

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

# THE BEDLAM FILES

*With Adam Groves*

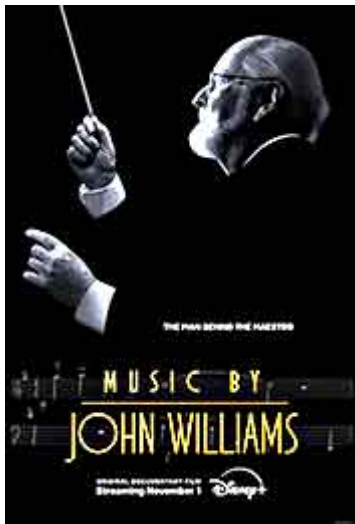
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“We meet aliens every day who have something to give us. They come in the form of people with different opinions.”

— William Shatner

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## Streaming Now



### 1. MUSIC BY JOHN WILLIAMS

An unabashedly fawning documentary portrait of *composer extraordinaire* John Williams. Featured are uniformly glowing testimonials by filmmakers (such as Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, Lawrence Kasdan and, for some reason, Seth McFarland) and musicians (such as Wynton Marsalis, Alan Silvestri, Itzhak Perlman and, for some reason, Chris Martin). No-one has anything bad to say, and in all fairness the adulation is largely justified. John Williams’ musical talents are undeniable, as evidenced

## Adam's Picks



### 1. RETURN TO OZ

Amid all the hullabaloo about WICKED, I think it’s an opportune time for a look back at what in my view is the ultimate WIZARD OF OZ pastiche. RETURN TO OZ is certainly the scariest such film, with many of the darker elements of L. Frank Braun’s OZ books given unforgettable life by director Walter Murch, a longtime collaborator of George Lucas, Steven Spielberg and Francis Ford Coppola—all of whom helped out with RETURN TO OZ when Murch became overwhelmed. Because or in spite of their intervention the film

by the many iconic film scores he's turned out over a fifty-plus year career, and this eminently watchable (and listenable, with music provided entirely by Williams himself) film provides an enjoyable tribute.

DISNEY PLUS



## 2. 765874 UNIFICATION

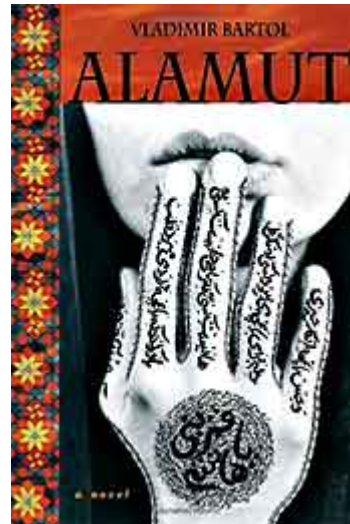
A heartfelt STAR TREK fan film, put out by the Gene Rodenberry Archive, that I'd probably have enjoyed more if I were a Trekkie (it was conceived as an addendum to 1994's STAR TREK: GENERATIONS, which I barely remember). It is, however, far superior to any of the TREK media currently being excreted by Paramount, providing digitally enhanced depictions of Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock engaging in a spectral final encounter that proves these two characters are and always will be the heart and soul of STAR TREK.

YOUTUBE



that emerged is unerringly stylish, visually inventive and absorbing.

FILM



## 2. ALAMUT

Here's a publication that should have received far more attention than it did: the premiere English translation of Vladimir Bartol's Slovenian language classic ALAMUT. A richly detailed historical epic in the grand tradition, ALAMUT is about the so-called "Old Man of the Mountain" Hassan-i Sabbah, an eleventh century Iranian warlord who created an order of formidable "hashishins" by using sex and drugs to convince his youthful followers they were in paradise—to which they fervently believed they'd return after carrying out Hassan's orders.

BOOK



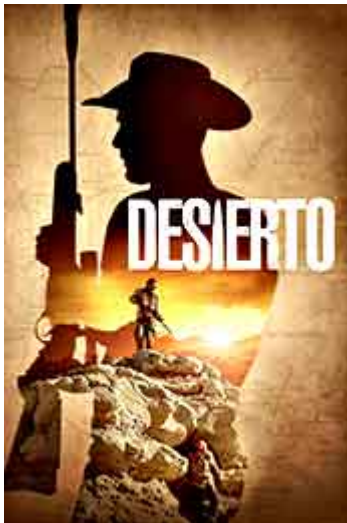
## 3. IMAGES

The closest thing that exists to a Robert Altman horror movie, a

### 3. COBRA KAI Season 6

Truth be told, the second half of the final season of COBRA KAI isn't very good, with storylines that are highly repetitive and lacking in plausibility (with one formerly incarcerated protagonist allowed to walk free *and* leave the country after engineering a prison break). It's all quite engaging, however, offering up a full roster of the soapy melodrama, eighties nostalgia and gratuitous ass-kicking that have come to define COBRA KAI.

NETFLIX



### 4. DESIERTO

A film that was ignored upon its release in 2016 and remains shockingly little known. Directed by Jonas Cuarón, the son of co-producer Alfonso Cuarón, DESIERTO works fairly well, with a relentlessness that favorably recalls 1970s desert-set shockers like SAVAGES and THE HILLS HAVE EYES. The Cuaróns favor minimalism, which is evident in this no-frills account of illegal immigrants hunted by a rifle-wielding loon (Jeffrey Dean Morgan) in the wasteland bordering Texas. That's about all there is to this film from a narrative standpoint, but it's enhanced by divertingly gory action, cleverly modulated suspense and impressively textured visuals.

HULU

REPULSION-esque depiction of the mental breakdown of a woman (Susannah York) who comes to view her life from two separate vantage points, and in the process communes with ghosts and commits several murders...or does she? Pretty silly stuff, but not uninteresting, with evocative cinematography by Vilmos Zsigmond and a jarring score by John Williams—yes, *that* John Williams, who for once was allowed to give his avant-garde leanings a full airing.

FILM



### 4. SAVE THE GREEN PLANET!

About a wealthy CEO (Baek Yun-shik) kidnapped and tortured by an apparently psychotic former employee (Shin Ha-kyun) who believes his ex-boss is an alien, SAVE THE GREEN PLANET! was one of the key entries in the South Korean cinema renaissance of the aughts. The film is not entirely successful (the storytelling falters), but the gritty yet cartoony atmosphere created by director Joon-Hwan Jang is arresting, and results in what often feels like a John Waters remake of EXTREMITIES.

FILM





### 5. AIRPLANE II: THE SEQUEL

A sequel to AIRPLANE! (1980) that's best viewed as a testament to the talents of William Shatner. Written and directed by Canadian TV legend Ken Finkleman (who claims he "hated every minute" of the job), AIRPLANE II: THE SEQUEL is an uninspired rehash of its predecessor, with a space shuttle in route to another planet replacing the airplane, thus allowing for a ton of lame space jokes in addition to all the recycled gags from the previous film. But then, in the final twenty minutes, Shatner turns up (taking the place of AIRPLANE's Robert Stack) and his energy and enthusiasm help bring this lackluster film to life; it certainly helps that he's introduced in the film's best sight gag, involving a seeming TV monitor that's revealed to be a window in a door.

AMAZON



### 5. NULL IMMORTALIS

The tenth and final installment of the Des Lewis edited NEMONYMOUS anthology series, this is a first-rate collection bearing two Lewis-demanded constants: the enigmatic term "Null Immortalis" and the name Tullis (after Scott Tullis, who won a competition to have his name appear in every story). The contributors include renowned talents like **Steve Rasnic Tem**, Mark Valentine, Daniel Pearlman and Mark Lane, and the subject matter encompasses dreams, ghosts, malevolent clowns, a possibly imaginary neck growth and the fiction of **J.G. Ballard**. The latter is paid homage in "Supermarine" by Tim Nichols, which closes out the volume in fittingly unfitting fashion.

BOOK

## Also New

- **A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET** (Film)
- **THE COFFEE TABLE** (Film)
- **FEVER YEAR: THE KILLER FLU OF 1918** (Graphic Novel)
- **PAUL MORRISSEY: 1938-2024** (Commentary)



- **THE FUTURE WAS NOW: MADMEN, MAVERICKS, AND THE EPIC SCI-FI SUMMER OF 1982** (Nonfiction)
- **Remembering That Which is Better Forgotten: THE CANNONBALL RUN** (Commentary)
- **Archived newsletters for easy reference**
- ***And Much More!***

## Insider Info

By now it seems that all there is to say about the 2024 election has been said. I certainly don't have anything interesting to add, although there is a subject whose relation to the events of early November hasn't been brought up much: movies, which I'd argue have a great deal to say about the election.



Overtly political movies from years past, like **MR. SMITH GOES TO WASHINGTON** (1939), **THE CANDIDATE** (1972) and **THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT** (1995), don't really apply for various reasons. MR. SMITH GOES TO WASHINGTON is about the triumph of an ordinary idealist, and there was NOTHING ordinary about the '24 election, while THE CANDIDATE features a protagonist whose lack of media savvy would have ensured him a quick political demise in today's landscape, and THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT was very much about then president Bill Clinton, despite the fact that its Michale Douglas essayed leader of the free world has a different name.

One film that *does* apply to 2024, and very much so, is **ELECTION** (1999). It's an allegorical account of a high school election disrupted by Tammy (Jessica Campbell), a young lesbian whose anti-establishment stance proves quite popular with the student body and greatly upsets the establishment. Equally pertinent is the election's major gatekeeper Jim McAllister (Matthew Broderick), who allows his hatred of one of the candidates, a firebrand named Tracy (Reese Witherspoon), to affect his judgement. The gist: Mr. McAllister grows vastly overzealous in attempting to affect the election outcome, and loses quite literally everything.

The puppet pastiche **TEAM AMERICA: WORLD POLICE** (2004) isn't election-themed, but its portrayal of an American counter-

terrorism outfit is quite relevant to our current reality. Particularly noteworthy is the film's portrayal of celebrity activism, which fails to move the needle one way or another and leaves the celebrities in question (led by a puppet-ized Alec Baldwin, whose real-life counterpart, as we all know, is still in the news) looking dumb(er).

Finally, we'll travel backward a few years to **Woody Allen's CRIMES AND MISDEMEANORS** (1989). There's nothing overtly political about this pitch-dark comedy, but its portrayal of Clifford (Allen), a bitter documentary filmmaker making a film about his much-hated TV producer brother-in-law Lester (Alan Alda), definitely harkened forward. Like Mr. McAllister, Cliff allows his emotions to get the better of him, and does something that in 1989 seemed like the height of outrage: he edits footage of Benito Mussolini rallies into his documentary about Lester, which makes Cliff look petty and ensures that he loses not only his job but also his girlfriend Halley (Mia Farrow), who to add further insult runs off with Lester.

Equating one's enemies with Mussolini? Pretty shocking, but it could have been worse: Cliff could have used Hitler as his basis of comparison. Now surely nobody would dare do *that*...



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

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