

what's at the movies

CAT PEOPLE (R). Erotic, nightmarish film about young woman (Nastassia Kinski) whose life is tied to strange cult of the black leopard.

CHARIOTS OF FIRE (PG). True and compelling story of two runners. One runs for the glory of God, the other to battle bigotry. Outstanding and elevating movie.

DEATHTRAP (PG). The film version of Ira Levin's comedy suspense thriller starring Michael Caine, Christopher Reeve and Dyan Cannon.

FANTASIA (G). The Disney classic of visual images matched to music returns again and with a new soundtrack.

HOUSE OF WAX (PG). Classic 3-D horror movie of all time is re-released. Starring Vincent Price, Frank Jovey, Phyllis Kirk and Charles Bronson.

I OUGHT TO BE IN PICTURES (PG). Heavy-handed Neil Simon comedy about Hollywood has been (Walter Matthau) whose daughter shows up after 16-year separation looking for a film career.

A LITTLE SEX (R). A newly married man (Tim Matheson) finds himself continually tempted by the women he encounters.

MONTENEGRO. Film of a woman's desire and need to escape, starring Susan Anspach and Svetozar Cvetkovic as Montenegro.

ON GOLDEN POND (PG). Beautiful, sensitive and humorous film about an older couple's 48th summer at the cottage as they reflect on their lives and relationships. With Katharine Hepburn and Henry Fonda.

PORKY'S (R). Director Bob Clark's rowdy, raunchy comedy of adolescence derives its title from the name of a notorious redneck dive, to which six lusty teen-agers are hypnotically drawn.

QUEST FOR FIRE (R). This science-fiction epic follows three courageous warriors forced to venture beyond their tribal lands when their life-sustaining flame is lost during a battle.

ROBIN HOOD (G). Exploits of the merry men of Sherwood Forest and their fearless leader get a new twist by Walt Disney in this animated feature (G).

TRAGEDY OF A RIDICULOUS MAN (PG). Study of an Italian factory owner who must face and deal with conflicts within himself, the kidnapping of his son and business problems simultaneously. Stars Ugo Tognazzi and Anouk Aimee.

MOVIE RATING GUIDE

- G General audiences admitted.
PG Parental guidance suggested. All ages admitted.
R Restricted. Adult must accompany person under 18.
X No one under 18 admitted.



Black leopard, with a deadly secret, roars disapproval at being caged in New Orleans zoo.



the movies

Louise Snider

New 'Cat People' dwells in realm of erotic fantasy

Is it possible to not like a film but still find it fascinating? Certainly. "Cat People" (R) falls into that category for me.

I don't care for the grisly scenes. There is one, in particular, in which a man has his arm ripped off. Blood spurts from the torn artery and bare bone protrudes from the socket.

There are other repulsive scenes which can best be described as "yech!" This same movie, however, has the compelling quality of a myth that captures the viewer's imagination and doesn't let go.

It begins in a myth-like way with hot colors, blowing sands and sensual music. In this timeless, unspecified place, a strange ritual of sacrifice is being conducted.

THE SCENE THEN shifts to New Orleans and the present. Emphasis on the eerie and mysterious qualities of the city and its surroundings make it an ideal site for perpetuating the myth.

Paul Schrader, the director of "Cat People," has created an erotic supernatural fantasy that takes place in the real world. The actual story sounds more silly than scary, but by charging it with sexual energy, maintaining a tense atmosphere and incorporating religious references, Schrader creates a powerful cinematic experience.

The premise (don't expect a rational explanation) is that in some distant time and place women were sacrificed to leopards, and there developed a strain of leopards with human souls and humans of leopard ancestry. The human can only mate with other "cat people," otherwise, they turn back into leopards.

Irena (Nastassia Kinski), unknown to her, is one of these cat people. She travels to New Orleans to live with her brother Paul (Malcolm McDowell) who has sent for her. They had been separated as children after their parents' deaths.

Paul tells Irena of their origins and their sexual need for each other. She runs from him in horror, and he goes on a rampage of lust and killing. McDowell handles his role adeptly. His pleasing, open face changes to a sadistic grin as he makes incestuous advances to Kinski.

IN KINSKI, the director has found the perfect actress to convey both innocence and sensuality. Her amazingly mobile face fits the duality of her role as does her body — slim as the young virgin, lithe as the seductress.

Amette O'Toole brings a healthy dose of normality to the situation as a zoo employee with a crush on the head curator, Oliver (John Heard).

However, she is a bit too normal for him. He finds himself attracted to Irena, perhaps sensing the duality of her being.

The New Orleans zoo, where Irena also works, is itself a bleak place where the sleek beauty of a captured panther contrasts with the ugliness of its prison. It reinforces the notion that Schrader uses this fantasy of the cat people as a metaphor for dealing with a variety of sexual attitudes and taboos.

Incest, bondage, virgin sacrifice and promiscuity are some of the themes which occur. The leopards, caged or free, suggest a corollary to sexual drive, shackled or unleashed.

The "Cat People" originally was produced in 1942 by horror master Val Lewton and directed by Jacques Tourneur. Alan Ormsby rewrote the script and Schrader infused it with erotic tension borne on a Calvinist conscience. The result is a unique supernatural fantasy, beguiling to view, if far from purr-fect.



Irena (Nastassia Kinski) is wide awake after she hears the cry of a leopard in her room.

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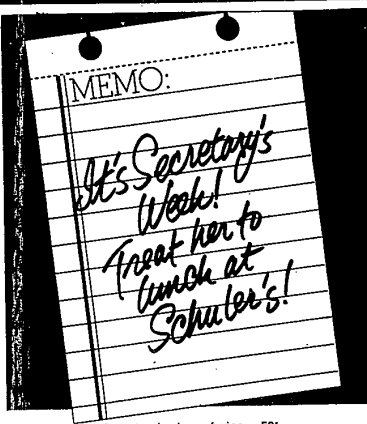
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