

A TRIP TO 'SATAN'S PLAYGROUND' (Sept. 05) by Jsyn & Robg.

Rather than writing the straight-forward review, Jsyn and I thought it would be much more interesting to collaborate on this particular piece, and both voice our seperate opinions on the same subject matter. (That being Dante Tomaselli's latest film 'SATAN'S PLAYGROUND') We wanted this particular review of his film to read like a running commentary & conversation between myself & Jsyn on the entire experience of viewing 'SATAN'S PLAYGROUND'. Hope you enjoy this format. -robg.

Jsyn: It's a gorgeous, lazy Sunday afternoon in beautiful New Jersey. Rob G and I made the trip out from LI because we were invited by the man himself, **Dante Tomaselli**, to check out his new flick, **SATAN'S PLAYGROUND**. Afterwards, we squint as we get a faceful of bright sunshine walking back to the car. There is a summertime street fair going on, full of smiling, happy faces. I am completley oblivious to it all, because I'm ten kinds of freaked out by my strange and unsettling trip to **SATAN'S PLAYGROUND**. On to my already long list of phobias, I add "Jersey Pine Barrens" and "autumn". Yes, it's true... Dante Tomaselli has made me afraid of a nature preserve and an entire season!



Robg.: To me, it's funny the length's that Jsyn and I will go to, strictly to satisfy our appetite for new & horrifying entertainment. It was a nice afternoon out, but we kept getting lost. Damn Jersey and it's no left turns!!! Regardless, nothing could stop my excitment for finally meeting my new-found friend Dante and seeing his latest opus. After all, I am a big fanboy at heart. As Jsyn mentioned, there was a street fair on Dante's block, pretty much right outside his door. When I asked him about it, he was unaware of the outdoor festivities. Much like when you sit down to bear witness to one of his features, you become completely unaware of the world outside and you are trapped in one of Dante's nightmares.



Jsyn: After a delicious vegetable lasagna (thank you, Mrs. Tomaselli!) we begin our viewing. Dante's apartment is awesome... kind of like a cross between Sherlock Homes' flat and Ron Burgundy's bachelor pad. "There are many leather-bound books and it smells of rich mahogany". And there are a lot of clocks, along with the Greatest TV I Have Ever Seen. Spooky the dog decides that we are not, in fact, burglars so he quits the barking and settles in on the couch between us. Dante sits directly behind us which is kind of unnerving.



Robg.: Dante's place is definitely every horror fanatics dream. The walls of the staircase were covered in framed theatrical posters of horror classics and it set the mood right away for the film we were about to experience. Having him sit behind us while watching the film was very surreal. Everytime the screen faded to black, I would see his reflection and be reminded that there was no way I was getting out of his world.

Jsyn: Now Rob G is a huge Dante fan. He keeps raving on and on to me and anyone who will listen about **HORROR** and **DESECRATION**. My roommate Stevie D, who hates absolutley everything, "fucking loves **HORROR**". I've seen the trailer for **HORROR** and was really intrigued, but honestly never got around to checking out either movie beforehand. I was in the unique position to watch his films in reverse order, starting with **SATAN'S PLAYGROUND**. When it's released, I'm sure many people will find out about Dante in the same way I did. The early word on **SATAN'S PLAYGROUND** was that it was Dante's most "accessible" movie to date, and that's ALL I knew about it.



Robg.: It's interesting, because most people will end up seeing Dante's films backwards, starting with **Satan's Playground** and that's fine. I've been lucky enough to see them in order, so I've always become more impressed with the growth Dante exhibits as a filmmaker from film to film. Right from the first few minutes of '**Satan's Playground**', I knew we were about to watch the best of his films thus far. And being a musician myself, I always pay attention to the score of movies. The music in '**Satan's Playground**', much like everything else is a step up from his last outting. I knew a bit about the movie, but not too many details on the plot. I'd interviewed him twice and seen the screen shots for months now. It was fascinating to be able to see some of those infamous stills come to life before my very eyes as I'd imagined.

Jsyn: So what's it about? Well, basically a family gets stuck in the Jersey Pine Barrens on their way to some sort of campground. When the car craps out and Dad goes for help, weird shit happens. And that's where the whole "accessible" thing ends. What could have been a by-the-numbers-crazies-in-the-woods flick turns into a nightmarish descent into a kind of madness not seen on screen since the glorious Seventies. I am amazed as to how many bizarre elements are in this movie and yet it retains a linear storyline. Invisible flying monsters, murderous psychopathic mutes, crystal meth snortin grannies, satanic rituals and supernatural mindfucks... this movie is a smorgasboard of terrors, both real and unseen.



Many times during **SATAN'S PLAYGROUND**, I had some deja vu moments. Not because what I saw on screen was familiar, it was more of a memory of something I had felt before... an echo of a long-forgotten childhood fear maybe? I'm not sure if the casual viewer will get the same out of it as a true horror fan would, but if you are sick of PG-13 remakes of Japanese horror movies involving wet ghosts, **SATAN'S PLAYGROUND** is the most diabolical homegrown backwoods hootch since Absinthe.



Robg.: The wonderful thing about '**Satan's Playground**' is the vibe it almost instantly creates. Our buddy *Christopher Garetano* summed it up perfectly. "It reminds me of the 4 'o clock movie I'd see on Channel 9 after school." You know, those old horror oddities that would usually end around the same time the sun set, where you'd become officially freaked out by the dark? Being familiar with Dante's previous films, it was great to see *Danny Lopes*, *Christie Sanford* and *Irma St. Paul* returning again, but this time along with horror icons *Felissa Rose* (Sleepaway Camp), *Ellen Sandweiss* (The Evil Dead), and *Edwin Neal* (The *original* Texas Chainsaw Massacre).

It just felt so odd and surreal to see them all gathered here in the same universe in a new horror movie. I hadn't felt this way while watching a feature since I was a kid. I couldn't help but get giddy seeing *Ellen Sandweiss* run through the woods, 20 some odd years after her "incident" with the woods in 'The Evil Dead'. And I couldn't help but laugh with glee at seeing *Edwin Neal* grace the screen, again as nutty as he was as the hitchhiker, only mute! Emotionally, this is a step up acting-wise for *Felissa Rose* as well. I haven't really seen her do something since the original Sleepaway Camp where she's out front and vulnerable to the evil's in '**Satan's Playground**'. She deserves more cred, especially after this flick.



Let's not forget seeing *Ron Milkie* appear as a cop, much like he did in the original Friday The 13th. (He may very well be the same character for all we know!) Back to Dante's usual crew... I loved the one moment where *Danny Lopes*'s character Sean comes face to face with Judy (played with maniacal brilliance by *Christie Sanford*) and for a moment... they recognize each other. As if from a previous nightmare in Dante's world.

Jsyn: Dante has a way of completley messing with your suspension of disbelief, no matter how outlandish certain on-screen actions or situations may seem to the rational mind. It's as though he has completely captured that feeling of lucid dreaming and put it on film. It's the kind of dreaming that makes perfect sense while your experiencing it, but once you wake and try you explain it to someone else, it makes no sense. I find it utterly insane how perfectly Dante translates the sensation of "dreaming a nightmare" for the screen.



Robg.: This is the most straight forward of Dante's films, but from the mid-point on, it does share the same surreal dream-like quality of '**HORROR**' and '**Desecration**'. Two films I personally consider 90 minute nightmares. This is the main reason his movies stand out against other horror fare.



Jsyn: Dante Tomaselli is a unique, visionary filmmaker in every sense. He is more of a painter than director, and his films are like canvases in different mediums. Instead of oils and watercolors, this artist works in fears and nightmares. Imagine yourself alone in a museum. You can walk right up to one of the paintings hanging on the wall and no one is there to stop you. It appears the canvas is still wet. Even though you know you shouldn't, you have the urge to just reach out and touch one. When you pull your hand back, your fingertips are stained. The stain keeps growing, past your knuckles up your arm. Before you know it, you are completely covered... unharmed but forever tainted. This is gonna stay with you a while.

Robg.: I agree, this movie IS going to stay with you for a while, and that's the way all films that carry the tag 'horror' should be. I can't wait for all you true horror fans to see this film. Quite frankly, I hope a company like *Anchor Bay* or *Lions Gates* snags this one up. It would be nice to see the right company behind this film, and both of the above have proved they know how to treat their horror properties. Either way, with '**The Ocean**' already in pre-production, at least we know we have plenty more to look forward to when it comes to *the horror of Dante Tomaselli*.

