5 movie titles that tell the tale

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LOS ANGELES — Some movie titles are wordy and complicated (Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan) or generically forgettable (Someone Like You). Others, like Man on a Ledge, tell you everything you need to know about the movie in just a few tidy words.

Here are five other movies whose titles say it all.

1) Snakes on a Plane (2006): This was one of the most fun experiences I've ever had at the movies: I saw it at a packed, late-night screening with a bunch of rowdy college kids in Boston. And that's really the best way to watch a movie like this. It is, of course, about snakes ... on ... a plane. They get loose and they get angry. All kinds of gnarly carnage ensues at 35,000 feet. And Samuel L. Jackson gets to shout one of the greatest lines in film history (which, sadly, we'll have to paraphrase): “I have had it with these (expletive) snakes on this (expletive) plane!”

2) Hobo With a Shotgun (2011): It's a bit of a one-note gimmick. Rutger Hauer plays the titular vagabond who rides into a new town and finds himself in possession of the aforementioned firearm. Transforming himself into a vigilante killer, he cleans up this cartoonishly depraved place full of dealers and junkies, pimps and prostitutes. It's a funny central nugget of an idea, the novelty of which wears off pretty quickly. But Hauer plays it completely straight in the kind of stoic, quietly violent character Clint Eastwood built a career on, and makes the repetitively gory material work better than it should. Plus, it's a fun title.

3) The Human Centipede (2010): Yep, that's pretty much what it is. A mad German scientist abducts and mutilates three people, then stitches them together mouth-to-anus to create a human centipede. It's a wild idea that writer-director Tom Six executed with surprising artistry — at least in part one. This is just the beginning of a trilogy; the disappointing part two came out last year, and Six is working on part three.

4) Attack of the Killer Tomatoes! (1978): I have fond memories of watching this as a child on Elvira's Movie Macabre. This spoof of B-horror movies is gleefully silly and hilariously low-tech. Menacing, mutant tomatoes threaten humanity. The rumbling, grumbling pieces of produce are seemingly unstoppable. Running is no use. Weaponry is insufficient. They can even kill you underwater (in a parody of Jaws). Only one thing makes them vulnerable: playing the shrill hit song Puberty Love, which causes the tomatoes to shrink. The San Diego Chicken even makes an appearance. That's how you know this is a quality piece of filmmaking.

5) Santa Claus Conquers the Martians (1964): This is a cheapo B-movie classic: a weird, goofy combination of family comedy and sci-fi adventure. The children of Mars are unhappy, so Martian leaders cook up a scheme to kidnap Santa Claus from Earth and bring him to their planet. There, he can set up a toy factory to please all the good little girls and boys. But Santa eventually wins on his terms because ... he's Santa. This movie is also notable as the film debut of a young Pia Zadora as one of the Martian children. Everyone's gotta start somewhere.

Photo: James Dittiger/New Line Productions

Snakes on a Plane