

johnny cool

Contributed by chris d.
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I'm cast in an early 1960s movie called Johnny Cool, but it has nothing to do with the Henry Silva mob picture from the same period. The main character in this movie — who is coincidentally played by Henry Silva — is taken over by demons he has accidentally invoked from smoking too much dope.

He climbs up on the narrow single bed, straddles his prone best friend and laughs loudly and fiendishly as twilight turns to darkness. The lights in the girls' dormitory next door blink on in scattershot alarm.

The film has a priceless cast, even though half of them were already dead in real life when this nocturnal dream thriller went into production. Fred Clark and another similar, unidentified character actor — maybe Frank Faylen? — play hucksters promoting rock concerts. I talk to them in between takes, sitting in the bleachers in a badly constructed approximation of the Inglewood Forum. Fred harrumphs, "Yeah, I'm great for the part. But this movie is a piece of shit!"

Elsewhere on the large interior set is a model of the Forum's exclusive clubhouse for rock stars, their groupies, their promoters and their high-rolling fans. The Forum proprietors are played by Patrick McGoohan and Robert Vaughn, and they are really evil guys, the villains of the piece, despite the logo over the entrance which features a neon replica of an Easter basket framed by the motto "Free milk, cookies and candy — always!"

Then abruptly I'm in another a movie — maybe a sequel? A young Edmond O'Brien is roommates with Tim Curry, he of The Rocky Horror Picture Show. Edmond is a beat writer type, but straight and square. When he learns that Tim has been hooking youngsters on grass, he freaks out and waits for Tim in their room to jump him. When a nebbishy friend enters instead, Ed clobbers him and almost knocks him out. Then Tim shows up, makes some smart-ass comments, waggles his eyebrows like Groucho, then runs down the stairs before Ed can grab him.

We dolly out in one continuous shot to an exterior, a street that looks like La Brea crossed with Fountain Avenue in Hollywood and maybe some deserted New Orleans boulevard. I stumble with Ed onto a traffic island as we scan the empty neighborhood for the fleeing, wisecracking fugitive. It's the red light district, and there are massage parlors on every corner. I can't help wondering aloud if maybe Barbara Payton will show up soon in this picture.

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