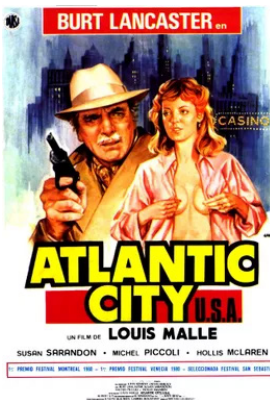


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darkness at noon



Atlantic City (1980) film notes by Tova Gannana

Atlantic City (1980) opens with lemons being halved, with the sound of a knife cutting through the lemons. Sally Matthews (Susan Sarandon) in her kitchen is performing her nightly ritual. She plays opera on a tape deck as she squeezes lemons on her neck, arms, and breasts. She rubs in the citrus then washes herself in her white ceramic sink. She is framed by curtains, lit by a bare bulb bright like a star. Sally is being watched from across the way by her neighbor Lou Pascal (Burt Lancaster) who lights a cigarette in the dark of his apartment. Lou has lived in Atlantic City since the song “On the Boardwalk in Atlantic City” hit the airwaves; Sally has recently arrived. All around the city buildings are being knocked down slowly to make room for casinos. Debris is everywhere, unnoticed. The city appears shipwrecked, run ashore.

Luck like possibility blows in different directions. Sally’s estranged husband Dave (Robert Joy) and her pregnant sister Chrissie (Hollis McLaren) are hitching on the highway with stolen dope from Philadelphia. They ride into Atlantic City on a truck bed looking for Sally, who by them does not want to be found. Dave and Chrissie in their hippie clothing, bearded and braided, look out of place in Atlantic City, but then Atlantic City looks out of place in Reagan’s America. Atlantic City has gone through each decade begrudgingly, holding on to the days when Betty Grable look-alike contests crowded the boardwalk.



This is how one arrives in Atlantic City, as a contestant, a player, a sun seeker, and if you are a believer you stay. On the floor below Lou and Sally, Grace (Kate Reid), a pink bow in her hair and blue eyeshadow on her eyelids, lives in bed. “He’s my servant,” she says of Lou because Lou used to run errands for Grace’s deceased gangster husband Cookie Panser. In Atlantic City it’s all about connections; what you did once you will do forever. Lou irons his red tie then goes downstairs to fix Grace eggs and hash. A bottle of bourbon he places on her tray. On the stairs, Lou passes Sally as she brings Chrissie and Dave up to her place. Neither Lou or Sally want these distractions. Because of Dave, Sally lost her license in Vegas. Because of Sally, Lou goes to the supermarket to look at lemons; he’ll tell this to her later.



People talk about themselves; it sounds like they’re talking about the bygone dreams of an aging city. “You know I always wanted shoes with clear plastic heels you could see through with live goldfish swimming in them,” Grace says to Lou while lying in bed, “wouldn’t that be swift. I’d have to walk so delicate.” Lou drinks from the bottle he brought her; he pockets her silver cigarette case. Because Lou saw Dave on the stairs with Sally he lets Dave use his kitchen table to cut his dope. Lou walks with Dave through Atlantic City to make his deal. Lou brags to Dave about his past, “You work for the people who work for the people. I was taken a shine to.” Overlooking the boardwalk, as Lou and

Dave pass below, Sally stands with Joseph, her French croupier instructor (Michel Piccoli), the one who gave her the opera cassette. He whispers into her ear, “You learn to deal and the whole world will open up to you. It’s not just cards it’s your future. I hate you going back to that oyster bar. The world should be your oyster.” Later he will try to pimp her on the casino floor. On

this day standing with the Atlantic at her back she says, “I’ve got so much to learn. I don’t even know how to count in French. Do you think you could teach me?” Sally stands at the oyster bar, the sign behind her in neon like a signature, reflecting on the counter in front of her. In the locker room at the casino, she searches for her wallet in her purse; Dave has stolen it. In Atlantic City only gangsters and tourists have cars. Sally walks to and from work with her stereo playing opera from inside her purse. “You smell you know that? Like a can of rotten tuna fish,” Dave says to Sally in her kitchen. She punches him in the stomach where later he’ll be stabbed by the same men he stole dope from in Philadelphia. In Atlantic City, only tourists leave.



Because Lou knew Dave, because he made \$4000 from selling Dave’s dope, Lou pays to send Dave’s body back to Saskatchewan; he sends flowers in both his and Sally’s name. Sally doesn’t know about Dave and Lou’s connection. She thinks Lou is like Atlantic City, full of millions. “Teach me stuff,” Sally asks of Lou in a fancy restaurant on the boardwalk. “It’s nice to have money to have things,” she says as she holds Grace’s swiped cigarette case. “You want information or wisdom?” Lou asks. “Both,” Sally replies. “Ditch the car soon,” Lou will tell Sally as she is walking out of their hotel room on the outskirts of Atlantic City, after telling him a lie he sees right through, “I’d really like some pizza, I know it sounds crazy, I’ll go.”

“The Atlantic Ocean was something then. Yes, you should have seen the Atlantic Ocean back then,” Lou tells Dave early on in the film. It sounds like something he tells himself, like something someone had once told him.

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FEATURED FILMS:

July 9 - **JAFAR PANAHİ'S TAXI**
Winner - Berlin International Film Festival

July 16 - **THE GUILTY**
Winner - National Board of Review, SIFF & Sundance Film Festival

July 23 - **HUKKLE**
Winner - San Sebastian Film Festival & Paris Film Festival

July 30 - **CAPERNAUM**
Winner - 2018 Cannes Film Festival Grand Jury Prize

August 6 - **SITA SINGS THE BLUES**
Winner - Berlin International Film Festival