

Milestone Film & Video presents:
Curtis Harrington's

Night Tide

Starring:
Dennis Hopper
Linda Lawson
Luana Anders

*And so, all the night-tide, I lay down by the side
Of my darling, my darling, my life and my bride,
In her sepulchre there by the sea,
In her tomb by the sounding sea.*

- *Annabel Lee* by Edgar Allan Poe

*Was she human?
Sensual ecstasy becomes supernatural terror!
A Unique Experience in the Weird and Terrifying!*

*Was she human?
or was she a beautiful temptress from the sea,
intent upon loving, consuming and killing?*

Eerie ... Strange ... Macabre ... Lovers caught in a dark tide of sinister TERROR!

— From the AIP ad campaigns

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Night Tide

Written and Directed by Curtis Harrington

Cast

Dennis Hopper	Johnny Drake
Linda Lawson	Mora
Gavin Muir	Capt. Samuel Murdock
Luana Anders	Ellen Sands
Cameron (Parsons)	Woman in Black
Marjorie EatonMme.	Romanovitch
H.E. West	Lt. Henderson
Thomas P. Dillon	Merry-Go-Round Owner
Bruno ve Sota	Man on stairs leading to Mora's apartment
Ben Roseman	

Production Team

Producer	Aram Kantarian
Executive Producer	Jules Schwartz
H. Duane Weaver	Associate Producer
Director, Screenwriter	Curtis Harrington
Assistant Director	Karl Romaine
Cinematographer	Vilis Lapenieks
Interior Cinematography	Floyd Crosby
Composer	David Raksin
Bongo Drums	Chaino
Additional Music	“Seaweed” by Jimmy Bond “The Tell Tale Harp” by David Raksin
Editor	Jodie Copelan
Music editor	Sid Sidney
Sound editor	Marvin Walowitz
Production Designer	Paul Mathison
Production assistants	David Blewitt and David McDonald
Choreography	Benjamin Zemach
Script Supervisor	Joyce King

Production: Virgo Productions

Distributed by: American International Pictures (AIP) [us]

Presented by Filmgroup.

Original 35mm negative courtesy of the David and Shari Pierce collection.

Filmed in 1961 in Venice, Santa Monica and Malibu, California

USA. 84 minutes. Black & White. In English. Aspect Ratio: 1:1.66.

World premiere: 1961 Venice International Film Festival

US premiere: February 13, 1963, Detroit.

Synopsis

While on leave in Southern California, lonely sailor Johnny Drake (Dennis Hopper) meets the beautiful, sullen Mora (Linda Lawson) at the Blue Grotto, a local jazz club. The girl tries to avoid his advances, wanting nothing to do with him. Then a strange woman dressed in black comes by and in a strange language, curses Mora. The girl is obviously unnerved and runs out of the club. Johnny chases her, calms her down, and soon is able to charm her.

Mora works as a mermaid at the Goldfish Bowl, a boardwalk attraction on the Santa Monica pier owned by a Captain Murdock. She lives in an apartment above a merry-go-round, overlooking the ocean. Murdock has raised the beautiful star of his show since he found her as a young orphan on the Greek island of Mykonos. He darkly warns Johnny to beware of her. Johnny learns from Ellen Sands, the attractive daughter of the merry-go-round owner, that two of Mora's previous boyfriends had died very mysteriously by drowning. But neither death could be traced to Mora ...

Johnny and Mora are in love. But something holds her back. She fears what will become of their relationship. One day, Johnny sees the woman in black and, hoping to get some answers, follows her through the streets and alleys to a forbidding part of town. He loses her in a maze of buildings, but discovers that he has been led to the Captain's house. Here, after several drinks, Murdock discloses the secret: although Mora performs a mermaid act at the carnival, to her it's no act. She believes that she is the descendant of an underwater race that must kill by the light of the full moon to survive. He warns again that the sailor is in “grave and serious danger.”

Johnny leaves the Captain's house, not believing the odd man's drunken story. At breakfast, Mora notes that it is a full moon coming up and it is the best time to go skin diving in the ocean. Johnny accepts her invitation. While they are underwater, she takes her knife and cuts his air hose. Johnny struggles to escape, barely managing to get to the surface and the boat alive. Mora has disappeared.

Johnny returns to the amusement pier out of a deep curiosity. He enters the Goldfish Bowl and looks into her tank. There he sees her dead body. Captain Murdock enters holding a gun. He accuses Johnny of killing Mora and starts shooting. Two policeman hear the shots and apprehend Murdock.

Murdock confesses that to prevent his adopted daughter and sideshow star from leaving him, he had convinced her of the Sea People story. But because Mora loved Johnny, she literally cut him loose from her, swimming into the depths of the ocean so she would not kill again.

Background

Night Tide had an auspicious debut, premiering at the 1961 Venice International Film Festival. However, one of the producers of the film held up its release over money squabbles so it was nearly two years before Roger Corman's Filmgroup (which had helped raise the money) and AIP released the film. Even then, it was badly released. It was shown around the country as a double-bill; first with *The Raven* and later with *Battle Beyond the Sun*, a Russian science-fiction film re-cut for American audiences by Corman's then-employees, Francis Ford Coppola and Jack Hill. The release was a disaster and the film soon disappeared. But New York Times critic, Howard Thompson saw *Night Tide* at a 42nd Street theater (a "dive" Harrington would later say) and championed the picture, which then re-opened at the prestigious 55th Street Playhouse. Thompson took his friends to the film, including Truman Capote, who became a fan of Harrington's work.

"Night Tide was my original screenplay, based on an unpublished short story of mine called "The Secrets of the Sea." I had raised the financing for it, about \$50,000 in cash. The total cost was between \$75,000 and \$80,000, but the actual cash outlay was only \$50,000. It was shot on a four-week schedule.

"The plot structure of Night Tide is not dissimilar to The Cat People, the girl doomed by her heritage. I had particularly admired The Cat People, I Walked with a Zombie and The Leopard Man when I was younger.

"The underlying myth is kind of general, that the Lorelei, or mermaids, lure seafaring men to their destruction. The Siren's call is very alluring; as the men respond to their song, their ship is dashed upon the rocks, and sinks. It's a portion of the legend of the fatal woman.

"I met [Dennis Hopper] socially and he had expressed an admiration for some of my short experimental films. I also liked him as a young, up-and-coming actor, so I gave him the script. I was very pleased he agreed to do it — I know that Dennis, whenever there is a retrospective of his films, insists Night Tide be shown."

— Bill Kelly interview with Curtis Harrington in *Video Watchdog*, Nov/Dec. 1992

Like Val Lewton, many of Harrington's films juxtapose an ordinary, everyday reality with barely glimpsed images of the seemingly bizarre and supernatural to create a world of terror in the viewer's imagination. Borrowed from Lewton are the exotic, mysteriously cursed femme fatale, the sincere boyfriend, and a sympathetic young girl-next-door secretly in love with the boyfriend. Then there's a strange woman who appears to acknowledge the curse,

the older man interested in keeping the girl for himself, and the loud sound effect (Lewton's bus in Central Park vs. Harrington's quick cut to the merry-go-round) to shock the audience. To this, Harrington added camera zooms, verbal and visual clues, and David Raksin's eerie score. There's also a brief reference to Lewis Carroll, as Dennis Hopper chases the woman in black through Venice. It's reminiscent of Alice chasing the White Rabbit through Wonderland.

In an early interview, Harrington speaks of another interest:

"There are two dream sequences in the film. The line between dream and reality becomes very thin. The dreams are not unreal in the usual sense, I prefer the French irréal. They are not so much unreal as there is simply a shift in perception. These dreams represent the unconsciousness of the hero."

— *Film Quarterly*, Spring 1961

Harrington took time off from his job as Jerry Wald's assistant at Twentieth Century-Fox to make *Night Tide*. It took four weeks to shoot the film and four more to edit it.

"Directing this dialogue film was a new experience. All my experimental films were conceived as silent films, then had sound added. However, this was a carefully considered film, although the first scene involving a large number of people gave me some trouble. After this first day I knew in advance what I wanted, so I was fairly certain to be covered."

— *Film Quarterly*, Spring 1961

Aram Kantarian, the producer, was a contract negotiator at MCA. Hollywood's Pathé labs put up the principal financing thanks to some convincing from famed independent producer, Roger Corman. Another large portion of the money came from two film financiers and the rest from friends and family. Still, the whole film was continuously short of cash, which gave rise to great creativity in the filmmaking.

Many of the film's sets were actual places that Harrington borrowed for free. The Blue Grotto was a real jazz nightclub down on Cuehenga Boulevard in Los Angeles. Harrington peopled the set with many of his friends and there's a brief glimpse of Barbette, the famed artist who had appeared thirty years before that in Jean Cocteau's *Blood of a Poet*. The flutist in the scene is Paul Horn, later a well-known jazz musician. Many of the actors were also old friends, including Hopper, Cameron, and Marjorie Eaton — Eaton was Harrington's favorite character actress. Harrington had tried to cast the role of Captain Murdock first with Peter Lorre and then with French actor Marcel Dalio, but was unable to afford either one.

There were two sets for Mora's apartment. The balcony where Mora and Johnny share a seafood breakfast was particularly imaginative. They merely set-up a table and a curtain of beads (to denote the doorway) on the pier over-looking the ocean. The exterior of Captain Murdock's house was the former estate of silent film star Mae Murray. The sideshow was set up at a local carnival, Long Beach Pike, now long gone. Production designer Paul Mathison created the gigantic poster advertising Mora and used his own visual clue: the bottom of the poster blares out "Alive" in large letters. These words are missing in the climactic scene. Ironically, the one thing they spent money on got them into trouble. Harrington had Dennis Hopper's sailor uniform specially made, and then as usual in film, dyed it off-white so it wouldn't glare on screen. One day, they passed by the Navy's Military Police who promptly picked up Hopper for having a dirty uniform!

Despite the struggles, it was an extremely happy shoot. Hopper worked hard until the last scheduled day, when he was so depressed that the filming was ending that he got drunk and

got into a bad motorcycle accident. Cast and crew had to reconvene two weeks later to complete the last shot.

Curtis Harrington

(September 17, 1928 —)

“The terror of waiting for the final revelation, not the seeing of it, is the most powerful dramatic stimulus toward tension and fright.”

— Curtis Harrington, *Hollywood Quarterly*, 1952.

Curtis Harrington started as an amateur filmmaker at the age of fourteen when he made a version of *The Fall of the House of Usher*. He was an essential part of the West Coast experimental renaissance that started with Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid’s *Meshes of the Afternoon*. Harrington learned from Deren’s writings an important lesson:

“Maya felt that, in essence, a poetic reality could be created by using the very realistic nature of film, by using the realism of the real setting, the real location, and having an imaginative act take place in that setting, thus conferring on the event a sense of reality; this was the idea”

— *Film Culture*, volume 34

The avant-garde renaissance really blossomed when Harrington met up with friends and fellow filmmakers Kenneth Anger and Gregory Markopoulos. The experimental films Harrington created, such as *Fragment of Seeking* (1946), *Picnic* (1948), *On the Edge* (1949), *The Assassination* (1952) and *The Wormwood Star* (1956, a color film featuring the mystical art works of Cameron, who appears in *Night Tide*) remain essential viewing today. Harrington also starred in Kenneth Anger’s classic 1954 experimental short *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (playing Cesare the somnambulist from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*).

Harrington was one of the first filmmakers to study his craft at film school, attending the University of Southern California long before George Lucas and John Milius. (Markopoulos, who started his own filmmaking career at 12, roomed across the hall from Harrington.) Harrington was also one of the first experimental filmmakers to work in Hollywood, twenty years before the 1970s invasion of David Cronenberg, David Lynch and John Waters. An assistant to producer Jerry Wald in the early 1950s, Harrington became an associate producer in 1955 working on the Humphrey Bogart film *The Harder they Fall* and Tyrone Power’s *The Eddie Duchin Story*. When Wald moved to 20th Century Fox, Harrington helped develop and script *Peyton Place* (1957), Pat Boone’s *Mardi Gras* (1958), Don Siegel’s *Hound-Dog Man* (1960) and *Return to Peyton Place* (1961).

In 1952, Harrington wrote what is probably the first serious analysis of the horror genre. He began his feature career with *Night Tide*, intending to make films in the tradition of Val Lewton’s (*Cat People*, *I Walked With a Zombie*): horror films based on the power of suggestion which emphasized atmosphere and psychology rather than make-up and special effects. *“Many of the themes and visual motifs of Harrington’s avant-garde works appear in these horror features, themes of desire and fate, of haunted realities, of poetic, anguished quests, and their literary qualities only benefit from the humor and sense of the fantastic Harrington brings to the genre.”* — *Film Calendar of the Pacific Film Archive*, Berkeley

Harrington’s other two notable influences were directors Josef Von Sternberg and James Whale. Whale befriended the young filmmaker and Harrington later repaid the friendship by helping to save and preserve Whale’s great mystery/comedy *The Old Dark House*.

Harrington's films range from low-budget science fiction, *Queen of Blood* and the possession terror tale, *Ruby*, to thrillers: *Games*, *What's The Matter with Helen?* and *Who Slew Auntie Roo?*. Since the 1970s, Harrington has also worked regularly in television, helming horror films such as *Killer Bees*, *The Cat Creature* and *Devil Dog: The Hound of Hell*, as well as episodes of *Baretta*, *Charlie's Angels*, *Dynasty*, *Vegas*, *Hotel*, and *The Twilight Zone*.

Filmography

Night Tide (1961), *Voyage to the Prehistoric Planet* (1965), *The Legend of Jesse James*, (1965, TV Series), *Queen of Blood* (1966), *Games* (1967), *How Awful About Allan* (1970, TV), *Who Slew Auntie Roo?* (1971), *What's the Matter with Helen?* (1971), *The Killing Kind* (1973), *The Cat Creature* (1973, TV), *The Dead Don't Die* (1974, TV), *Killer Bees* (1974, TV), *Charlie's Angels* (1976, TV Series), *Ruby* (1977), *Devil Dog: The Hound of Hell* (1978, TV), *Darkroom* (1981, TV Series), *Mata Hari* (1985), *The Twilight Zone* (1985, TV Series, episode *Voices in the Earth* (1987)

Dennis Hopper

(May 17, 1936 —)

Dennis Hopper was born in Dodge City, Kansas and learned his craft at the Globe Theatre in San Diego and the Actors Studio. Although appearing in several of the great films of the 1950s including *Johnny Guitar*, *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Giant*, Curtis Harrington was the first director to cast Dennis Hopper in a lead role in *Night Tide*. J. Hoberman observed: "Where another actor might have settled for bland sappiness, Hopper textures his naiveté with a borderline hysteria." Hopper's independent, rebellious characters have always been true to his own personality. He has become an important American myth much like his young cohort in *Rebel without a Cause*, James Dean. His later work has been just as influential with Wim Wenders' *The American Friend*, David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* and Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*. His multi-talented career also includes international fame as director (*Easy Rider* and *Colors*) writer, and photographer.

Select Filmography

The Jagged Edge (1955), *I Died a Thousand Times* (1955), *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), *Giant* (1956), *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* (1957), *Night Tide* (1961), *The Sons of Katie Elder* (1965), *Queen of Blood* (1966), *The Trip* (1967), *Cool Hand Luke* (1967), *True Grit* (1969), *Easy Rider* (1969), *Tracks* (1976), *The American Friend* (1977), *Apocalypse Now* (1979), *The Osterman Weekend* (1983), *Rumble Fish* (1983), *My Science Project* (1985), *River's Edge* (1986), *Black Widow* (1986), *Hoosiers* (1986), *Blue Velvet* (1986), *The Indian Runner* (1991), *Red Rock West* (1992), *Boiling Point* (1993), *True Romance* (1993), *Speed* (1994), *Waterworld* (1995).

Linda Lawson

(January 14, 1936 —)

Born Linda Gloria Spaziani, Lawson acted in films including *Sometimes a Great Notion* (1971), *Let's Kill Uncle* (1966) and *Apache Rifles* (1964), but she is best known for her excellent television work spanning more than forty years. She has appeared in such classic television series as *The Millionaire*, *Mike Hammer*, *Peter Gunn*, *77 Sunset Strip*, *Sea Hunt*, *Maverick*, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, *Wagon Train*, *Perry Mason* and even *Saved by the Bell*. An article on Lawson appeared in the January 1996 issue of "Filmfax." Shortly after *Night Tide*, Lawson married John Forman, the producer and partner of Paul Newman and partly retired from Hollywood.

Select Filmography

Sometimes a Great Notion (1971), *Let's Kill Uncle* (1966), *Apache Rifles* (1964), "Don't Call Me Charlie" (1962, TV Series), *Night Tide* (1961), *The Threat* (1960), "Adventures in Paradise" (1959, TV Series).

Gavin Muir

(September 8, 1900 — May 1972)

An American character actor educated in England, Muir appeared in Hollywood films from the mid-1930s through the 1960s. He often affected a British-style accent in his portrayals of effete, shifty types. He appeared in such films as *Escape to Burma* (1955), *Abbott and Costello Meet the Invisible Man* (1951), *Unconquered* (1947), *Sherlock Holmes Faces Death* (1943), *Hitler's Children* (1942), *Mary of Scotland* (1936) and *Lloyd's of London* (1936).

Luana Anders

(May 12, 1938 — July 21, 1996)

Luana Anders had a long and distinguished career in offbeat, often interesting American independent films. The excellent work she did early in her career with Roger Corman in the fifties and sixties paid off when her friends Dennis Hopper hired her for *Easy Rider* (1969) and Jack Nicholson hired her for several important films. Her best work was in *The Two Jakes* (1990) *Border Radio* (1987), *Irreconcilable Differences* (1984), *One From the Heart* (1982), *Personal Best* (1982), *Goin' South*, (1978), *The Missouri Breaks* (1976), *Shampoo* (1975), *The Killing Kind* (1973), *The Last Detail* (1973), *Greaser's Palace* (1972), *Games* (1967), *The Trip* (1967), *Dementia 13* (1963), *Night Tide* (1961), *The Pit and the Pendulum* (1958). Anders was beloved and admired by all who worked with her. Dennis Hopper said of her: "She's so wonderful. A great actress. She was so simple, so endearing, so full of life." Luana Anders died of cancer in 1996. In his 1998 Oscar speech for Best Actor, Jack Nicholson paid homage to her in his acceptance speech.

"When I was cast in Night Tide I was a rebellious young Hollywood actress wanting to be creative in what I felt was a climate of stifling conformity. Therefore I was thrilled to work with Curtis Harrington, a director of what we used to call "art" films, meaning those films that portrayed life's more elusive aspects. I remember Curtis as a young director who was diligent, imbued with a vision, and easy to work with."

— Video Watchdog interview with Luana Anders, Nov/Dec. 1992 issue

David Raksin

(August 4, 1912 —)

David Raksin studied under the great composer Arnold Schoenberg. Raksin first gained notice as the "arranger" for Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936) and fame for his score for *Laura* (1944). Raksin's wide range of compositions include orchestral and chamber works as well as scores for ballet, stage, television and film scores for *Laura*, *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (1947), *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952), *Pat and Mike* (1952), *Suddenly* (1954), *Night Tide* and *Will Penny* (1968). Raksin was nominated for two Oscars for his scores for *Forever Amber* (1947) and *Separate Tables* (1958). Today, a teacher at USC, Raksin is one of the great composers from Hollywood's golden era.

Vilis Lapenieks, Cinematographer

The son of a Latvian cinematographer, Vilis Lapenieks worked most in the horror genre. Among the films he worked on include *Kiss Daddy Goodbye* (1981), *The Trial of Lee Harvey Oswald* (1977, TV), *If It's Tuesday, This Must Be Belgium* (1969), *Queen of Blood* (1966) and *Voyage to the Prehistoric Planet* (1965). He and Harrington worked closely together on the look of *Night Tide*. Their influences included Lewton, Von Sternberg, Michelangelo Antonioni and Robert Bresson.

Floyd Crosby, Interior Cinematographer
(December 12, 1899 — September 30, 1986)

Floyd Delafield Crosby was born in New York and studied at the New York Institute of Photography. In 1928, Crosby met filmmaking pioneer Robert Flaherty. Crosby and Flaherty were destined to be lifelong friends and collaborators, working together on *Acoma*, *Tabu* and *The Land*. Although Crosby's Oscar for *Tabu* should have launched him on a long and successful career in Hollywood, in fact it did just the opposite. Crosby did not shoot in Hollywood again for twenty years. He spent most of the 1930s travelling in North and South America, working for various explorers and expeditions. Crosby returned to the US to shoot *The River* for Pare Lorentz. The two worked together on several critically acclaimed films which helped establish Crosby as one of America's finest cinematographers. In 1950, Crosby photographed Robert Rossen's *The Brave Bulls* — his first real chance to prove himself on a major Hollywood film. His next job firmly established Crosby's reputation — Fred Zinnemann's classic western *High Noon*.

In 1955, Floyd Crosby shot *Five Guns West* for a young director named Roger Corman. Their association lasted eight years, culminating in the classic series of Edgar Allan Poe horror features. When Curtis Harrington needed another cinematographer for the interior scenes on *Night Tide*, Roger Corman suggested that he hire Crosby. Crosby's work was uncredited due to union regulations. During the 1950s and 1960s, Crosby photographed such cult classics as *She Gods of Shark Reef*, *Attack of the Crab Monsters*, *Machine Gun Kelly*, *The House of Usher*, *The Pit and the Pendulum*, *The Raven*, *X — The Man with the X-Ray Eyes*, *Pajama Party*, *Beach Blanket Bingo* and *How To Stuff a Wild Bikini*. Crosby retired in 1967 and died in September 1985. His wife Betty and sons Ethan and David (of Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young) survive him.

Milestone would like to thank first and foremost *Film Comment* and *Video Watchdog* for its groundbreaking issues on Curtis Harrington.

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