





NIGHTMARE CITY

CAST

HUGO STIGLITZ as Dean Miller
LAURA TROTTER as Anna Miller
MARIA ROSARIA OMAGGIO as Sheila
FRANCISCO RABAL as Major Holmes
SONIA VIVIANI as Cindy
EDUARDO FAJARDO as Kramer
STEFANIA D'AMARIO as Jessica
MEL FERRER as General Murchison

CREW

Directed by **UMBERTO LENZI**
Produced by **DIEGO ALCHIMEDE**
Written by **PIERO REGNOLI, TONY CORTI & JOSÉ LUIS DELGADO**
Director of Photography **HANS BURMAN**
Edited by **DANIELE ALABISO**
Music by **STELVIO CIPRIANI**



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FADE AWAY AND RADIATE: UMBERTO LENZI'S NIGHTMARE CITY

by John Martin

It was the international box office success of George Romero's walking dead epic *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) which alerted trend-conscious Italian producers to the filthy lucre implicit in cinematic rigor mortis. This awareness was all the more keenly felt when the first pasta knock-off off the blocks, Lucio Fulci's 1979 effort *Zombie Flesh Eaters* (aka *Zombie* and *Zombi 2*) surpassed its avatar in financial and, arguably, artistic terms. The gates of hell – to reference just one of three quick-fire Fulci follow-ups – were flung wide open in the land of The Big Boot; within (give-or-take) two years, a succession of zombie epics gouged their way across domestic and international cinema screens and surfed the nascent home video wave before, in Britain, washing up on the Director of Public Prosecution's dreaded 'Video Nasties' list.

And still they kept on coming: in 1980 alone, Marino Girolami's *Zombie Holocaust* was followed by Fulci's *City of the Living Dead* and Joe D'Amato's bet-hedging *Sexy Nights of the Living Dead*. 1981 brought Bruno Mattei's comparably shambolic *Zombie Creeping Flesh* (aka *Hell of the Living Dead*), Fulci's *The Beyond* and *The House by the Cemetery*, along with Frank Agrama's Ancient Egyptian variant *Dawn of the Mummy*. As the cycle spun down irrevocably into barrel bottom-scraping redundancy, every B-movie hack worth his salt (and some who quite clearly weren't) was grabbing himself a slice of the pustulant zombie pizza pie.

One of the more reliable genre-jumpers to contribute to this latest violent cycle of Italian cinematic imitation was Umberto Lenzi. Born in Massa Marittima in 1931, Lenzi first made his mark during the 1960s with a series of action flicks centring on the heroic exploits of the likes of Robin Hood, Samson, Sandokan (who was a big deal in Italy, if nowhere else) and the Invincible Masked Rider. Having then dabbled in Spaghetti Westerns, war epics and fumetti-inspired, sub-Diabolik comic book action (with *Kriminal*, 1966), Lenzi's next big score was in the *giallo* market – that sub-genre





inflamed by the breakout success of Dario Argento's seminal offering *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (*L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo*, 1970). Although Lenzi's *Eyeball* (*Gatti rossi in un labirinto di vetro*, 1975) took that genre as far as any other film ever did into the far reaches of gory silliness, his true legacy in this field was a steamy (for their day) series of psycho-sexual thrillers – *Orgasmo* (aka *Paranoia*) and *So Sweet... So Perverse* (*Così dolce... così perverse*), both 1969, and *Knife of Ice* (*Il coltello di ghiaccio*, 1972) – all starring his muse Carroll Baker. It's not too preposterous to see in these films the low-budget template for later Hollywood blockbusters such as *Basic Instinct* (1992); nor is it too difficult to believe, when watching the controversial Black & Decker demise of Deborah Shelton in *Body Double* (1984), that director Brian De Palma might have been drawing inspiration from a similar death-by-drill sequence in Lenzi's *Seven Bloodstained Orchids* (*Sette orchidee macchiate di rosso*, 1972).

Next up on the indefatigable genre-hopping director's agenda were several hugely enjoyable hard boiled "crime slime" epics, notably *Gang War in Milan* (*Milano rovente*, 1973), *Assault with a Deadly Weapon* (*Roma a mano armata*) and *Violent Naples* (*Napoli violenta*), both 1976. Lenzi has been sniffy about his involvement in the much-derided cannibal genre, even though he personally parlayed its emergence from the 'mondo' school of documentary film-making with *The Man from Deep River* (*Il paese del sesso selvaggio*, aka *Deep River Savages*, 1972) and contributed to it more than any director – also clocking in with the enjoyable quasi-Jonestown docudrama *Eaten Alive!* (*Mangiati vivi!*, 1980) and notorious 'nasty' *Cannibal Ferox* (aka *Make Them Die Slowly*, 1981). Depending on what mood you catch him in, he has also been dismissive of *Nightmare City*...

On days when he's gotten out of the right side of bed, however, Mr Lenzi has championed this flick as everything from an anti-pollution allegory of the then-recent industrial disaster at Seveso to a prescient early warning about AIDS. It's interesting to note that *Nightmare City* (aka *City of the Walking Dead*) is an Italian-Spanish co-production, much like Jorge Grau's uniquely unnerving 1974 take on British rural entropy, *The Living Dead at the Manchester Morgue* (aka *Let Sleeping Corpses Lie*) – another exploitation film with eco-conscious pretensions and one of the surprisingly few and belated Eurotrash responses to George Romero's inaugural zombie romp, *Night of the Living Dead* (1968).



Nightmare City opens with a news bulletin concerning "speculation regarding the real facts behind the Department of Health's announcement about a radioactive spill supposed to have occurred yesterday at the state nuclear plant". Crack investigative reporter Dean Miller (Hugo Stiglitz) is dispatched to the airport to await the arrival of Professor Otto Hagenbach, the architect of the state nuclear programme, who is allegedly going to brief everybody on the situation. His unconventional approach to this brief is to arrive in a hijacked Hercules transporter plane at the head of a bunch of pepperoni-faced zombies who jump out of the plane and proceed to cream the Iberian security forces with crow-bars, knives, machetes and blazing Uzis!

Their justification for these anti-social antics is their need to drink their victims' blood, radiation having pulverised their own platelets and corpuscles. But it's not all bad news: their enforced consumption of gamma rays and whatnot has also equipped them with superhuman strength and recuperative powers. Actually, hang on, that's pretty bad news too...

Despite having witnessed the airport attack with his own eyes, Miller is warned by his superiors, under heavy military orders, to keep a lid on things. "I am a journalist and my job is to keep the public informed", retorts our proto-Julian Assange. Sticking it to the man, he interrupts the scheduled broadcast of 'It's All Music' (a disco-dancing bad wet dream of Berlusconi-esque proportions) to tell the people the hard facts, only for his boss to pull the plug at the insistence of Mel Ferrer's hard-ass General Murchison, who is hell-bent on a cover-up. There's little chance of that though after the resumed live episode of 'It's All Music' is gate-crashed by crud-faced bloodsuckers who waste no time in chowing down on the leotard-clad dancers. "We'll follow Emergency Plan H....," barks Murchison, "... and keep Plan B in reserve, in case the situation gets out of hand," – as indeed it rapidly does, with the zombies attacking military bases and power stations.

Next up on the ghouls' itinerary is the hospital where Miller's doctor wife Anna (Laura Trotter) plies her trade. Anna is busy reassuring her favourite patient Jim that the bad dreams he's been having about losing his leg bode no ill for his promising soccer career, when the living dead roll up in A&E and wreak more havoc on the health service than a Tory minister ever could (well, comparable amounts of havoc, anyway...). We never do learn the ultimate fate of Jim's leg, nor that of any other





part of his anatomy, but there's little grounds for optimism as the wildly gurning zombies waste no time running amok on the ward, doling out gratuitous axe wounds, impromptu mastectomies and more. When they crash a busy operating theatre to suck out some plasma bags, though, the surgeon's response is as sharp as his scalpel which, without hesitation, he flings, with unerring aim, into the nearest suppurating zombie, as though this is the kind of everyday contingency which is covered in Spanish medical schools... a priceless comic moment.

As society crumbles around them, the not-so-jolly Mr and Mrs Miller make their way through an increasingly zombie-ravaged landscape, him woodenly delivering ranting monologues about the constitutional issues attendant on their predicament ("In a democratic society, nobody is allowed to interfere with the freedom of the press... for any reason whatsoever!") while she agonises over the pros and cons of technological advancement ("Coca Cola, nuclear energy... we'd be better off without all of that stuff!") – before winding things up with a climactic funfair-set standoff with the radioactive assailants.

Lenzi, ably abetted by his scriptwriters (comprising Piero 'The Playgirls and the Vampire' Regnoli, Tony Corti and José Luis Delgado) proves his film buff credentials by working a dizzying myriad of cinematic allusions into the mix: *Silkwood* (or the real-life events behind the 1983 film) and *The China Syndrome* (1979) loom as large as *Night of the Living Dead*, and there's more than a touch of *Jaws* (1975) about Miller's struggle to get the authorities to acknowledge the seriousness of the unfolding emergency. That "Phew, it was all a dream / Oh shit, no it wasn't!" ending is a clear nod to William Cameron Menzies' *Invaders from Mars* (1953) and, even further back, to Cavalcanti and co.'s *Dead of Night* (1945); while the arrival of the zombies is nicked (with an aeronautical twist) from Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) that was already anticipated in Fulci's *Zombie Flesh Eaters* and Luigi Cozzi's *Contamination* (1980). Would it be going too far to compare Jimmy's leg to the missing limb in Buñuel's *Tristana* (1970), that so fascinated Hitchcock? Probably...

In the absence of Giannetto De Rossi (the FX guru behind the Grand Guignol set-pieces of *Zombie Flesh Eaters* and *The Beyond*), various and variable gory make-up effects are supplied, alongside buckets of blood by Franco Di Girolamo (as Franco de Girolami) and Giuseppe Ferranti, while Stelvio Cipriani's sub-Goblin score keeps things

chugging along nicely as the action keeps coming thick and fast. There are incidental chuckles aplenty to be had at such subplots as General Murchison's wayward daughter Jessica (*Zombie Flesh Eaters* refugee Stefania D'Amario) attempting to enjoy her holiday plans, which keep getting interrupted by marauding deadsters.

It would be remiss, of course, not to touch upon the performance of charisma bypass victim Hugo Stiglitz in the central role of Dean Miller. It's fair to say that the prolific Mexican actor, who has starred in some of the more outrageous burritosploitation offerings from various generations of the Cardona clan (e.g. the 1976 true-life cannibalism epic *Survive!* and the rather self-explanatory *The Night of a Thousand Cats*, 1972), struggles, in the immortal words of Dorothy Parker, to register the full range of emotions from A to B.

Lenzi has conceded that he wanted either Tomas Milian or John Saxon in the leading role, but neither were available at the time. Still, Quentin Tarantino – an unabashed admirer of *Nightmare City* – likes Stiglitz well enough to have named a character after him in his *Inglourious Basterds* (2009). When I interviewed him in 1992, Tarantino gushed: "I just love the fact that the zombies in this movie can run, shoot machine guns, fly planes... fuck, man! It's no fun being chased by a zombie and he can run as fast as you!" And Tarantino wasn't the only one impressed by Lenzi's innovations on the zombie genre, as witnessed by the plethora of lively dead overrunning any amount of currently voguish big-budget American TV series.

Is that then, the extent of *Nightmare City's* legacy? The film's pretensions to social commentary can be easily dismissed – or rather, they could be at the time of its release. In these post Chernobyl, post-Fukushima days... well, maybe it won't be too long before General Murchison is dusting off Emergency Plans H and B again...

John Martin has been a commentator on exploitation cinema and censorship issues for nearly thirty years and is the author of Seduction of the Gullible: The Truth Behind the Video Nasty Scandal.

ABOUT THE RESTORATION

Nightmare City (*Incubo sulla città contaminata*) is presented in its original aspect ratio of 2.35:1 with mono sound.

Nightmare City has been exclusively restored in 2K resolution for this release by Arrow Films.

The original 2-perf Techniscope negative was scanned in 2K resolution on a pin-registered Arriscan at Immagine Ritrovata, Bologna. The film was graded on the Baselight grading system at Deluxe Restoration, London. Thousands of instances of dirt, debris and light scratches were removed through a combination of digital restoration tools.

Unfortunately at some point during their history the negative elements for *Nightmare City* were subjected to heavy damage and photochemical decay, resulting in regular instances of heavy density fluctuation/image flicker, colour fluctuation and chemical stains. These instances of damage appear intermittently throughout the film.

Alternative source elements were examined, but the only other existing pre-print element, a 4-perf reversal dupe negative, proved to be of unacceptable quality. As a result, this project relied completely on the damaged but complete original negative as its picture source. In doing so, although much of the worst instances of damage have been minimised, this presentation still shows the considerable problems with the material.

The film's mono soundtracks were transferred from the original optical sound negatives by Minerva Films. Some minor instances of noise still remain, in keeping with the condition of the materials.

There are times in which the film's audio synch will appear slightly loose against the picture, due to the fact that the soundtrack was recorded entirely in post production. This is correct and as per the original theatrical release of *Nightmare City*.

Restoration Supervised by **James White, Arrow Films**

Scanning and audio transfer services by **Immagine Ritrovata, Bologna**:
Restoration Department Management: **Alessia Navantieri, Davide Pozzi**
Scanning/Technical: **Julia Mettenleiter, Caterina Palpacelli, Elena Tammaccaro**

Restoration services by **Deluxe Restoration, London**:
Basilight colour grading: **Stephen Bearman**
Restoration Department Management: **Mark Bonnici, Graham Jones**
Restoration Department Supervisors: **Tom Barrett, Clayton Baker**
Restoration Technicians: **Debi Bataller, Dave Burt, Lisa Copson, Tom Wiltshire**

Audio Transfer: **Minerva Films**

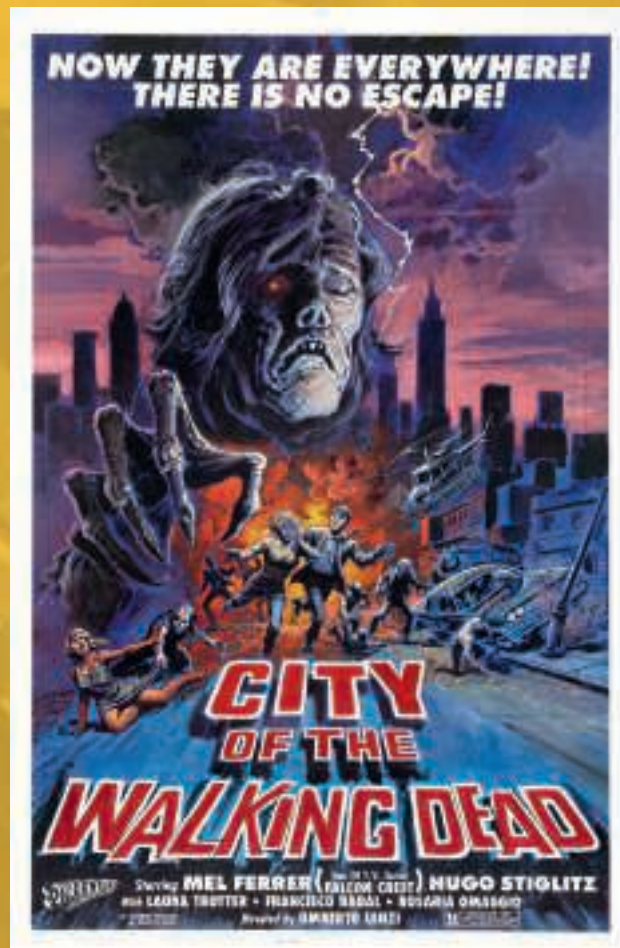
This release also provides the option of viewing *Nightmare City* from a High Definition Restored version produced by Minerva Films/Raro Video. This version used the aforementioned 35mm 4-perf reversal negative as its source element, and as such appears much softer overall in comparison with the 2-perf negative sourced Arrow restoration. This element was not subjected to the same damage as the negative and as a result, appears much cleaner overall. However, unlike the Arrow presentation, grain management and other DNR-type processing software tools were used to achieve the results of this presentation.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by: **Ewan Cant**
Executive Producer: **Francesco Simeoni**
Production Assistants: **Louise Buckler, Liane Cunje**
Technical Producer: **James White**
QC and Proofing: **Ewan Cant, Nora Mehenni**
Subtitling: **IBF**
Authoring: **David Mackenzie**
Artist: **Graham Humphreys**
Design: **Jack Pemberton**

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Chris Alexander, Michael Brooke,
Giulia Casavecchia/Minerva Pictures, Chris Collier,
Gianluca Curti/Minerva Pictures, Craig Ennis, Umberto Lenzi,
Alessia Navantieri/Immagine Ritrovata, Maria Rosaria Omaggio,
Roberto D'Onofrio, Luigi Pastore, Davide Pozzi/Immagine Ritrovata,
Ilaria Ricci/Minerva Pictures and Eli Roth.





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