

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

THE BEDLAM FILES

With Adam Groves

“Life is a disease: sexually transmitted, and invariably fatal.”

— Neil Gaiman

Streaming Now



1. **SHORT CUTS**

A very rare example of a film that's actually improved with age. Initially released in 1993, *SHORT CUTS* was the umpteenth attempt by the late Robert Altman at recapturing the magic of his all-time classic *NASHVILLE* (1975), and unlike the other attempts (such as *A WEDDING*, *HEALTH* and *PRET-A-PORTER*), it actually works. As in *NASHVILLE*, *SHORT CUTS* offers a serio-comic multi-character tapestry that concludes with a shocking act of violence. The film was inspired by the fiction of Raymond Carver, but with his Pacific Northwest settings

Adam's Picks



1. **ALIENS**

The first and in my view best of the *ALIEN* sequels (meaning that, yes, I feel *ALIENS* is far superior to *ALIEN: ROMULUS*). James Cameron took over the directorial reins from [Ridley Scott](#), and the result is an awesome, nail-biting spectacle. Sigourney Weaver returns as Ripley, the plucky young woman from Scott's film, accompanying a bunch of Marines to the planet where she and her crew met their fate. Instead of just one alien there are dozens infesting a colony, making for an increasingly thrilling series of chases, shoot-outs and narrow escapes...until the final,

transposed to urban Los Angeles and the distancing literary overlay jettisoned, meaning Carver's retinue of drunks, liars, racists, philanderers, sociopaths and murderers is presented unvarnished. This may not have seemed especially novel or startling in the grunge era (when "edginess" was the major media buzzword), but it sure does now.

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2. PUNCH-DRUNK LOVE

This was Adam Sandler's first real attempt at stepping outside his comedy comfort zone, and he ended up, in the words of Roger Ebert, getting "bitten by the hand that feeds him." What Ebert and most other critics missed was that the wild and unpredictable PUNCH-DRUNK LOVE was not a quirky Adam Sandler movie pastiche but, rather, a quasi-autobiographical portrait of its writer-director Paul Thomas Anderson and his widely publicized romance with singer Fiona Apple. Anderson is known, like Sandler in this movie, for social awkwardness and a hair-trigger temper, and once followed Apple to Hawaii, an episode that was dramatized in P-DL. Yet, given that Anderson and Apple had long since broken up when this film was made, its love-conquers-all finale is questionable.

CRITERION

mind-blowing mono-a-mono between Ripley and the queen alien.

FILM



2. BEETLEJUICE

For reasons that should be obvious, this is an ideal time to get reacquainted with Tim Burton's 1988 classic BEETLEJUICE. It marked Burton's premiere collaboration with the late novelist/screenwriter Michael McDowell and emerged as one of the world's most authentically Burtonesque films. Michael Keaton (who's said to have ad-libbed ninety percent of his dialogue) makes a sizeable impression in the title role of a renegade "Bio-Exorcist," and he's well supported by Alec Baldwin and Geena Davis as a young couple who enter his realm after dying unexpectedly, and a teenaged Winona Ryder in her breakout role of a goth girl who gets a bit closer to B'Juice than is advisable.

FILM





3. HOW TO STAY HEALTHY

One of the creepiest damn things I've seen lately, and no wonder: this short film was made entirely with AI. It has a distinct "bad trip" feel, being an unabashedly discordant account that takes the form of an infomercial. Included are depictions of body dysmorphia, flying cars, drugs, cloned bodies and head transplants (courtesy of perpetually leering "sewing specialists"). It's narrated by an odd fellow wearing a white kabuki mask who serves some kind of leadership role in an alternate universe Las Vegas.

YOUTUBE



4. THE DEAD MOTHER

An exceedingly well-made 1993 Spanish thriller from director Juanma Bajo Ullao (AIRBAG). The admittedly unwieldy prologue has a sociopathic criminal named Ismael (Karra Elejalde) robbing a house, killing its owner and wounding the latter's

3. CORALINE

Neil Gaiman, it seems, **is in the midst of being cancelled**. If this is indeed the case, I'd strongly recommend viewing the stop-motion Gaiman adaptation CORALINE as a cinematic last supper before discarding him and his output. Writer-director Henry Selick retained much of the darkness of **Gaiman's account** of a little girl (voiced by Dakota Fanning) discovering an alternate world, although the film is more flamboyantly gothic than the book, adding elements like a giant spider web that figures unforgettably in the climax. As an animated spectacle CORALINE simply cannot be improved upon; its big-headed stick-figured characters have an utterly distinct look and move in startlingly lifelike fashion. The lighting, in contrast to most Claymation features, is varied and layered, and the camerawork has a verisimilitude that would impress even in a live-action feature.

FILM



4. IMAGES

The only true horror movie made by the late Robert Altman (although he approached the genre in THAT COLD DAY IN THE PARK, 3 WOMEN and THE GINGERBREAD MAN). It stars Susanna York as an attractive but deeply schizophrenic woman living with her husband (Rene Auberjonois) —or so it appears. Things are clearly not as they might seem, as becomes

daughter Leire. Years later the thief recognizes the now grown-up, and mentally impaired, Leire (Ana Alvarez) in an institution and kidnaps her. He's aided by his equally cracked GF (Lio), who wants to ransom off their captive immediately; Ismael, however, finds himself falling in love with Leire. There exist quite a few glaring plot holes (it's interesting that by the third act nobody has thought to clean up the glass from a window broken in the first), but impressive camerawork and cleverly wrought suspense make for a worthwhile time-passer.

SHUDDER



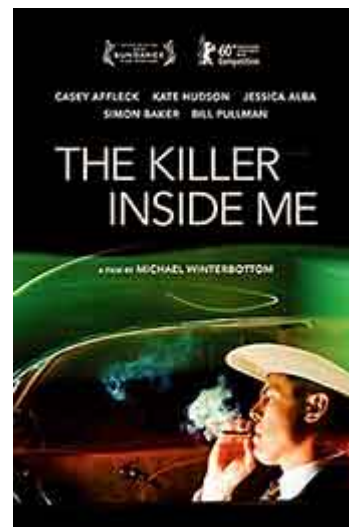
5. FACE/OFF

I'll always remember this 1997 shoot-'em-up for the fact that I worked on the Paramount lot during its preproduction, and witnessed a colleague having a full-blown nerdgasm upon catching a glimpse of FACE/OFF's director John Woo (who reacted like he was being confronted by a gunmen from one of his own films). But onto the flick itself, which has a premise —of a cop (John Travolta) and a criminal (Nicolas Caged) switching faces —so ludicrous it renders the suspension of disbelief a chore. But Woo's energetic treatment ensures the proceedings are always fun to watch; "balletic" is the word most often used to describe Woo's unique brand of stylized carnage, and balletic it indeed is.

PARAMOUNT PLUS

clear during a trip the two take to a scenic Irish cottage where she splits completely. The proceedings are quite derivative (of Roman Polanski's **REPULSION** and Ingmar Bergman's **HOUR OF THE WOLF**), but the technical credits, from Vilmos Zsigmond's evocative photography to the jarring, asynchronous music by John Williams (yes, that John Williams), are all top notch, and the film overall seems worthy of the effort required to figure it out.

FILM



5. THE KILLER INSIDE ME

There's never been a first-person psycho novel like this one, nor a character like Sherrif Lou Ford, a seemingly upstanding officer of the law who also happens to be a schizophrenic murderer. In the lexicon of Jim Thompson psychotics Lou beats out strong contenders like **A HELL OF A WOMAN**'s Dillon and **THE NOTHING MAN**'s Clinton Brown as the ultimate expression of Thompson's ultra-stark, fatalistic worldview. There's some truly shocking violence herein, related in Lou's unerringly frank, hard-boiled vernacular, as well as moments of psychotic hilarity. Thompson's frankness and love of excess made him an ideal practitioner of fifties-era pulp fiction, but he did far more with his novels, this one in particular, by convincingly exploring the darker areas of the human psyche in a manner that's downright

Also New

- **BEETLEJUICE vs BEETLEJUICE BEETLEJUICE** (Commentary)
- **TERROR ABOVE THE SUNSET STRIP** (Film)
- **ROLLERBALL** (Film)
- **TEN NOTABLE CINEMATIC DEPICTIONS OF THE INFERNO** (Commentary)
- **WITH LOVE, MOMMIE DEAREST: THE MAKING OF AN UNINTENTIONAL CAMP CLASSIC** (Commentary)
- **A HELL OF A WOMAN** (Fiction)
- **OLDBOY** (Film)
- **HORROR MOVIE** (Fiction)
- **SOME CALL IT LOVING** (Film)
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- ***And Much More!***



Insider Info



It's official: after 70 years Japan's Toho has finally codified Godzilla. **It seems a "Godzilla Room" now exists**, bearing a set of unbreakable rules every Godzilla iteration, Japanese, American or otherwise, must follow, among them the fact that Godzilla can never die and "does not prey on people or things." These rules, I should add, aren't exactly novel, as the Godzilla Room has apparently been in operation since 2016, and heavily informed the content of both **GODZILLA MINUS ONE** and **GODZILLA X KONG: THE NEW EMPIRE**, but Toho has in recent weeks made sure to flaunt its guidelines.



You may wonder why it took them so long, especially in light of all the outrageous American-made iterations of Godzilla. Who can forget the ridiculous Hanna-Barbara kiddie cartoon series with “**Godzooky?**,” or the 1998 Roland Emmerich GODZILLA and its animated TV spin-off, or the 2014 Hollywood version featuring a title character who was (in the words of critics residing in Godzilla’s country of origin) too fat? Clearly there were no Godzilla guidelines back then, and there probably should have been.



Do the Godzilla Room’s rules mean, as many fans have opined, that Godzilla is “going woke?” I’d say no, and that, in fact, the opposite is true.

It seems that Hollywood, in light of last year’s debilitating strikes and an overall **decline in box office receipts**, is increasingly following the lead of the comic book industry (in which Japanese manga **tends to dominate**) by relying on Asia to generate content. That’s certainly true of Netflix, who in recent months have **leaned quite heavily on Asian-made film and TV**, and the fact that Japanese made theatrical releases like the aforementioned GODZILLA MINUS ONE have been quite lucrative on these shores. This is a fact that hasn’t gone unnoticed by mainstream Hollywood, with a **new era of Japanese-American collaborations** being touted.



Hence all the recent crowing over the Godzilla Room. Far from being a capitulation to Hollywood, Toho's guidelines seem to me a declaration of independence against encroaching western values. Precisely how long this declaration might last remains an open question, as Hollywood, whatever its shortcomings, can be VERY persuasive.



Check out Adam's
recommendations in the
NEWSLETTER ARCHIVE.

I'm done reading. To the website!

The Bedlam Files, Septmber 2024

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