

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

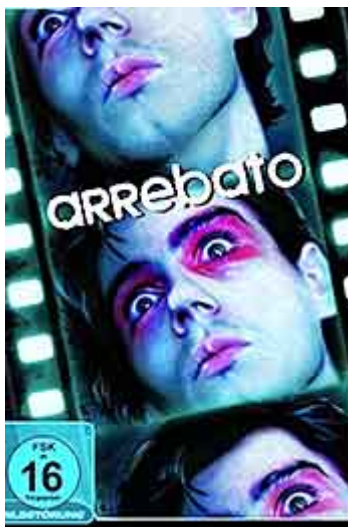
THE BEDLAM FILES

With Adam Groves

“I was obsessed with not knowing what happened after you were dead. And I sat or kneeled for a whole day with my head against the wall, trying to figure it out. But I couldn't, and I just said, 'Okay. And then it was nothingness.'”

— Donald Sutherland

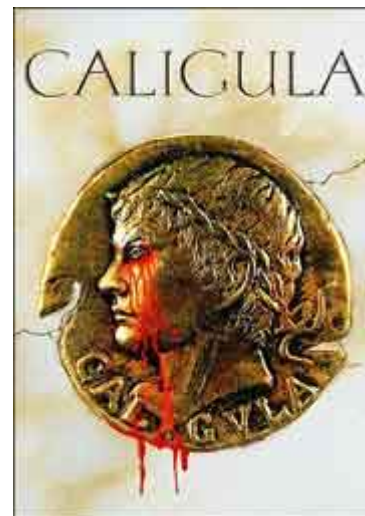
Streaming Now



1. **ARREBATO**

For years I was convinced I was the only person who knew, or cared, about this film. Now Ivan Zulueta's unnerving 1979 masterwork **ARREBATO** is streaming on Shudder, so its profile will hopefully expand. It remains a singularly gritty and surreal portrayal of drug abuse and the corrosive power of cinema, which in this film takes on a very tangible, and deadly, form. See also Zulueta's 1976 short **LEO ES PARDO**, a surreal shocker that served as a dry run for

Adam's Picks



1. **CALIGULA**

Next month Drafthouse Films will be unveiling an “Ultimate Cut” of this legendary anti-classic. According to a statement, this new version makes changes “to match the original tone and intentions that director Tinto Brass and screenwriter Gore Vidal wanted to convey before they decided to dissociate their names from the project.” I find I’m getting disquieting flashbacks to the **NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD 30th ANNIVERSARY debacle**, but will reserve judgement until I’ve seen this

ARREBATO, and contained many of the same themes. SHUDDER



2. EXHUMA

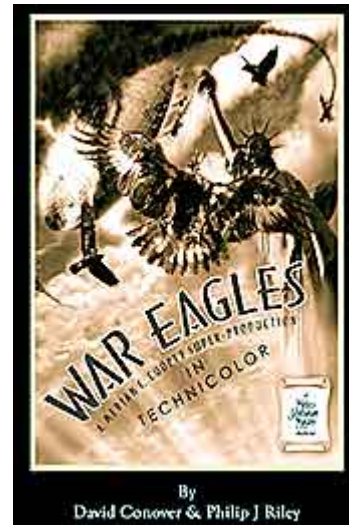
A South Korean import that accomplishes something I've long believed was impossible, fashioning a rich and complex horror epic from a very simple premise. About the exhumation of a grave that causes the unquiet spirit of its owner to haunt his surviving family members, EXHUMA is comparable to a novel of the type written by horror scribes like Peter Straub and Ramsey Campbell, meaning it offers a literate and intelligent treatment with multiple characters (at least two of whom give their thoughts in voice-over). Such an expansive approach might seem ill-advised, but it works, so much so that I'm willing to grant the film's single greatest hinderance—the 134-minute runtime—a pass. SHUDDER



3. THE PRIMEVALS

supposedly new and improved CALIGULA. Regarding the original 1979 cut, it's one of filmdom's great curios, a historical epic/big budget porno/Felliniesque extravaganza that won't be mistaken for anything else.

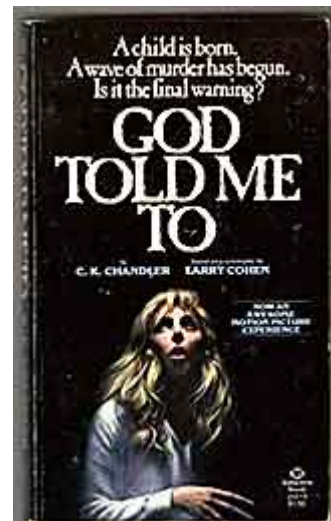
FILM



2. WAR EAGLES: THE UNMAKING OF AN EPIC

A fun book about the unmaking of WAR EAGLES, which was supposed to be the follow-up to KING KONG by that film's makers. I'm unconvinced WAR EAGLES is the "lost masterpiece" it's been proclaimed, striking me as an inferior rehash of the previous film with forced patriotism, in the form of mutant eagles who help the US defeat the Nazis, in place of the horror evoked by Kong. I much prefer the latter.

BOOK



3. GOD TOLD ME TO

Archaic is the word for this film. Initiated back in 1978, THE PRIMEVALS, the first and only feature directed by the late special effects ace David Allen, took until 2022 to be completed (outlasting Allen himself, who died in 1999). It certainly won't make any greatest movie listings, hobbled as it is by wooden performances and inert drama that showcase Allen's directorial inexperience, but the film's old school charm is undeniable. The story, about a hunt for a Yeti that takes a group of explorers into a mysterious region where aliens hold sway, harkens back to the 1930s, while the stop-motion monster effects are straight out of a Ray Harryhausen movie. Also harkening back to old-timey cinema is the fact that those effects take until the final twenty minutes to reach their full expression. AMAZON



4. BRATS

For those who remember the so-called "Brat Pack" BRATS offers a potent blast of 1980s nostalgia. It was made by the sixtyish Andrew McCarthy, one of the pack's charter members, who documents his chats with fellow aging BPer's like Emilio Estevez, Ally Sheedy, Rob Lowe and Demi Moore, along with third-party commentators like Brett Easton Ellis, Malcolm Gladwell and David Blum (who wrote the essay that gave the pack its name). Very little of substance is said (the gist: *it's hard*

Larry Cohen's GOD TOLD ME TO was one of the most unique and audacious films of the 1970s, mixing mass murder, religious mania, otherworldly sci-fi and Cronenbergian bio-horror. It starred the recently deceased Tony Lo Bianco as a seemingly ordinary detective investigating a spate of random killings in NYC, all committed by people claiming that "God Told Me To." Under review here is the novelization of the film, written by C.K. Chandler; it's not a great book by any means, but as movie novelizations go it's not bad, capturing all the beats of Cohen's outrageous script.

BOOK



4. LASERBLAST

For a demonstration of the special effects expertise of THE PRIMEVALS' David Allen, see this 1978 **Charles Band** directed film. No, it's not very good, being about stop motion aliens who land a spaceship in the California desert and leave behind a laser gun, which a young punk (Kim Milford) uses to shoot a bunch of people and blow things up. Yes, that adequately sums up the severely underbaked narrative, but again, the film is worth watching due to the FX work by Mr. Allen, which proved that even at a young age he had a real knack for the job.

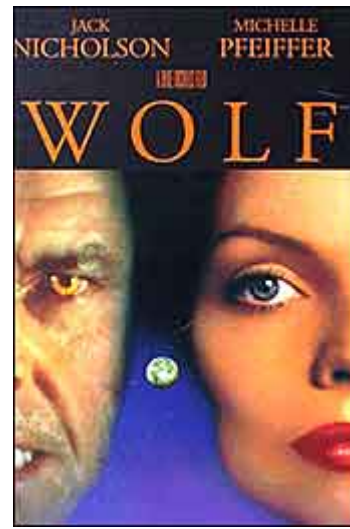
being famous), meaning BRATS fits in quite well with the shallow and naive yet enormously self-important films (THE BREAKFAST CLUB, ST. ELMO'S FIRE, etc.) that defined the Brat Pack and (for many of us) the decade overall. HULU



5. HIT MAN

A passable film based on the story of Gary Johnson, a Houston-based college professor contracted by police to nab would-be killers by posing as a hitman. Precisely how accurate this film is I have no idea, but it doesn't feel too authentic. The details of Johnson's hiring seem far too easy, and his police colleagues impossibly stupid, as despite closely monitoring his every move they somehow miss the fact that he's romancing a would-be client (Adria Arjona). Still, Glenn Powell proves quite engaging as Johnson, and director Richard Linklater's laid-back style (punctuated with the requisite Linklaterian philosophical soliloquies) fits the material quite well. NETFLIX

FILM



5. WOLF

A film that premiered 30 years ago—the very day, in fact, that O.J. Simpson tied up the 405 freeway in that never-to-be-forgotten white Bronco. I know this because I witnessed that event on my way back from seeing WOLF, an upscale horrorfest involving Jack Nicholson as a businessman-turned-lycanthrope, Michelle Pfeiffer as his boss's sexy daughter and James Spader as a rival wolfman. Co-scripted by the renowned poet Jim Harrison and directed by Mike Nichols, WOLF is at best a curiosity, showcasing a wealth of superlative talent in the service of a thoroughly mediocre product.

FILM

Also New

- **BUFFET FROID** (Film)
- **THREE IDENTICAL STRANGERS** (Documentary)

- **THE SADDEST MUSIC IN THE WORLD** (Film)
- **RAPTOR RED** (Fiction)
- **DEUS IRAE** (Fiction)
- **MIDORI-KO** (Film)
- **DONALD SUTHERLAND 1935-2024** (Commentary)
- **Archived newsletters for easy reference**
- ***And Much More!***



Insider Info

Recently I was asked by an internet colleague what my feelings were about the major *controversy du jour*: the reception of THE ACOLYTE TV series, the latest STAR WARS iteration put out by Disney. My response: “I don’t care.”

That’s not entirely true. I *do* care, just not enough to take the whole thing seriously, with Disney’s actions and the (over)reaction of STAR WARS fans striking me as hilarious.

As with quite a few Gen-Xers, STAR WARS and its attendant media (toys, books, etc.) were an enormously important part of my life growing up. It became increasingly less vital as I got older, until eventually, after seeing the solidly crafted but hopelessly dreary SOLO, I gave up on STAR WARS altogether—and, yes, that includes THE ACOLYTE. Needless to say, my situation was far from universal.

In a situation that may well be unprecedented, Disney—in the form of Lucasfilm chair Kathleen Kennedy, ACOLYTE showrunner Leslye Headland and an extremely accommodating news media—have been trolling STAR WARS fans relentlessly through **inflammatory press releases**, a **fan-hating video made by ACOLYTE star Amandla Stenberg** and the content of the show itself, which appears to have been **deliberately conceived to rile up fans**. Disney’s actions may seem childish and self-defeating (attacking one’s customer base doesn’t strike me as sound



business practice), but they're not without a certain twisted logic.

Consider: casual STAR WARS fans like myself have drifted away and Lucasfilm's attempts at enticing women and gen-z viewers have failed, leaving only one receptive demographic. This would be the hardcore fans, who can be counted on to consume every bit of STAR WARS related media and broadcast their feelings about it. That last part is crucial because current-day Hollywood measures success (in part) by social media engagement, and by that metric THE ACOLYTE ranks as one of the most successful TV shows of all time.

The fact that 90-plus percent of that engagement is negative is beside the point, at least in the eyes of Disney. They're deliberately fueling that negativity, after all, and the fans, **including STAR WARS buff Elon Musk**, have been taking the bait with cries of "*They've gone woke!*" and "*STAR WARS is dead!*," followed by the inevitable media denunciations of "**toxic fandom.**"

Here's a thought: if you're among those upset about THE ACOLYTE then stop watching it. Too much to ask? Okay, keep up the kicking and screaming, but understand that there's a "Kick Me" sign on your back.



Check out Adam's recommendations in the **NEWSLETTER ARCHIVE.**

I'm done reading. To the website!

The Bedlam Files, June 2024

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