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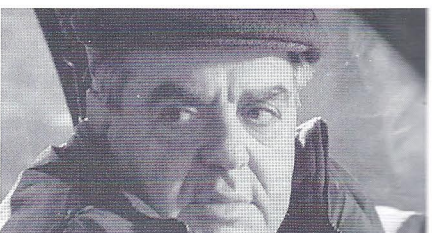


SATAN'S PLAYGROUND (2005)

Directed by Dante Tomaselli.
81 mins. approx.

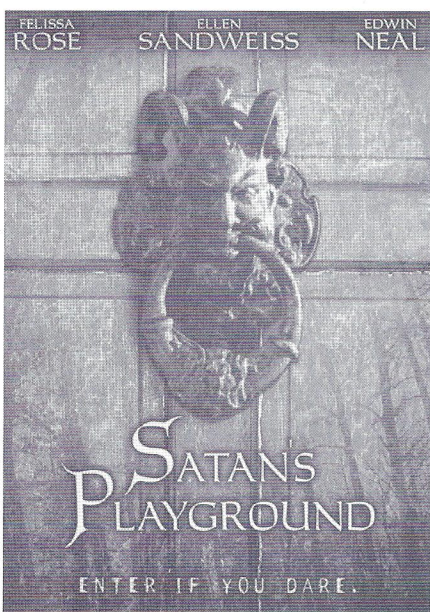
As evidenced by the casting of four actors from iconic 70s / 80s low budget horror movies, and by the use of quotations from David Lean, Isabelle Huppert and David Lynch during the end credits, indie filmmaker Dante Tomaselli is a hybrid of horror fan boy and artistically ambitious auteur. Over-praised in some quarters, his latest is a slight but effectively eerie homage to 70s backwoods horror cinema, though the stunt casting doesn't quite pay off. **FRIDAY THE 13TH**'s Ron Milkie has a nothing part as a cop and Ed Neal (the Hitchhiker in **THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE**) has no dialogue, falling back on his patented mad squint. Female leads Ellen Sandweiss (the tree-rape victim in **THE EVIL DEAD**) and Felissa Rose (a memorable killer in **SLEEPAWAY CAMP**, here a screaming heroine) never were strong actors and come off a tad flat.

Still, Tomaselli has crafted an atmospheric ode to bleak rural chillers such as **RACE WITH THE DEVIL** and **THE EVIL DEAD**, complete with the latter's roaming subjective camera. The titles play over an aerial shot à la **THE SHINING** of a winding country road, on which Rose, her autistic



All illustrations this column: SATAN'S PLAYGROUND

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Rubik cube-loving son (Danny Lopes) and friends are travelling. Their car breaks down in the woods and all of them are ultimately destined to either perish outdoors - where a mysterious unseen evil presence swoops from above - or take refuge at the home of warped palm-reading Mrs Leeds (Irma St. Paule). A coke-snorting

mother of 13, Mrs Leeds has produced 'slow' offspring, represented on screen largely by a pigtailed sledgehammer-wielding deaf mute



named Judy (Christie Sanford). Warning of the Jersey Devil lurking outside, Mrs Leeds soon proves that Rose isn't safe anywhere.

The decision to incorporate an assortment of threats into the story, as opposed to fleshing out the freaky-family element, results in a sometimes disjointed experience, though the presence of the flapping creature outside does result in a

spectacular arterial-spraying throat slash in the second half. This New Jersey-shot flick benefits enormously from the unnerving sound design and score crafted by Tomaselli and Kenneth Lampl, and, at a trim 81 minutes, it's never dull. Adding to the warped mood and providing nervous laughs are the crazed St Paule and scary woman child Sanford, whose performance as the grinning Judy recalls the over-grown 'children' of underrated 80s slasher **AMERICAN GOTHIC**.

Steven West
Source Print: Anchor Bay DVD (USA)

THE HOUSE WHERE EVIL DWELLS (1982)

Directed by Kevin Connor.
88 mins. approx.

A Japanese warrior wanders home after a hard day's work. Getting a bit frisky, he thinks of his wife and then quickly speeds up his progress. Unfortunately for him, his wife is 'entertaining' a male friend and some clothes are starting to shed! Just as said warrior makes it home, he sees the silhouette of his beloved cavorting with the other man. In a jealous rage, he gets out his big weapon (his samurai sword that is!) and proceeds to slice his way through the walls of the house. Cue lots of slow-motion shots and scared reactions from the young lovers. The young male recoils in fear and doesn't have an easy ride - he gets his right arm lopped off, is then stabbed in the gut, and then to make matters worse has his head sliced clean off. His head promptly lands in between the legs of his female lover (well at least he gave her

