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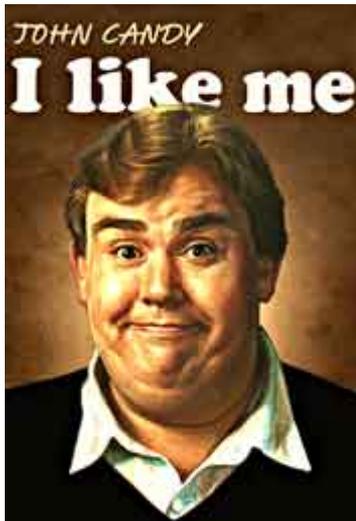
THE BEDLAM FILES

With Adam Groves

“Our world is so glutted with useless information, images, useless images, sounds, all this sort of thing...And I think anything that can help a person sit in a room alone and not worry about it is good.”

—Martin Scorsese

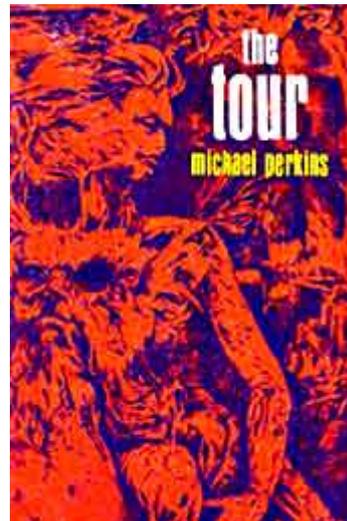
Streaming Now



1. JOHN CANDY: I LIKE ME

A profile of the late [John Candy](#) that's a lot like its subject: engaging, sweet natured and bearing a voracious appetite. Director Colin Hanks insists on exploring his subject's every facet, resulting in a film that feels schizophrenic. We learn that Candy was deeply insecure and supremely confident, an irrepressible social butterfly and a stay-at-home family man, a generous acting partner and a shameless scene stealer, etc. Several competing rationales for Candy's

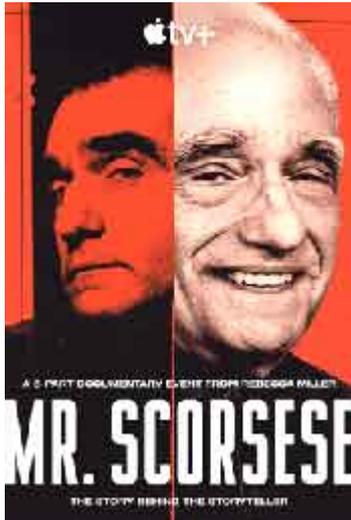
Adam's Picks



1. THE TOUR

A book that's hard to find but worth searching out. Published in 1969, THE TOUR is an updating of Dante's INFERNO by the late smut novel impresario Michael Perkins. Concerned is a writer exploring the debauched Long Island empire of a mob-connected playboy in a search for his (possibly dead) girlfriend Beatrice. I say it's one of Perkin's best books, with a balance of extravagance and introspection that places THE TOUR far ahead of most other late-1960s smut books. I also say it's superior to the

weight issues are offered up, including the disturbing possibility that Hollywood wanted him to be overweight (a possibility that isn't followed through). Fun movie, though. PRIME



2. MR. SCORSESE

There's very little information in this five-part portrait of Martin Scorsese that can't be found in the many extant Scorsese biographies, with MR. SCORSESE emerging as a captivating but frustratingly shallow, surface-level treatment. I strongly believe director Rebecca Miller would have liked to dig a bit deeper (she bluntly asks Sharon Stone "Did you ever have disagreements or conflicts with Marty?"), but this is an officially sanctioned product, and so only shows what Scorsese and his circle want us to see. APPLE TV



3. THE LOST BUS

Another hard-hitting exercise in reality-based calamity from director

author's earlier, and more widely known, novel **EVIL COMPANIONS**, which to me reads like a warm-up for the sublime outrages of THE TOUR.

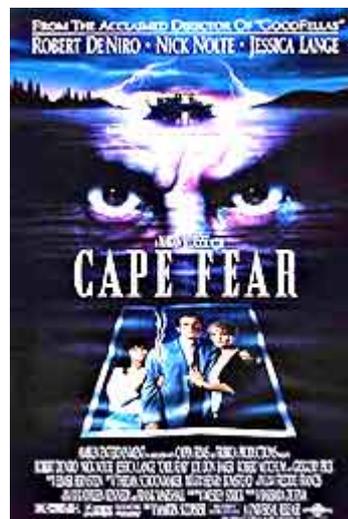
BOOK



2. JOKER: FOLIE A DEUX

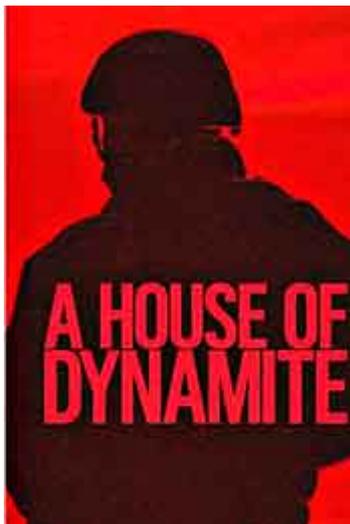
Here's a controversial opinion: I quite liked what is probably the most despised film of the 2020s. JOKER: FOLIE A DEUX (2024) is easily the most subversive big studio sequel to appear since Joe Dante ran wild with **GREMLINS 2: THE NEW BATCH** back in 1990. Director Todd Phillips turned from the Martin Scorsese informed JOKER (2019) to a depiction of subjective insanity that incorporates music numbers, violent hallucinations and what is likely the most perverse ending of any superhero movie ever made.

FILM



3. CAPE FEAR

Paul Greengrass (following UNITED 93, CAPTAIN PHILLIPS and 22 JULY). The subject is the catastrophic 2018 wildfire in Paradise, CA, and the bus driver (Matthew McConaughey) who found himself tasked with driving 20 schoolchildren and their teacher (America Ferrera) out of the fire zone. The film often plays like a school bus SORCERER, with McConaughey facing various dramatic contrivances in his odyssey, all of them extremely well staged by Greengrass. On the downside, the sentimentality is lathered on a bit thickly (with McConaughey contending with possibly charred family members in addition to the school kids) and the copious fire effects aren't always convincing (BACKDRAFT this film isn't). APPLE TV

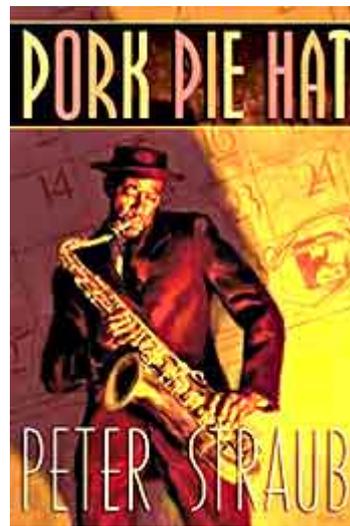


4. A HOUSE OF DYNAMITE

There are around thirty really good minutes to be found in this **FAIL SAFE** (1964) like drama from director Kathryn Bigelow. The subject is an unidentified nuclear missile fired at Chicago, with a variety of government functionaries, played by Rebecca Ferguson, Jared Harris, Idris Elba and others, dealing with the situation. The opening scenes are tense and deeply alarming, with an unforced naturalism and a depiction of the inner workings of the US government that's horrifyingly convincing (horrifying because a lot of mistakes are made), but then the events of the narrative are repeated

Martin Scorsese fanatics tend to dismiss this, the most unabashedly commercial of all his films. It's a 1991 remake of a 1962 potboiler, with Nick Nolte and Jessica Lang as a suburban couple and Robert De Niro as a psychopath with his eyes on them (and their daughter Juliette Lewis). Scorsese makes sure to include a hammy message about guilt and complicity—Nolte's character is a lawyer who got De Niro convicted by falsifying evidence—but the film works best as a straightforward thrill machine, with De Niro at his most magnificently unhinged.

FILM

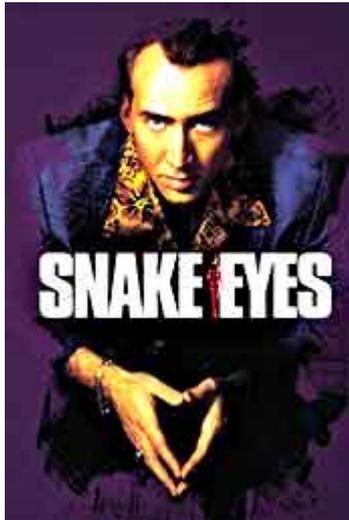


4. PORK PIE HAT

A 1994 novella that united two of the late **Peter Straub**'s major passions: jazz and horror. Featured are the time tripping narrative perturbations that typified Straub's fiction, in addition to the author's strong grasp of characterization and not-inconsiderable descriptive powers. The story they power is about a jazz legend recollecting a horrific childhood incident that may or may not be genuine.

BOOK

twice more. No dramatic rationale is offered for the repetition, which deflates the suspense and calls unwanted attention to the fact that not a whole lot actually happens. NETFLIX



5. SNAKE EYES

A 1998 flop that's become newly popular due to its parallels to a certain widely publicized recent event. A supposed return to form for director **Brian De Palma** after **MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE** (1996), **SNAKE EYES** is centered on a political figure getting shot in the neck during an Atlantic City boxing match. From there the film explores the wide-ranging conspiracy that led to the shooting in a stylistically dazzling but extremely cold and mechanical treatment. The headliners include Nicolas Cage, Gary Sinise and Carla Gugino, none of whom stand out (with Gugino having very little to do outside looking pretty). PRIME



5. GOING BERSERK

This 1983 goof marked an early starring role for John Candy. As always, Candy went for broke in his portrayal of a hapless limo driver transformed, **MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE** like, into a programmed assassin by an evil cult leader. Called "one of the most disillusioning experiences of Candy's career" by his biographer Martin Knelman, the film, with its plethora of lazy penis jokes, isn't terribly funny (or cohesive), but Candy is occasionally allowed to shine.

FILM

AND THEN THERE WERE THREE.

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Insider Info

A few weeks ago, I did something I do very infrequently: I went to a movie theater. The venue was a newly opened multiplex located a mile or so from where I live, and the attraction an afternoon screening of **Paul Thomas Anderson's ONE BATTLE AFTER ANOTHER**.

Prior to this excursion, the last time I set foot in a multiplex was roughly a year ago, when I went to see **JOKER: FOLIE A DEUX**. I'm one of the few who liked that film, but the experience of seeing it was profoundly depressing. As I recall, I was one of three people in the auditorium, situated in a building that seemed oddly desolate, especially in light of my memories of **working in a multiplex in the early nineties**, when enthusiastic crowds were abundant.

Fast forwarding to the more recent **ONE BATTLE AFTER ANOTHER** screening, I once again found myself in the company of just two other patrons. Upon emerging from the film, I decided to check the viewership of the other movies playing, and in so doing was able to confirm that the issue of **declining movie theater patronage** isn't as bad as everyone is making it out to be—it's actually much, much worse.



As it turned out, ONE BATTLE AFTER ANOTHER, with its three patrons, was the hit of the day. The combined viewership for in-progress screenings of **KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN**, **A HOUSE OF DYNAMITE** and the just-released **TRON ARES** (on two screens) added up to a big fat zero.

This was despite state-of-art projection, an extremely well trained staff (upon booting me from an auditorium a young woman usher was careful to say “thank you” and “have a nice day”) and auditoriums containing **4DX**, referring to seats that move in conjunction with the action onscreen (I found the sight of those dancing theater seats with nobody in them deeply sad and not a little eerie), and **ScreenX**, referring to projection that flows off the screen and onto the theater walls. Quite a difference from my movie theater employee days, which occurred in an old building with antiquated projection equipment that nonetheless drew large crowds.

The reasons for this drastic drop in theater attendance? I’d opine there are quite a few reasons, which I believe are the fault of Hollywood’s gatekeepers rather than theater owners, and are best summarized by the adage *make better movies*.

Final thought: as dispiriting as my recent moviegoing excursion was, I’m glad I went. I don’t think I’ll have too many more chances to do so, after all, as something tells me the multiplex I attended won’t be around much longer.

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The Bedlam Files, October 2025, Issue 25-09

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