

film

You think you got cojones? Try dropping some (from left) *Nightmare City*, *Satan's Playground*, *Carnival of Souls* (top), and *Suspiria* into your trick-or-treat pail, and then we'll talk cojones, fraidy-cat.



HALLOWEEN 2006

Four videos on gray velvet

A fearsome quadruple feature for Halloween night

The squeals of wheels and drag-racing teens give way to the horror of a car crash. A woman stumbles from the wreckage, stunned that she survived. The opening moments of David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*? Nope, the beginning of Herk Harvey's *Carnival of Souls*, an earlier American classic. *Mulholland Drive* doesn't just share an auto-shock prelude with *Carnival*, it also remodels the nightmarish afterlife plot of Harvey's 1962 movie, in which blond Mary (Candice Hilligoss) heads to Salt Lake City for a gig as a church organist yet finds herself drawn to an eerie abandoned carnival out on the flats. Harvey's sole feature is an even greater one-and-only feat than Leonard Kastle's 1970 *The Honeymoon Killers*, a Utah masterpiece equal to 1965's *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!*, and the closest the era's American cinema comes to topping the French New Wave. It's also bizarrely funny, especially when Mary faces the enthralled, then concerned looks of her bespectacled minister, the strange smile of her rabbit-land-

lady, and the leer of her sleazy neighbor down the hall. Most of all, it's scary, occasionally in a sudden jolting manner, but ultimately in a way that slow-chills you to your core. (Johnny Ray Huston)

The deliciously tasteless power of Umberto Lenzi cannot be denied. The maestro behind gangsta dramas like *Violent Protection* and the exploito-classic *Cannibal Ferox* (a.k.a. *Make Them Die Slowly*) inflicts cerebral-cortex damage with 1980's *Nightmare City*. The film's alternate title, *City of the Walking Dead*, is kind of misleading, because these ain't no strollin' corpses. After a nuclear accident, an unmarked plane carrying a prominent scientist cruises in for an uneasy landing as TV reporter Dean Miller (hirsute Hugo Stiglitz) looks on. "Could be his radio isn't working," mutters an air traffic controller confused by the pilot's nonresponse. Could be the craft is overstuffed with angry, running, hollering ghoulies, armed to the rotting teeth with fire axes and

lead pipes. You gotta love any movie that segues from that kind of mayhem into a jiggly jazz-dance program being shown on Dean's network. My, a wandering zombie can really screw up a live broadcast! (Other skills: cutting phone lines and causing citywide blackouts.) The movie races from attack to attack as the monsters ooze all over the military, a hospital full of unlucky patients and doctors, a vacationing couple in their RV, a church, and — yes! — an amusement park, where the moniker *Nightmare City* is proven all too true. Or is it??? (Cheryl Eddy)

There's been a dismaying recent trend in horror movies away from imaginative terror and into literal torture. I prefer the creepy atmospherics, perversities, and fantasticism of horror films that suggest the mind is the scariest place of all. They're getting harder to find. Fortunately, surreal horror has a major US champion in Dante Tomaselli. His three features to date have gone direct from the fantasy festival circuit to DVD — a pity, because they look gorgeous on the big screen. To enter Tomaselli's world you must abandon all hope of narrative coherence — his movies are ruled by a nightmare logic closer to, say, that of Jean Cocteau than Freddy Krueger. His latest, last year's *Satan's Playground*, is equal parts *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Hansel and Gretel*, as two families collide in New Jersey. Stranded on a country back road, a bickering clan (including actors from the original *Chainsaw*, *Evil Dead*, and *Sleepaway Camp*) is lured one by one into the

abandoned shack where a crazy crone and her lunatic offspring just love greeting company — often with a large mallet. Nor is the outdoors safe, given the giant batlike Jersey Devil (an actual legend) swooping overhead. *Satan's Playground* is full of striking primal-terror images, grotesque humor, ominous ambient sounds, and painterly lighting schemes. Mario Bava and Dario Argento would doubtless approve. The makers of *Saw* and *Hostel* might likely whine, "What's this arty shit?" (Dennis Harvey)

Since Argento's opulent blood parfait *Suspiria* is based on portions of Thomas de Quincey's *Suspiria de Profundis*, I'd encourage you to gorge on opium before attending: this lusciously appointed, color-drenched grim mothers' bedtime giallo. If only. The first in a series of blood-soaked operatic odes to the Three Mothers — those ancient witches who hark back to *Macbeth* — Argento's 1976 film opens with a Rube Goldberg-esque series of murders that challenge you to hide your peepers even as they dazzle the eye and goad you to marvel at their ingenuity. Here, Mother Suspiriorum, or Mother of Sighs, runs a Freiburg ballet academy, the ideal setting for beautifully torturing delicate damsels — and for blasting Argento's trademark prog band Goblin at top volume. Fresh from her *Phantom of the Paradise* turn, hapless dancer Jessica Harper has the cookies-and-cream, startled-doe look that Argento will fixate on in other splatter fantasias to come. (Kimberly Chun)

DAN WEST'S TOP FIVE HORROR MOVIES

1. *Shriek of the Mutilated* (1974)

Not only the greatest title in cinema history but also its single greatest achievement. Never before (or since) have bad acting, cannibalism, alcoholism, and the Abominable Snowman scaled such heights.

2. *The Wizard of Gore* (1970)

Blood Feast director Herschell Gordon Lewis does it again, becoming the first filmmaker in history to slaughter someone on camera with a chain saw. If the crude and relentless gore effects don't turn your stomach, the "acting" certainly will.

3. *Straight Jacket* (1963)

High camp is the order of the day as convicted ax murderer Joan Crawford returns home after a lengthy stay in the loony bin, only to seemingly resume her old habits. Hilarity ensues in this William Castle-directed classic. Crawford really sells it. This is the stuff of which drag queens are made!

4. *King Kong Lives* (1986)

This follow-up to the Dino de Laurentiis-produced remake of *King Kong* boasts a plethora of delights for the bad movie enthusiast. Kong, after falling to his supposed death from the heights of the World Trade Center, is retrofitted with a giant artificial heart during a *Monty Python*-like opening sequence. It is a film that has to be seen to be believed. Several bong hits might help.

5. *The Car* (1977)

Never has vehicular manslaughter been so much fun! The screenplay boasts "technical advice" from Church of Satan founder Anton LaVey. **SFBG**

San Francisco filmmaker Dan West codirected Monsturd and the forthcoming RetarDEAD.