, replicating the

previous film's aesthetic—narrative complexity isn't something one can reasonably expect from a MAD MAX movie, and nor, it seems, is acting nuance. Grave took over the role from Mel Gibson and Tom Hardy, and handily matches both, proving that apparently all it really takes to headline a MAD MAX movie is a surly demeanor, stubble and a cool jacket.

YOUTUBE



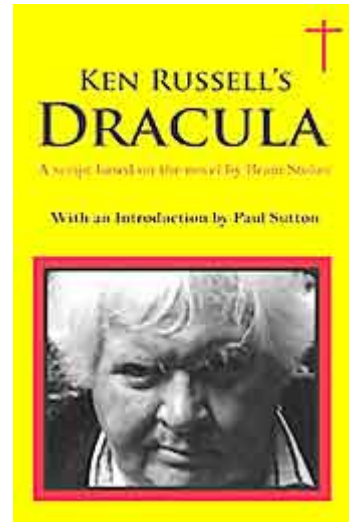
2. UPGRADE

This nifty ROBOCOP pastiche snuck past me back in 2018, but I've finally caught up with it, and must say it's pretty damn good. Written and directed by THE INVISIBLE MAN'S Leigh Whannell, UPGRADE features Logan Marshall-Green as a mechanic living in a cyberpunk dystopia who after being viciously attacked allows an experimental AI chip to be implanted in his spine. This entails a voice in his head advising him on what to do in every situation, coupled with superhuman fighting skills that make for a succession of MATRIX-like slow-mo smackdowns (complete with that whirring sound effect so popular these days). I'd have preferred a bit more of the body horror the conception portends, and a more substantial budget than the severely limited one provided by Blumhouse (never an outfit known for its financial extravagance), but the film works.

NETFLIX

darker elements of L. Frank Baum's OZ books with none of the expected kid movie cutesiness. Terry Gilliam's claim about TIME BANDITS (1981) offering "a chance to become a kid again without all the mawkish sentimental crap that normally comes with kids' films" applies equally to RETURN TO OZ.

FILM



2. KEN RUSSELL'S DRACULA

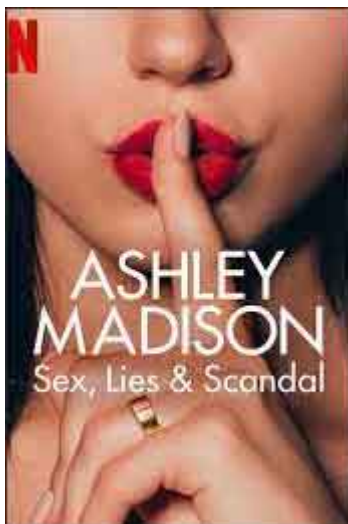
Another iconic date in the Week of Deathless Darkness lineup was May 26, which marked World Dracula Day. In observance, here's one of the more idiosyncratic interpretations of **Bram Stoker's iconic masterpiece**: a never-filmed late 1970s screenplay by **Ken Russell**. His famously extroverted voice registers in the opening pages, in which Jonathan Harker is attacked by a coachman-turned-werewolf. A slow-building exercise in atmospheric subtlety this isn't, but Russell's grasp of the mechanics of cinema is evident throughout, particularly in an early sequence that masterfully intercuts Count Dracula on his sea voyage to England with the institutionalized Renfield anxiously awaiting his master's arrival. Even better is Russell's revamped ending, which has the Count meeting his fate in a mythologically-inspired manner so perfect I'm amazed nobody else has utilized it.

BOOK



3. DARK MATTER

This long-in-the-works screen transposition of **Blake Crouch's DARK MATTER** takes the form of a Crouch scripted Apple TV miniseries. As such it's agonizingly drawn-out, and Joel Edgerton could admittedly be a bit more emphatic in the lead role. He's far from the mild-mannered everyman depicted in the novel, who after nearly getting run down outside a bar one night is thrust into a variety of alternate timelines. The novel's imaginative bravura has been retained in this series, even if it takes far longer than I'd have preferred for things to really get moving. APPLE TV



4. ASHLEY MADISON: SEX, LIES AND SCANDAL

A three-part profile (two would have done nicely) of Ashley Madison, the infamous online outfit that facilitated "discreet affairs" for married people, and the 2015 data breach that damaged the service (and quite a few marriages) irrevocably. I understand



3. AMERICAN PERFEKT

Continuing with Fairuza Balk, here's one of her lesser known, but superior, films: AMERICAN PERFEKT, a cunning 1997 exercise in misdirection. Written and directed by Paul Chart (**NASTY**), it features Balk as a young woman meeting up with an eccentric shrink (**Robert Forster**) who lives his life according to coin flips and has stashed the corpse of her sister (Amanda Plummer) in the trunk of his car. As with most good thrillers, it's the twisty narrative that's paramount here, and the best thing about Paul Chart's filmmaking is that he never allows it to get in the way of the story. His script is a marvel of invention, with a constantly mutating narrative that never takes an expected turn and shockingly discards some pivotal characters before the halfway point, while cunningly concealing its true antagonist until the final half hour. FILM



an allegedly superior 2023 Hulu documentary on the same subject (THE ASHLEY MADISON AFFAIR) already exists, but this Netflix series will suffice. It has its annoyances: aside from being overlong, it lavishes too much screen time on the YouTube stars Sam and Nia Rader, whose lives were allegedly turned upside-down by Ashley Madison (I say allegedly because it's difficult to believe anything these two attention-seeking dimwits say). On balance, however, this is a solid piece of work, telling us all we need to know about Ashley Madison and its karmically ordained downfall.

NETFLIX



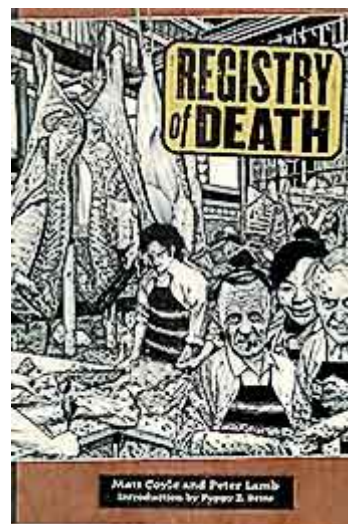
5. **TWISTED TALES: A SUPER 8 ANTHOLOGY**

A ten-minute three-parter that offers a nostalgic glimpse back to an era when Super 8mm was a viable and sometimes necessary format for independent filmmakers. Presented by the YouTube-based Alter, TWISTED TALES was lensed entirely on Super 8 (and comes complete with most everything that entails: soft focus, lens flares, jittery still shots, etc.) with an appealingly retro vibe that compels, even though none of the three segments really stand out. "The Landlord's Daughter" features a deranged couple whose activities include abduction, rape and murder, while "Bag for Life" depicts a sentient bag with desires both homicidal and romantic, and "There Can Be Only

4. **CONFESSIONS OF AN OPIUM EATER**

The abovementioned Vincent Price was the star of this druggy 1966 adventure set in San Francisco's Chinatown. Price plays Thomas de Quincey, who wrote the autobiographical nineteenth century book that inspired the title. He's depicted here as a thrill-seeking Englishman stationed in Northern California who gets involved in a skirmish waged by rival Chinese gangs. This film's true claim to fame is a hallucinatory sequence in which Price does an eerie slow motion dash through a soundless dreamscape, a triumph of experimental filmmaking that stands out in an otherwise awkward and uneven tapestry.

FILM



5. **REGISTRY OF DEATH**

Another Week of Deathless Darkness subject was novelist Poppy Z. Brite, whose birthday was on May 25. REGISTRY OF DEATH is a 1996 graphic novel, for which Brite provides an introduction that takes the form of a "tiny tale" told from the point of view of a maggot stuck in the brain of the tale's unfortunate protagonist. This fellow resides in an alternate timeline in which an execution squad is dispatched by the leaders of a fascist state to exterminate individuals deemed undesirable, with the bodies subsequently disposed of in a slaughterhouse. It's a simple story

One” involves rival psychopaths on a two-pronged killing rampage. As those descriptions suggest, this is a strictly not-for-the-easily-offended affair.

YOUTUBE

related with admirable fire and anger, and strikingly surreal, authentically nightmarish artwork.

BOOK

Also New

- **13 GHOSTS** (Film)
- **ROGER CORMAN: 1926-2024** (Commentary)
- **BANNED FROM BROADCAST: SAIKO!** (Film)
- **LOST SOULS** (Fiction)
- **PURE: THE SEXUAL REVOLUTIONS OF MARILYN CHAMBERS** (Nonfiction)
- **THE BLACK GESTAPO** (Film)
- **DISEASE MOVIES: AN INFORMAL HISTORY** (Commentary)
- **Archived newsletters for easy reference**
- ***And Much More!***



Insider Info

Earlier this year the mini-mogul **Tyler Perry** was in the midst of a long-planned expansion of his **Atlanta film studio**. Perry was set to add multiple sound stages and increase the backlot exponentially, yet in mid-February this ambitious \$800 million project **was abruptly cancelled**. Why? One word: **Sora**.



This is to say that Perry, who keeps a close eye on AI developments, was shown a **video demonstration** of the capabilities of Sora, an OpenAI program that can create cinematic-worthy figures (human or otherwise) and landscapes literally out of thin air. Perry’s bluntly stated takeaway was that, regarding his expensive studio upgrade, “there is no need to do it.”

Previous AI programs have been able to create virtual landscapes, but unable to maintain them for more than a few seconds (which explains why AI generated cinema has thus far taken the form of brief montages). Sora has no such limitations, and so removes the need for expensive movie studios of the type that Tyler Perry was building, along with actors, production designers, cinematographers, special effects technicians, grips and caterers.

That leaves us with writers and editors, and AI programs for those things already exist (and are in use), meaning Sora completes this unholy trinity. People have been saying for years that “AI will destroy cinema,” and now we have a good idea of precisely how.

This destruction obviously won't happen overnight. Sora, it seems, **still has some glitches that need ironing out**, while many industry insiders have compared Perry's actions to those of Chicken Little. I'm more inclined to liken him to Paul Revere, offering a potent warning of a coming cataclysm that, based on the fact that it inspired such a prominent Hollywood player to take an \$800 million write-down, is approaching much faster than most of us would like to believe.

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



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The Bedlam Files, May 2024

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