

BACK FROM THE DEAD, IT'S THE...

ATTACK ^{of the} SCISSORPEOPLE ^{cert} X

ITALIAN
HORROR
SPECIAL



featuring

THE MASK OF SATAN SUSPIRIA THE BEYOND
TENEBRAE THE SECT AND MUCH MORE...

ISSUE 2

FEB '98

Editorial

Welcome to our long promised Italian Horror Special in which we look at 26 of the key films helmed by the genre's four most important directors, Mario Bava, Dario Argento, Lucio Fulci and Michele Soavi. Starting with Bava's classic *THE MASK OF SATAN* (1960), we try to get to the bottom of why these particular films incurred the censors' wrath.

Up front, I have to make several apologies about the content of this issue. Due to lack of space, we have only included the most important films by Bava and Fulci (some of the others will be covered in future issues), but virtually all of Argento and Soavi's films are covered. For the same reason, there are no films by Riccardo Freda, Pupi Avati, Sergio Martino, Lamberto Bava and several lesser known directors, but these will also be covered in future issues.

Italian horror movies are often thought of as cheap imitations of successful American films, and while this is not exactly untrue, the relationship between the two is a bit more complex than that. For one thing, the plagiarism is not just a one way affair (just look at the link between the Eighties slasher boom and the earlier Bava films) and the cheap Italian films often boasted superior make up effects and a more lavish appearance largely thanks to the almost *de rigueur* use of *cinemascope* photography. This together with their penchant for visceral gore effects made them popular, but ironically it was these moments of graphic gore that played a big part in the video nasties campaign that threatened to obscure the genre from public sight. When the films were eventually re-released with official certificates, their battered remains were a mere shadow of their former selves. In the early days these films earned a cinema release. Today they are regarded as strictly straight-to-video fodder, the last U.K. theatrical release of a major Italian horror film being over a decade ago!

When we started this issue, we weren't prepared for just how complex and difficult it would be, and because of this you will notice that some of the censorship information is missing. We tried to be as accurate as possible but certain information was second hand and not 100% reliable. These omissions will be corrected in future issues when we've fully looked into them. If you spot any mistakes, omissions or extra information of interest, send it in and we'll publish the corrections.

We have tried to provide background information on all the directors covered, but these summaries are in no way comprehensive. For more detailed information check out the following publications: Tim Lucas' upcoming 'All The Colors Of The Dark' to be published in two volumes will almost certainly be the final word on the great Mario Bava's career, and is due out this year. 'Broken Mirrors, Broken Minds: The Dark Dreams Of Dario Argento' by Maitland McDonagh was the first significant book length overview of Argento's career, but it is rather academic in its approach, and was eventually superseded by Alan Jones' 'Mondo Argento', a collection of Alan's reviews for all Argento's films - revised and updated - and superbly illustrated with hundreds of mouth watering stills that alone make it a must have item. 'Lucio Fulci: Beyond The Gates' by Chas Balum is the first English language book about the director, but Stephen Thrower's soon to be released 'Lucio Fulci: Beyond The Eye Of Horror' promises (on the strength of published extracts) to offer a more thorough overview of his career. There are at this moment no book length surveys of Michele Soavi's career, and because of the tragic personal problems that have all but brought an end to his involvement in cinema for the foreseeable future, such a survey would seem very unlikely. Midnight Media did announce the publication of a booklet about Soavi to be written by Mark Ashworth, but as Mark now works for Joe D'Amato in Italy, its completion is now in doubt. But who knows, a few nice letters might encourage its completion.

If its an overview of the genre as a whole that you are looking for, Adrian Smith's 'Delirium' magazine is the thing to get. The first two issues cover 1970 - 1979 (approximately 300 films), but subsequent issues cover a year each (approximately 50 films each). A revised version of issue two covering twice as many films as the original should be out very soon, and no doubt issue one will at some point receive the same treatment. With extensive credits, a synopsis, review and video info, they are an essential purchase.

On a final note, we have also included a special extra review by *SCISSOR PEOPLE* newcomer Andrew for a very controversial short film still doing the festival rounds - and gaining awards - called *AFTERMATH* (1994). Its a sick black comedy about necrophilia, far more polished than the likes of *NEKROMANTIK* (1988) but just as repulsive, its already appalled the likes of Chas Balum. Andrew is also the editor of the upcoming magazine 'Gore Galore' which will incorporate his previously published 'Gore Guide' which is an impressive list of video stockists, mail order companies and other outlets world wide from where you can order uncut versions of your favorite films and is worth reading in conjunction with this zine as it offers a much more comprehensive list of outlets than I could list here. Its out very soon.

Till Next Time...

Daniel - Editor

This issue is dedicated to Alan Jones who taught me to stop worrying and love Italian horror.

EDITOR, PUBLISHER, WRITER AND OTHER STUFF

DANIEL - fell asleep at the keyboard while writing this issue and typed the letter 'c' 121,617 times.

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

ALEX - used to go to the same pub as the Spice Girls before they were famous. Boy is he kicking himself now.

ANDREW - had the theme music from CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST(1978) played at his wedding.

COVER ART & DESIGN

LEE - recently bought a Mini and wants THE ITALIAN JOB(1969) soundtrack to play in it. Please send offers.

ADDITIONS & CORRECTIONS

TURKEY SHOOT(1981) is available on the Roadshow label in Australia, pan & scan but completely uncut.

THE DEVILS(1971) was presented to the BBFC at 10,122 feet (112 mins 28 secs) who cut 132 feet (1 min. 28 secs) to 9990 feet (111 mins.) before granting an 'X' certificate. Warner Home Video's release of the film in their 'Ken Russell Collection' was the American 'R' rated version. The only scene surrendered to the MPAA to change the film from an 'X' to an 'R' was the brief bloody shot of Grandiers crushed legs. Warner's current release as part of the 'Maverick Collection' is the British cinema version, passed with no further cuts and letterboxed at 1.70:1 (credits letterboxed at 2.35:1).

GALAXY OF TERROR(1981) Sid Haig starred as Dragos in 'Jason Of Star Command' not 'Buck Rogers In The 25th

THANKS TO:

Paul J. Brown (Midnight Media) for ongoing help and advice, and for keeping me up to date on genre information when I've been watching too many Ingmar Bergman films. Michael Donovan (Redemption Film publicist). Mark Morris (for information on cuts and other obscure stuff). The ODEON (Sheffield). The staff of WATERSTONES (Sheffield) for finding some of the almost non existent books I wanted. Tristan Thompson (editor of IT'S ONLY A MOVIE for his wildly appreciative and out-of-the-blue telephone call of encouragement after issue one came out). All the sources consulted by us. Magazines including: Cinefantastique, Fangoria, Video Watchdog, Starburst, Delirium, Fantasy film Memory #2: Lucio Fulci and #4/5: Dario Argento, Shivers (under the editorship of Alan Jones) and The Dark Side. Books including: 'The Aurum Film Encyclopedia' (Horror and Science Fiction editions) edited by Phil Hardy, 'The BFI Companion To Horror' edited by Kim Newman, 'Spaghetti Nightmares' by Luca M. Palmerini & Gaetano Mistretta, 'Mondo Argento' by Alan Jones, 'Nightmare Movies' by Kim Newman, 'The Incredibly Strange Film Book' by Jonathan Ross, 'Fantastic Cinema' by Peter Nicholls, 'Cult Movies' by Danny Peary, 'The Penguin Encyclopedia Of Horror And The Supernatural' edited by Jack Sullivan, 'The Video Watchdog Book' by Tim Lucas, 'Terror On Tape' by James O'Neil, 'Elliot's Guide To Home Entertainment', 'The Time Out Film Guide' edited by John Pym, 'Stay Out Of The Shower' by William Schoell, 'Horror Film Directors' by Dennis Fischer, 'Nekrofile' by Alan Jones, 'Broken Mirrors Broken, Minds' by Maitland McDonagh and probably a few more I can't recall. And all the video companies mentioned within.

BACK ISSUES

ISSUE #1 featuring SHOGUN ASSASSIN, RE-ANIMATOR, TURKEY SHOOT, WITCHFINDER GENERAL, MARK OF THE DEVIL, HENRY: PORTRAIT OF A SERIAL KILLER, THE DEVILS, GALAXY OF TERROR and more still available at £1.90 including P&P.

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THE MASK OF SATAN(1960)

Mario Bava was born in San Remo, Italy in 1914. He entered the film industry in 1939 as a cinematographer - a craft he learnt from his father Eugenio Bava - gaining his first screen credit for **THE ADVENTURES OF ANNABELLA**(1943), and working for such high profile directors as Roberto Rossellini, G.W.Pabst and Raoul Walsh. He also acted as second unit director on Pietro Francisci's **HERCULES**(1957) and **HERCULES UNCHAINED**(1958), and directed the battle scenes for Jacques Tourneur's **THE GIANT OF MARATHON**(1960).

While working as a cameraman on **THE SINS OF ROME**(1952), Bava met and befriended Riccardo Freda. As a result, he was hired to photograph Freda's classic **I VAMPIRI** (1956), the first Italian horror film in the sound era. When Freda abandoned the project after being refused a 12 day extension on his schedule, Bava stepped in and directed half the film in just 2 days! When Freda quit **CALTIKI THE IMMORTAL MONSTER**(1959) after just two days in a ploy to get his exploited friend the recognition he deserved, Bava stepped in and completed the film (Freda went on record saying that **CALTIKI** should be regarded as Bava's true directorial debut). Producer Lionello Santi of Galatea Film was so impressed, he rewarded Bava with the opportunity to debut as director. A devotee of Russian literature, he chose to adapt Nikolai Gogol's short story 'Vij'. The result was **THE MASK OF SATAN**, a film that is now regarded as one of the true classics of the horror genre.

The film begins with the execution of Princess Asa (Barbara Steele) and her lover Javutich (Arturo Doninici). Charged with 'witchcraft' by the local inquisitor - her own brother - she has a spiked Devil's mask hammered onto her face, and with her last words swears vengeance on his descendants. 200 years later when two traveling doctors - Dr. Kubayan (John Richardson) and Dr. Andreus (Andrea Cecchi) - on their way to a convention near Milgorod stop by the crypt where Asa is buried, Kubayan unwittingly removes the mask from Asa's face, and in doing so cuts his hand and spills blood on her corpse bringing about her resurrection. Asa returns to take revenge on her brother's descendant's Prince Vaidu (Ito Garrani), and his innocent daughter Katia (Steele again) whose body she seeks to possess.

The film's narrative scripted by Bava, Ennio De Concini, Marcello Coscia and Maroi Serandrei is fairly straight forward, but its the visuals and the unforgettable set pieces that make this so memorable. Asa's shocking execution at the start of the film and her subsequent, drawn out resurrection and emergence from the crypt with the spike holes still in her face is a stunning moment of horror. Other key sequences include Javutich clawing his way out of the grave where he is buried, the ghostly coach emerging from the mist in slow motion (both a reference to the coach scene in F.W. Murnau's classic vampire pic **NOSFERATU**(1922) and itself an influence on Neil Jordan's **INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE**(1994)), the unusually graphic black & white gore scenes and perhaps most of all, Barbara Steele herself. Playing both the virginal Katia and Asa, the sexual witch - two extremes of

womanhood usually associated with religious imagery - from her first appearance in the graveyard flanked by two black dogs, her strangely beautiful features dominate not only this film, but many subsequent Italian horror movies to the point that she became an icon for the entire genre.

Outside of the gore scenes, the special effects are subtle but very impressive. In another of the film's great scenes, Asa attempts to drain the life from Katia, and she rejuvenates before our eyes, *without* a cut away. When she tries to seduce Andreus who has fallen in love with Katia, Asa is revealed to be literally a walking corpse. It's a measure of the film's quality that you never even think that Steele is playing two roles until after the credits have rolled.

The overall design of the picture courtesy of art director Giorgio Giovannini evokes a powerfully surreal atmosphere reminiscent of the look of the classic Universal horror films of the 1930's. Bava's fluid, stylish direction which utilizes such techniques as the 360 degree pan two decades before Brian De Palma made them famous in **BLOW OUT**(1981), and the crystal clear monochrome photography by Bava and Urbano Tizano make this one of the most visually impressive studio bound movies ever.

THE MASK OF SATAN was recut by Salvatore Billitteri and re-scored by Les Baxter when Samuel Z. Arkoff acquired the film for release by AIP in America where its title was changed to **BLACK SUNDAY**, a title not without meaning. It refers to the day in every century when the forces of evil can rise and take revenge on their oppressors. When it was submitted to the BBFC under this title in 1961, it was refused a certificate by then censor John Trevelyan on grounds of disgust, largely thanks to the opening execution. It was eventually passed in 1968 under the title **REVENGE OF THE VAMPIRE** with an "X" certificate because as Trevelyan put it in his autobiography 'What The Censor Saw', "by this time it looked rather ridiculous". But this did not stop him removing approximately 1 minute 45 seconds of footage, mainly from the opening sequence, but also from the stake through the eye killing of Kruvajan, and probably from the scene where prince Vaida falls head first into the fire as well. When it was released on video in the early 80's by Vampix, it was in this cut version.

In the mid 80's, the uncut version - again under the title of **BLACK SUNDAY** - turned up amid complaints about its content on British T.V., and then again in 1990 as part of the Film Club season in a slightly letterboxed print. It is this version that became Redemption video's first release. Passed uncut with a "15" certificate and letterboxed at 1.45:1, it is a pristine transfer, and the best version of the film currently available to buy anywhere in the World. That is until Elite Entertainment do a collectors laserdisc edition

DANIEL

BLOOD AND BLACK LACE (1964)

After completing *THE MASK OF SATAN*, Bava moved from gothic black & white to Technicolor and the panoramic expanses afforded by the 2.35:1 techniscope format for *HERCULES IN THE HAUNTED WORLD* (1961), a horror fantasy starring Christopher Lee. This was followed by *ERIK THE CONQUEROR* (1961) a Viking epic, *THE EVIL EYE* (1962), *BLACK SABBATH* (1963) an anthology horror starring Boris Karloff in 'The Wurdalak' episode - cited by Karloff as the favorite of his own work - and *NIGHT IS THE PHANTOM* (1963) starring Christopher Lee as a masochist haunted by the whip wielding spectre of his dead lover, a theme made clearer in the alternative title *THE WHIP AND THE BODY*. Of these, it was Bava's last black & white film *THE EVIL EYE* that was to be the most significant. Now accepted as the first cinematic incarnation of the 'Giallo', a genre of thriller that takes its name from the distinctive yellow covers that accompanied much crime fiction by authors such as Frederick Brown, Cornell Woolrich and Agatha Christie. Impressive as *THE EVIL EYE* is, it was comprehensively eclipsed by the release of *BLOOD AND BLACK LACE*, one of the key films in the genre.

The original Italian title of the film *SEI DONNE PER L'ASSASSINO* or *SIX WOMEN FOR THE MURDERER* really sums up the films plot in a nut shell. Christina (Eva Bartok) runs a fashion salon in Rome with her lover Max Morlan (Cameron Mitchell) who handles the financial side of the business and uses it as a front for a drug ring. When the body of Isabella, one of the models, turns up stuffed in a closet quickly followed by the murder of two other models - Nicole who stole Isabella's boyfriend and Peggy who has stolen and destroyed Isabella's diary - suspicion falls on several suspects, including Max. When the suspects are arrested the danger appears to be over, until a fourth model is murdered.

The story by Bava, Marcello Fondato and Joe (Giuseppe) Barillu is light weight enough to make even an average episode of 'Scooby Doo, Where Are You?' seem labyrinthine by comparison. Indeed the faceless killer is actually two people - Max and Christina - and the motivation was just Isabella's attempted blackmail of

them because of the suspicious death of Christina's late husband, the subsequent murders being an attempt to suppress the trail of evidence.

The plot is ultimately insignificant as *BLOOD AND BLACK LACE* finds Bava at the peak of his powers as a visual stylist. The gaudy sets lit in garish neon tones and photographed by Urbano Tizanes play a significant factor in the impact of the film, nowhere more so than murder scenes. Each is a virtuoso display of suspense due to Bava's prowling camerawork, and the murders themselves are unusually brutal and frenzied for the era which it was made in. They still retain their impact when viewed today. One of the victims has her eyes gouged with a claw type instrument the killer wears, one has her face burnt on a red hot stove and in the most famous scene, Claudia Dante is drowned in a bathtub before having her wrists slashed with a straight razor. Several of the killings in this film and Jesus Franco's *BLOODY MOON* (1981) turn up in Pedro Almodavar's *MATADOR* (1986) during the scene in which Nacho Martinez masturbates while watching the extracts on video. Almodavar also pays homage to *BLOOD AND BLACK LACE* by having Asumpta Serna reenact Dantes bathtub death scene.

An English version of the film was prepared by Lou Moss using different takes for distribution outside of Italy. It was submitted to the BBFC who made over 4 minutes of cuts, removing every violent scene. This version was passed with a 'X' certificate and has been described by horror author Ramsey Campbell as like "...an array of bravura suspense scenes terminated by violent hiccups in the soundtrack music.". Sadly it was this butchered version of the film that was released on video in the early 80's by Iver. Ironically, after a five year ban *MATADOR* was passed uncut with these scene intact.

Despite rumors of one, there has never been a Sell thru release of this film in the U.K. Of the versions that should still be available, Sinister Cinema in America released the uncut, English dubbed version several years ago, and the French version is also uncut and letterboxed a 1.55:1. All current versions of the film would be rendered obsolete if - as promised - *BLOOD AND BLACK LACE* is released by Quentin Tarantino's Rolling Thunder video label in America. Tarantino wants to release the original uncut Italian version in a letterboxed and subtitled print that would be definitive and an absolute must have item. At present, this version has not materialized. Its probably worth waiting for this version, but at present the other versions are as good as you're going to get.

DANIEL



FIVE DOLLS FOR AN AUGUST MOON(1970)

After BLOOD AND BLACK LACE, Bava turned his talents to many varied projects, most of which were not horror: A little known western called THE ROAD TO FORT ALAMO(1964). PLANET OF THE VAMPIRE(1965), a sci-fi/ horror film that served as the inspiration for Ridley Scott's classic ALIEN(1979). DR. GOLDFOOT AND THE GIRL BOMBS(1966), a sequel to both DR. GOLDFOOT AND THE BIKINI MACHINE(1965) and TWO MAFIA GUYS VS. GOLDFINGER(1967) starring Vincent Price. KNIVES OF THE AVENGER(1967), a second Viking epic. CURSE OF THE DEAD(1966), a gothic horror about a village haunted by the ghost of a little girl that had a big influence on David Lynch, particularly TWIN PEAKS: FIRE WALK WITH ME(1992), but also LOST HIGHWAY(1996). DANGER: DIABOLIK(1967), a comicbook sci-fi film in the BARBARELLA(1968) vein produced by Dino De Laurentis. HATCHET FOR THE HONEYMOON(1969), a black comedy/ horror film shot in Barcelona. ROY COLT AND WINCHESTER JACK(1969), a comedy western and FOUR TIMES THAT NIGHT(1970), a variation on Akira Kurosawa's RASHOMON(1951). Though not up to the standard of some of these films, Bava's next feature was more significant than it appeared at the time.

Based partially on Agatha Christie's novel 'And Then There Were None' (originally it was published as 'Ten Little Niggers', but was retitled for obvious reasons) FIVE DOLLS FOR AN AUGUST MOON is quite possibly one of the weirdest horror films ever made. The story is set upon a remote island owned by a wealthy business man who invites two couples, along with their lovers and servants, to the island in an attempt to persuade one of them - a professor - to sell him his secret formula. The professor has other ideas and refuses to sell, instead wishing to donate it to science.

Until that point, everything is quite understandable... Then the murders begin. Is it Charles, the wealthy business man? Is it Nick, the irritable husband? Or is it Trudi, the oversexed wife? Do we really care? Ah, but then it could be Isabelle, the strange girl who likes to steal clothes and run daintily all over the island. It could also be all of them...and more, but you'll just have to wait for the multitude of "revelatory" plot twists.

But despite the films incomprehensible plot and Bava's disinterested direction, the film is an absolute joy to watch. It's pastel colours, the jaunty and totally out of place organ music and overwhelming sense of bizzareness make it a highly enjoyable experience.

The film opens on a shot of Isabelle running over sand dunes toward the sea, accompanied by the afore mentioned organ music. The effect of this is that one is lulled into thinking one is watching an old English comedy, and that at any moment she is going to stumble across Kenneth Williams and Hattie Jakes up to something behind a sand dune.

This is followed by an even weirder scene in which Isabelle comes to a house built on the edge of a cliff, and peers in through the window. Suddenly we're in Jess Franco territory with a great deal of the following action

punctuated by close-ups, and enough zooms in and out to make even the ablest sea-man sick. A bizarre party is being held which culminates in the fake murder of Trudi. This whole scene has a feel to it not unlike a particularly creepy episode of 'Tales Of The Unexpected'.

From this point in, little of any real interest occurs until the actual murders themselves. Each of them takes place off screen, and the audience discovers them at the same time as the characters in the film. As each body is found, it is wrapped in plastic (a motif used by David Lynch in his watershed T.V. series 'Twin Peaks') and hung up in the freezer. The scene is always accompanied by some strangely cheerful music.

Ultimately, as with BLOOD AND BLACK LACE before it, what really holds the interest are the numerous stylistic touches the film contains: Interesting match cuts such as the white of a woman's bikini between her buttocks to the surf being carved up by a motor boat (trust you to pick that - Ed), or the body that is discovered only when a bowl of glass marbles is knocked over, and the marbles tumble down the stairs like water and roll into the bath where the body is.

Touches such as these also stand out more due to the sheer banality of the dialogue, the best line in the film being "Murder is a dirty business". And none of the characters seemed to be particularly disturbed or surprised by what is going on. Even when they discover the body of a woman with a bloody knife protruding from her breast in the films one truly shocking scene, they do no more than pull a few faces before returning to the dead pan looks they have held throughout the proceedings.

Despite the seemingly ineptitude of all involved in the production, the film somehow works. It never fails to arouse interest, partly due to the seductive portrayals of womanhood by the four female leads, but also due to the fact that the film seems so incredibly innocent, so very sixties. The whole experience comes across as one glorious, hamfisted experiment that one simply has to see through. Those familiar with Bava's work will also have great fun noting his trademark touches to the action. As an exercise in style over content, some of it works, some of it doesn't, but it all has value.

FIVE DOLLS FOR AN AUGUST MOON was not released theatrically, or on video in the U.K. until Redemption's current sell-thru cassette of the film. Redemption's version - a nice clear print letterboxed at 1.60:1 with full exit music - was passed uncensored by the BBFC with an "18" certificate. As we can't find details for any other release from any other country, we would say that this print is as good as definitive.

ALEX

THE BIRD WITH THE CRYSTAL PLUMAGE(1970)

Dario Argento was born in September 1940, the son of Salvatore Argento, a executive in the film industry. He became interested in film and worked as a critic on one of Rome's daily newspapers before he got his big break. Sergio Leone was planing a new spaghetti western called ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST(1968) and hired Argento along with Bernardo Bertolucci to storyboard it. Given this impressive credit, Argento found work writing scripts for several more westerns (TODAY ITS ME, TOMORROW YOU(1968) and FIVE MAN ARMY(1969)), some war films (BATTLE OF THE COMMANDOS(1969) and PROBABILITY ZERO(1968)) and a pornographic epic called LA RIVOLUZIONE SUSSUALE (SEXUAL REVOLUTION)(1968).

When Argento wrote the screenplay for METTI UNA SERA A CENA (THE LOVE CIRCLE)(1969) to good reviews, Goffredo Lombardo - head of the Titanus Distribution Company - asked him to assist him on script rewrites and revisions for Titanus. When Bertolucci insisted Argento read 'The Screaming Mimi' by Frederic Brown that he was interested in optioning, Argento wrote a script that incorporated elements from the book, and also from Mario Bava's THE EVIL EYE, that he wanted to direct. Lombardo didn't want to produce a film directed by Argento, preferring to hire British director Terence Young as WAIT UNTIL DARK(1967) had been a big hit in Italy. Lombardo eventually bowed to pressure from Salvatore to let his son direct under the proviso that he oversee his sons debut. When the first weeks rushes were screened, Lombardo was mortified and tried to replace him with Ferdinando Baldi, but thanks to his fathers watertight contract, he couldn't. THE BIRD WITH THE CRYSTAL PLUMAGE became Titanus' biggest money earner.

The film stars Tony Mustane as Sam, an American writer who witnesses an attempted murder of a woman - Monica (Eva Renzi) - in an art gallery, but he is disturbed by the fact that something was not quite right with what he saw. As the film progresses, several more murders occur and attempts are made on the life of both him and his girlfriend Julia (Suzy Kendall), all of which seem to have a bizarre link to a painting of a woman being assaulted in a snow covered landscape. Taped phone calls from the

killer containing the sound of a rare species of bird with white feathers like glass lead the police to an apartment where Monica is seen in a struggle with her husband (Umberto Raho) who police think is the killer. In the struggle, the husband falls to his death through the window. It is only then that Sam realizes what was bothering him about the attack he witnessed. It was the wife who was trying to kill her husband.

The idea of a protagonist trying to remember exactly what he saw, and the way in which the past effects the future was to be a recurring theme in Argento's work, influenced mainly by Alfred Hitchcock (an example being SPELLBOUND(1946)) and Michaelangelo Antonioni's BLOW UP(1966).

With this film, Argento took the Giallo thriller one step further, giving equal weight to the narrative and the visual design of the film. The films stylish look was largely thanks to a then little known cameraman called Vittorio Storaro who would later go on to shoot Francis Ford Coppola's masterpiece APOCALYPSE NOW (1979). Storaro's sense of composition was already very much in evidence; the characters at times appearing deeply recessed in the frame, surrounded by ominous expanses of space. In the opening murder attempt in the gallery, the two struggling figures are set against an almost completely white background, framed by the gallery windows that Sam is trapped between.

The third important element of the film is the almost childlike theme music courtesy of the legendary composer Ennio Morricone. Morricone's ability to write brilliantly atmospheric music for film after film is awe-inspiring, and a key reason for the enduring reputation of Argento's debut film.

When THE BIRD WITH THE CRYSTAL PLUMAGE was released in the U.S. in 1970, the MPAA made two cuts totaling 20 seconds for a 'PG' rating. They were: 1 cut (8 secs) in which the killer rips the panties off one of the victims, and 1 cut (12 secs) of the woman in the elevator having her face slashed with a straight razor and a shot of her savaged face (This scene was a big influence on Angie Dickinson's death scene in Brian De Palma's underrated DRESSED TO KILL(1980)). It was this version that was released on video by VCI/United in America, and on laserdisc by Image, but while united's cassette is pan & scan, Image's disc is letterboxed at 2.35:1 and boasts rich colours.

When the film was released in the U.K. under the title THE GALLERY MURDERS, it was passed in this version with an "X" certificate. It was this censored print that turned up on video in early 80's on Videomeia, and later on Stable Cane in a washed out print that also loses visual information on all four sides.

The uncut version was issued on laserdisc by Columbia in Japan, but the framing was less accurate, and the colours not as rich as the Image disc. At this time, the only uncut version on tape that we know of is the full screen Greek release. Its a fairly decent print and it is in English so we would recommend you seek it out.



DANIEL

A BAY OF BLOOD(1971)

Considering that he neither like nor wanted to direct FIVE DOLLS FOR AN AUGUST MOON, Bava's next project again appeared to use the 'Ten Little Indians' formula. But A BAY OF BLOOD was in fact one more step closer to the plotless "opera of violence" that he seemed to be striving for ever since BLOOD AND BLACK LACE.

The film begins with an old woman in a wheelchair (Isa Miranda) being garroted by a mystery assailant. He would appear to be the films killer until he is himself dispatched with a knife. A quartet of teenagers staying in a cabin are slain - an aspect of the film that was to be of significance years later. In the end, 13 people who live in the bay are killed, almost everyone by a different hand, and all in an attempt to control the land surrounding the bay.

The script by Bava, Joseph McLee (Giuseppe Zaccariello) Filippo Ottoni, Sergio Canevari and Francesco Vanorio while willfully infuriating whodunit fans, does at some level offer a darkly humorous condemnation of capitalism as each of the protagonists attempts to gain control of the piece of real estate. In an amazingly surreal twist ending, the final two survivors are shot dead by their own children. As Bava was forced to work fast, the camerawork does include a lot of zoom shots, and little of his usual fluidity. Stylistically the film is still impressive, and nicely shot in crisp, realistic tones by Bava and Antonio Rinaldi, but what counts here is the violence.

The numerous gore killings in A BAY OF BLOOD led to it having an impact almost a decade later when its plot was used as the basis for Sean S. Cunningham's FRIDAY THE 13TH(1980), the film that kicked off the slasher phenomena in the early 80's (John Carpenter's HALLOWEEN(1978) also owes a debt to Bava's film, but is far more original in its approach and the body count is relatively low). For its day the film was very graphic, and even after 25 years the killings still have a degree of power. The scenes in which the teenagers are killed have an uncomfortable sexual overtone to them, the shot of a corpse with a live octopus attached to its face is memorably squirm inducing and the killing of Simon is truly horrifying.

Many of the death scenes in A BAY OF BLOOD were reworked in Steve Miner's FRIDAY THE 13TH PART 2



(1981). Walt Gurney's garroting recalls the opening murder, the machete in the face killing of the boy in the wheelchair is strikingly similar to the killing of the second teenager in BAY and the death of the two teenagers who are impaled together with a spear is a direct rip off (ironically, while it is the most famous scene in FRIDAY THE 13TH PART 2, it was removed by the MPAA to avoid the "X" rating). Somewhat bizarrely, some of the costuming from BAY was also borrowed, including the sweater worn by Betsy Palmer in FRIDAY THE 13TH, but Brigitte Skay's memorable miniskirt sadly wasn't.

When A BAY OF BLOOD was submitted to the BBFC in the early 70's, it was refused a certificate and remained banned until it came out on video in the early 80's on the Hoshukin label under the title BLOODBATH. This version was uncut and was eventually banned as a video nasty. It remained unavailable for the next decade until Redemption released it in a 1.60:1 letterboxed version with full exit music. Unfortunately the BBFC insisted on 7 cuts totaling 43 seconds before they would issue an '18' certificate. The cuts were: 2 cuts (2 secs) removing the shot of the first teenager having her throat cut from behind and one graphic hatchet blow to her head. 1 cut (21 secs) removing practically all details of the boy with the machete embedded in his face and shots of him dying. 3 cuts (9 secs) to the scene in which the couple having sex are impaled together with a spear, removing shots of blood welling around the wound and shots of them writhing while impaled. 1 cut (11 secs) after Simon is stabbed in the stomach with a spear, shots of him being gored so hard he is forced up the wall have been removed (see picture).

The cuts do significantly reduce the impact of the scene in which the four teenagers are killed (they are essentially innocent) giving their deaths a throw away feel; all effect and no aftermath. Simon's death also suffer badly. In the uncut version it is gut wrenching. With the cuts it isn't. The loss of the afore mentioned shot totally blunts the scene. The annoying thing is that Redemption's version would have been definitive if not for the cuts as its the only letterboxed version around.

A BAY OF BLOOD has appeared under many different titles. It was filmed as REAZIONE A CATENA (CHAIN REACTION); It was first announced as ANTEFAITTO (BEFORE THE FACT) and was then released in Italy as L'ECOLOGIA DEL DELITTO (THE ECOLOGY OF MURDER). It is also known as CARNAGE, TWITCH OF THE DEATH NERVE (my favorite) and THE LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT PART 2 even though Wes Craven didn't make the original until the following year.

We would recommend that you buy Redemption's version because its the best looking version of the film available, but you should seek out the uncut version as well which should be available from America on the Gorgon Video label.

DANIEL

CAT O'NINE TAILS(1971)

Argento's follow up to *THE BIRD WITH THE CRYSTAL PLUMAGE* was again in the thriller mode, but in *CAT O'NINE TAILS*, elements of the fantastic were beginning to creep into his work.

The distributors this time insisted on American stars in an attempt to improve overseas sales, so Karl Malden was cast in the lead as Françoise Arno, the blind journalist who over hears a man who stole genetic research papers from a science institute, and a "someone" trying to blackmail him. During Arno's investigations, he teams up with another reporter Carlo Giodanni (James Franciscus, the star of *MARCOONED*(1969)), and together they follow the trail of evidence that points towards the daughter of the institute's chief Anna Terzi (Catherine Spaak) as the murderer. The solution to the mystery comes out of the blue. The murder is Dr. Casoni (Aldo Reggiani) who is trying to suppress the fact that he has an extra "Y" chromosome - a potential indicator of a psychotic personality - who during a roof top struggle, falls to his death down a lift shaft.

CAT O'NINE TAILS is both the weakest and most experimental of Argento's early work, laying a lot of the groundwork that would lead to his later masterpieces. While borrowing several stylistic ideas from other films, most memorably from Orson Welles's *TOUCH OF EVIL*(1958), it has also had an influence on several subsequent movie like the prowling murder point of view shots that turned up in John Carpenter's use of the Panaglide camera in his much superior slasher classic *HALLOWEEN*(1978), and the eye close up motif that played a crucial role in the sci-fi masterpiece *BLADE RUNNER*(1982). In the context of his career as a whole, *CAT O'NINE TAILS* is important. It has been described as a sequel to *THE BIRD WITH THE CRYSTAL PLUMAGE*, but doesn't bear any real similarity to the film except for the animal reference in the title. This led to his first three films being called the "Animal Trilogy". As a one off thriller, it is very ordinary.

CAT O'NINE TAILS was submitted to the BBFC in the early 70's who passes the film with a "AA" certificate, but this version was seemingly shortened by about 8 minutes. It was released for rental by Warner Home Video in the late 80's, and was finally issued on sell thru - again by Warner's on their Terror Vision label, uncut with an "18" certificate. It is as good a version of the film as you can get. It is also worth noting that the American cassette of the film is missing just over 20 minutes of footage, and that the Canadian version, although complete, accidentally gives away the killers identity on the sleeve.

The definitive version of *CAT O' NINE TAILS* was released on laserdisc in Japan by Columbia in an uncut, letterboxed version which is no longer available. Terror Vision's only misstep was to release a pan & scan version that severely damages the films 'scope (2.35:1) camerawork when a letterboxed master is available. After all, that's what collector want.

DANIEL

FOUR FLIES ON GREY VELVET(1972)

CAT O'NINE TAILS was not as successful as Argento's much admired debut, so he teamed up with fellow Italian Luigi Cozzi to work on a new script. Their initial attempt was vetoed after it was discovered to have similarities to an Italian TV movie aired during the writing. The result was the enigmatically titled *FOUR FLIES ON GREY VELVET*.

Michael Brandon plays Roberto, a rock drummer who believes he is being pursued by a strange man. His confrontation with him in an abandoned theater results in Roberto accidentally stabbing him, all of which is witnessed by an unidentified onlooker who takes photographs of the incident. He then discovers the photos in his apartment. After his maid is murdered, he sends his Wife (Mimsy Farmer) to the country fearing that the mystery figure could attempt to kill her. Along with a bizarre character called Godfrey (referred to as God and played by spaghetti western star Bud Spencer), he hires a detective (Jean-Pierre Marielle) to help find the murderer. The detective solves the case but is himself murder upon proving it. When Roberto sleeps with his wife's cousin (Francine Racette), she is murdered. The solution is both outlandish and especially cruel. Roberto's wife is the murder. She reveals that she was mistreated as a child by her father, and she married Roberto because of his resemblance to her father so she could achieve a kind of revenge-by-proxy on him. Roberto is saved from death by God (an Argento pun) after which his wife flees, crashing her car which explodes.

The main problem with *FOUR FLIES ON GREY VELVET* is logic. Even by Argento's standards the plot is extremely contrived, requiring several narrative jumps to forward the story. This has a lot to do with the fact that in Argento and Cozzi's original script, Brandon's character was the murderer observed in the act who kills off several suspects before realizing that it was his loyal wife who was the witness. Its stylistically made - the slow motion bullet shot being the best remembered detail - but emotionally neutral. The only murder to register is that of the sweet Francine Racette's, and the astonishingly cruel solution demanded more exploration. Its not boring, just unremarkable. The *FOUR FLIES* of the title are not seen on any *GREY VELVET* as the title suggests, though there is one fly in a pendant Mimsy Farmer wears.

FOUR FLIES ON GREY VELVET was released in America in the 70's with a 'PG' rating from the MPAA reflecting its tameness.

Outside of occasional showings at repertory theaters like the Scala, *FOUR FLIES ON GREY VELVET* has never been properly released in the U.K. It has never been legitimately issued on video here or in America. There is a video version that can be found from certain outlets on the continent that is probably not official. It has been taken from a 16 mm version, it is letterboxed at 2.35:1 and is of appalling quality, this being the fault of the worm print used. Then again, it is the only way to see the film that we know of.

DANIEL

LISA AND THE DEVIL(1972)

After the financial success of *BARON BLOOD* (this should have been included in this issue, but will now appear next issue - Ed.), producer Alfred Leone gave Bava *carte blanche* for his next project. It was a decision he was to regret.

LISA AND THE DEVIL begins with an American tourist, Lisa Reiner (Elke Sommer) touring a Spanish town. The guide points out a mural depicting the Devil carrying away the dead. When she becomes separated from the rest of the group, she runs into a man (Telly Savalas) holding a mannequin that at times looks like a real corpse. The man bears a similarity to the devil in the mural. Lisa is taken to a Villa owned by Maximillian (Alessio Orano) which seems to be derived from several different time periods and filled with mannequins that also appear - at times - to be alive. She soon realizes that she is the double of the Maximillian's unfaithful dead lover (Elina) whose corpse he keeps locked in a room over run by vegetation. After several deaths, Lisa escapes the villa, which it seems has apparently been abandoned for a hundred years, to the airport and boards a plane only to find that the plane is piloted by the Devil (Savalas).

LISA AND THE DEVIL is Mario Bava's masterpiece, the script by Bava, Roberto Natale and Giorgio Manlini no more than an excuse to string together a dazzling array of lyrical set pieces - beautifully photographed Cecilio Paniagua - that is closest Bava has come to pure style over content. The overall effect is a hauntingly poetic film about decay, death and necrophilia, the later theme exemplified by the scene in which Maximillian makes love to a fainted Lisa on the bed next to his lovers corpse. The film has blackly humorous touches such as Savalas as the lollipop sucking butler breaking the legs of corpses so they will fit smaller coffins, and moments of surrealism as when Lisa, seemingly hypnotized by figure rotating on a wind up merry-go-round, has a flashback of Elina meeting her lover only to wake up and find that the figures have turned into skeletons. That the plot makes little sense, and the ending is seemingly incomprehensible ultimately doesn't matter.

It was to prove impossible to follow. His next project *CANIARRABBIATI* (1974) was impounded for 20 years after the money ran out during post-production. A violent, real time crime drama, the film was completed by co-star Lea Lander 15 years later and received its world premiere in 1996 under the title *SEMAFORO ROSSO* when his son Lamberto Bava went back and sorted out the

legal problems. Bava's final film was *SHOCK* (1977), but most of it was actually directed by Lamberto Bava. In an attempt to give his son a start in the film industry as Ricardo Freda had done for him two decades earlier, his career went full circle. Mario Bava didn't direct another film for the cinema after this, restricting himself to technical work. He died of a heart attack in 1980.

LISA AND THE DEVIL premiered at the Cannes film festival in 1973 at 98 minutes as Bava intended to good word of mouth. It was this version that was released in Spain as *THE DEVIL AND THE DEAD*. As Alfred Leone was unable to sell the film to any other country in the world, he tried to recoup his costs by re-cutting the film and re-releasing it as *THE HOUSE OF EXORCISM* (1975) in an attempt to cash in on the success of William Friedkin's *THE EXORCIST* (1973) which was a huge box office hit. This new version deleted approximately 20 minutes of footage from Bava's cut, and adds about 15 minutes of newly shot footage. Most of the new footage involved a priest called Father Michael (Robert Alda) performing an exorcism on Elke Sommer in flaky make up while she swears, vomits toads and causes objects to fly around the room. All the action takes place in the one room and ends with the priest being killed by a bolt of lightning. Some of the footage was actually filmed by Bava himself, but Leone shot the footage that Bava considered blasphemous (Bava's direction is credited to Mickey Lion, the story to Alfred Leone and Alberto Cittini and the exorcism make up effects to Franco Tocci).

THE HOUSE OF EXORCISM was released on video in the early 80's uncut by VTC (Video Tape Company), and is an insult to Bava's masterpiece, but all was not lost. In 1990 the original cut of *LISA AND THE DEVIL* was screened on British television (this version is still missing the aftermath of Sylva Koscina's death which is included in *THE HOUSE OF EXORCISM*) and was subsequently released on video by Redemption in the U.K. This version is letterboxed at 1.66:1 and was passed uncut by the BBFC with an '18' certificate.

The same version was also released on laserdisc by Elite Entertainment in America on a letterboxed double bill with the director's cut of *BARON BLOOD* and then on video by Anchor Bay using the same transfer. Apart from the supplementary extras that the disc comes with - examples of some of the stronger moments of eroticism that Leone insisted be shot for overseas markets - the disc has the same picture quality as Redemption's version which boasts excellent picture quality. We would recommend Redemption's version as its the easiest to get hold of, if you live in the U.K.

DANIEL



DEEP RED(1975)

FOUR FLIES ON GREY VELVET was considered to be another failure, as was his next film LA CINQUE GIORNATE(1973) (FIVE DAYS IN MILAN), an historical comedy about Milan's 1848 revolt. Thankfully Argento put it behind him, reworking some of the plot elements of FOUR FLIES ON GREY VELVET into his best straight thriller to date, and a Giallo masterpiece.

David Hemmings plays a musician who, while talking with his drunk friend Carlo, witnesses the murder of a medium (Macha Meril) when her head is pushed through a window. After running up to the apartment to try and help, he see a figure running away down the street. On retracing his footsteps, he notices that one of the paintings hanging in the hallway is missing! As he begins to investigate the murder, he teams up with a journalist (Daria Nicolodi), and their investigations lead them to an old abandoned house with bizarre children's drawings hidden under the wall paper, and a sealed up room that contains the corpse of a man. It turns out that the pictures were drawn by Carlo when he was a child after witnessing his mother's murder of his father which we saw this during the opening credits, and it is his mother that has been committing the murders (The picture Hemmings saw in the hallway was in fact the face of the killer reflected in the mirror). After Carlo stabs Nicolodi in an attempt to cover up for his mother (Clara Calamia), he is killed in a road accident. On confronting her, Hemmings is attacked with a meat cleaver and is only saved when her necklace is caught by an ascending elevator, decapitating her.

The narrative written by Argento and Bernardino Zapponi is the soundest of all his films. Argento doesn't cheat with the glimpsed face. On reviewing the scene, the face is present just after the opening murder; the killer literally hiding in plain sight. There are several stunning set pieces: The death of the medium - her face silently screaming in the window as Hemmings looks up just in time to see her face propelled through it due to the force of the hatchet blow - is shocking despite the fact we know what's happening. The scene where Calabrini is attacked by first a child size mannequin, and then by the killer who smashes his teeth out on the edge of the mantelpiece before pinning him to the table with a knife through the neck is surreally frightening. Hemmings' discovery of the walled up corpse and the final confrontation between

Hemmings and the killer are also memorable. The killings in DEEP RED employs an elaborate rhyming system, prefiguring each death. For example, Hemmings likens playing the piano to symbolically knocking his fathers teeth out prefigures Calabrini's death.

DEEP RED was never released theatrically in the U.K. It was released in America, but that version was missing over 20 minutes of footage, leaving it incomprehensible. It was released on video by Fletcher in the early 80's, but this version was short of many character scenes, probably so it would fit on a shorter tape.

The killings in DEEP RED, including the bloody death of the medium as she is repeatedly hit with the cleaver, the scene where Amanda has her face scalded in boiling water, Calabrini having his teeth knocked out in an excruciating scene, Carlo having his head squashed by the oncoming car and Calamai's gruesome decapitation are very graphic, making it somewhat suprising that they all remain intact in Redemption's current sell thru release. When the film was submitted, the BBFC made just 2 cuts totaling 11 seconds before they issued an "18" certificate. These are: 1 cut (4 secs) of two dogs fighting (approximately 70 mins in) and 1 cut (7 secs) deleting a pan down to a squirming lizard impaled on a long needle after the little girl is slapped in the face by her father just before Hemmings enters the old house. The first cut is not noticeable but the second is particularly damaging. In addition to rendering the slap to her face gratuitous and incomprehensible, the shot of the impaled lizard represents both a sense that her innocence has been corrupted, and of an aura of unease that seems to emanate from the house. The shots are included in virtually all other versions.

Redemption's subtitled tape is unfortunately in pan & scan, severely hampering Luigi Kuveiller's breathtaking 2.35:1 techniscope framing, but it is still the only complete Italian version in English. The Italian language version is letterboxed, as is the Dutch release, but this version is missing several character scenes. Neither version is ideal, but Redemption plan to release a letterboxed, English language edition of DEEP RED at some time in the future that will - cuts aside - be definitive. In the meantime, take your pick between Redemption's version and the Dutch version. They both have their particular strengths.

DANIEL



SUSPIRIA(1976)

After his run of Giallo thrillers, SUSPIRIA marked a distinct change of pace for Argento, and a move into the world of the supernatural horror picture that would cement his claim to being Italy's king of horror.

Suzy Banyon (Jessica Harper) is an American ballet student who has come to Germany to study at the Academy of Frieberg ballet school. On the night she arrives, a girl runs from the building in terror and is later murdered along with her room mate. As the story progresses, increasingly sinister events begin to occur. Maggots rain from the ceiling, a man is killed by his own guide dog after being menaced by a stone gargyle, and another of the girls is murdered. When a psychiatrist (Udo Kier) tells Banyon that the Academy was run by an infamous Black Witch called Elana Markos in the fifteenth century, she sets about trying to find out more. This sets in motion one of the genre's greatest scenes of sustained horror as Banyon confronts the Witch and kills her, thus bringing about the destruction of the academy.

Many critics have commented on the fact that the script by Argento and his then wife Daria Nicolodi is nothing more than a collection of elaborate set pieces with little narrative to tie them together. It's true that much of the film's strength comes from its visual design. Giuseppe Basson's sets dressed with heavy velvet drapes, and Luciano Tovoli's amazing techniscope photography using out-of-moded Kodak film stock to give the reds, blues and greens a garish luminous look that dominate the picture. But the single greatest element of the film is the pounding rock soundtrack by Goblin which is heard throughout almost the entire film. Recorded in 4-track stereo before even a foot of film had been shot, its aural effect is crucial to SUSPIRIA's impact.

The set pieces themselves have passed in to legend. The opening double murder is one of the most famous death scenes in horror film history. Babyon's arrival at the airport and subsequent cab ride to the academy has a strange ominous quality. The afore mentioned scene in which a blind man is menaced by some unseen force on a vast open plaza before he is attacked by his guide dog. Art-Nouveau wall paintings give way to reveal secret passages and a dead girl with pins in her eyes is animated

by an unseen Witch.

Heading the cast, Jessica Harper, the star of Brian de Palma's PHANTOM OF THE PARADISE(1974) and here added another impressive genre credit to her c.v. looks convincingly overwhelmed by events, as do Kier and American actress Joan Bennett as the head of the academy.

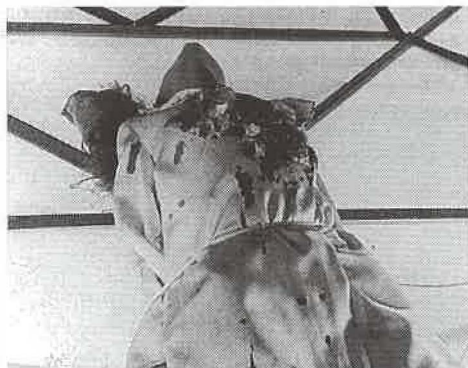
SUSPIRIA was submitted to the BBFC in 1977 who made only 2 cuts totaling 15 seconds before passing the film with an 'X' certificate. These were: 1 cut (13 secs) during the scene where the dog attacks its blind owner, close ups of the dog tearing chunks of flesh from his throat have been removed. 1 cut (2 secs) in the scene where the woman crawls into the room full of wire, the graphic shot of her having her throat cut has been removed. This version was released theatrically by EMI at the ABC Shaftsbury Avenue, the only cinema in London at the time that could accommodate its 4 track magnetic sound system. Very prestigious for an Italian horror picture.

When the film was released on video by Thorn EMI in the early 80's, the theatrical cuts were restored, but it was a pan & scan transfer and its stereo soundtrack was presented in mono. Though it was never a target of the video nasties campaign, Thorn EMI withdrew it from shops and replaced it with the cut version. It was eventually reissued for rental by Entertainment in Video, but the BBFC made 2 further cuts totaling 34 seconds before issuing an '18' certificate. These were: 1 cut (18 secs) Deleting several stabs to the chest and the blow to the exposed beating heart during the opening murder. 1 cut (16 secs) Removing shots of the dog biting the blind man's throat, including the shot of him spitting up blood in close up. This version was subsequently released on sell thru by 4-Front.

Both the rental and the sell thru versions are pan & scan losing significant information from both peripheries and varying amounts from the top and bottom, destroying Luciano Tovoli camerawork.

The Dutch version of the film is uncut, though a small bit of footage is missing due to damage to the master copy from which it was taken, but is again a pan & scan version, making Magnum Entertainment's unrated American cassette - which is letterboxed at 2.35:1 - the best version of the film yet released, surpassed only by Image Entertainment's laserdisc release which is now deleted. Our advice is avoid the U.K. release at all costs and seek out the American tape which should still be available.

DANIEL



ZOMBIE FLESH-EATERS(1979)

Lucio Fulci began his career as a script writer and assistant director on films like Marcel Lherbier's *LAST DAYS OF POMPEI*(1960). He made his directorial debut with *THE THIEF*(1959). He continued to work mainly on comedies and rock'n'roll films, but also on sci-fi films, historical epics and spaghetti westerns. He produced a western with fantastic elements called *TEPEPA*(1967) starring Franco Nero, and assisted on a film about - of all things - bottom pinching called *THE EROTOCIST*(1967).

Fulci first Giallo was *PERVERSION STORY*(1968) but it was with *A LIZARD IN WOMAN'S SKIN*(1971) that he first attempted a truly fantastic film, even though it ended as a detective story (the film featured the famous scene of several dogs with their stomachs ripped open). He followed it with the rural horror picture *DON'T TORTURE A DUCKING*(1972), *THE PSYCHIC*(1977), and countless minor films. Fulci was considered a journeyman at best and an opportunistic hack at worst. It was the later description that would apply to his next project, but it began the most creative period of his entire career.

When George A. Romero made the seminal *DAWN OF THE DEAD*(1978), Fulci saw an opportunity to cash in on its success, especially when its Italian release - as *ZOMBIE* - was overseen by Dario Argento, the creative consultant on the film. The result was called *ZOMBI 2* in

Italy, and *ZOMBIE* in America, but it is still best known by its near legendary English title, *ZOMBIE FLESH-EATERS*.

The film opens in New York. A mystery boat with no one on board is adrift in the harbour. On investigation, one of the policemen is attacked by a zombie and killed. The boat belonged to a Professor Menard (Richard Johnson). When the daughter of one of Menard's assistants (Tisa Farrow) and a reporter (Ian McCullough) look into the mystery, it leads them to an island in the West Indies called Matoul that mysteriously doesn't appear on any of the maps. They discover that Menard is conducting experiments with the dead involving voodoo that have gone out of control, leading to the wholesale resurrection of the dead who have a hunger for human flesh. Practically everyone dies in various gruesome ways except Farrow and an infected McCullough who escape back to New York only to find it populated by zombies.

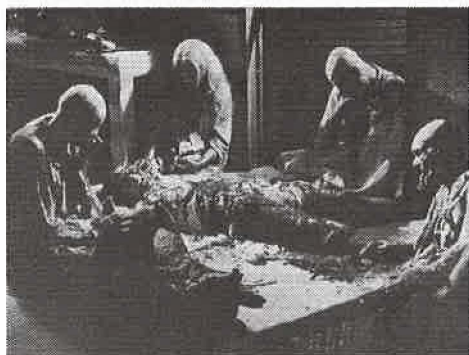
The film has its share of ridiculous moments. When zombies attack, the victims turn around v-e-r-y slowly (as Quentin Tarantino said in *Giallo Pages #3*, I'd be "...the Carl fucking Lewis of turning around"). The final line of dialogue spoken by the man on the radio - "I've just been informed that zombie's are entering the building, they're at the door, they're coming in, AAARRHH" - is truly terrible, and the zombie apocalypse does not seem to



have affected traffic on the Brooklyn bridge seen in the final shot of the film.

These flaws are forgiven for the most part as the film does have several notable assets. **ZOMBIE FLESH-EATERS** has the best eerily cheesy theme music ever thanks to Fabio Frizzi and Giorgio Tucci, and a big reason for its enduring appeal among fans. Sergio Salvati's cinemascope frame is filled with scary details, and the film is very pacy. It also makes an attempt at a social subtext. The zombies are mainly black at first but later their historical oppressors - the Spanish conquistadors - also rise from the dead. But perhaps most of all, its Gianetto de Rossi's horribly realistic gore effects that contributed to the films fame, and one of the main reasons for its notoriety during the video nasties debate.

ZOMBIE FLESH-EATERS was submitted to the BBFC in 1979 who made 14 cuts totaling 1 minute 41 seconds before passing the film with an 'X' certificate. these were: 2 cuts (7 secs) deleting shots of the policeman's bitten throat and a shot of blood spurting from the wound (this shot was included in the trailer). 1 cut (15 secs) Removing the shot of Menard's wife having her eye pierced by a splinter of wood (see picture). 1 cut (34 secs) deleting almost all shots of Menard's wife being eaten by zombies (see picture). 1 cut (10 secs) deleting all shots of blood gushing from Aurette Gay's throat when she is bitten by a zombie (see picture). 1 cut (2 secs) during the zombie attack on the church, a zombie coming through the window having the top of its head sliced off has been removed. 1 cut (9 secs) Menard being bitten on the face has been removed. 1 cut (8 secs) deleting the shot of a zombie biting one of the church peoples arms. 1 cut (3 secs) removing the zombie that's on fire having its head blown off (this shot was also included in the trailer). 1 cut (14 frames) removing a shot of a zombie's mashed face after being hit. 1 cut (1 sec) removing shot of a zombie being slashed in face. 1 cut (2 secs) removing a shot of a zombie being bashed in face



(these 3 cuts are in quick succession). 2 cuts (9 secs) deleting shots of Aurette Gay biting her boyfriend on arm plus a shot of her chewing the flesh. The cut version is also missing the prologue (26 secs) in which Menard shoots a zombie in the head as it begins to get up. The same scene is repeat later in the film using different takes and wasn't cut, so its loss was probably down to the distributor.

This censored version was released on video in the early 80's by VIPCO. They then issued it in a "strong uncut version" which sold for £10 more than the cut version. It became their best seller and was partly responsible for the video nasties panic of which **ZOMBIE FLESH-EATERS** was one of the principle targets. It was declared obscene and banned. It remained banned until the early 90's when VIPCO reissued it on sell thru in a 1.65:1 letterboxed print of the cinema version that was passed uncut by the BBFC with an '18' certificate. VIPCO issued the same cut version in a fully letterboxed (2.35:1) version.

In trying to minimize the damage the censors might do to the film, VIPCO got it wrong. They should have submitted the uncut, letterboxed version to the BBFC for certification as some of the deletions made in 1979 were ridiculously petty. The cuts - made simply on grounds of disgust - result in scenes missing their logical climax, or the action being messily interrupted. They are more infuriating than damaging, described accurately by horror journalist Mark Kermode as "...not unlike listening to a comedian's routine from which punch-lines have been studiously removed", and they dull the film's overall visceral impact. The loss of the eye piercing effect which uses clever cross cutting to achieve verisimilitude is especially regrettable, eye piercing being a favorite target of the BBFC (check out Linda Ruth Williams' excellent article in *Sight & Sound*: April 1994 for more on the subject).

Avoid VIPCO's U.K. release at all costs and buy the their Danish version which is fully letterboxed and uncut. A letterboxed, uncut laserdisc has been announced by The Roan Group in America and is due out in the new year. Produced by William Lustig, it will also feature audio commentary by Ian McCullough. Pick your format of choice and enjoy.

DANIEL

INFERNO(1980)

In the years since the success of *SUSPIRIA*, Argento was stricken with writers block. It was four years till Argento made his next picture, designed as the second part of a proposed sequence to be known as 'The Three Mother' trilogy.

The film opens in New York with a young poetess (Irene Miracle) reading a book that tell of how the world is secretly controlled by 'The Three Mothers', witches that live in Freiburg Germany, New York and Rome in houses designed by the author of the book, an alchemist and architect. She discovers that the building in which she live is one of those houses. While investigating the basement, she loses her keys in a water filled room into which she dive in an attempt to retrieve them. Within the room is a painting of The Mother Of Darkness. She is then confronted with a decomposing corpse.

Meanwhile in Rome, her brother Mark (Leigh McCloskey) is studying music, unaware that the third Mother, The Mother Of Tears, is in the same class. When his sister disappears, Mark goes to New York to investigate. The trail eventually leads him to a confrontation with The Mother Of Darkness herself, and the destruction of the house.

The above synopsis may appear all over the place, but that is what the film is like. There is no coherent narrative. Argento's script - inspired by a comment in De Quincey's 'The Confessions Of An Opium Eater' - is just a device with which to link together a collection of stunningly executed set pieces: Miracles swim through the submerged room - actually filmed by Mario Bava who did special effects work on the film - has a beautifully dreamlike absurdity. A man is attacked by hordes of rats during an eclipse while he attempts to drown some cats, only to have a potential rescuer - a hot dog vender - kill him with a meat cleaver in a shockingly unexpected twist. A scene in which Eleonora Giorgi is stalked by the hooded figure of an alchemist in the basement of a Rome library is memorably tense. In particular, Mark's discovery of the passage ways that honeycomb the building and lead to a secret basement serves as the film's central metaphor for evil that literally permeates the normal world in which people live. Even a mundane taxi ride is made extraordinary.

Critic Alan Jones has stated that you could take any



frame from an Argento film and you would have a masterpiece. That statement is true of *INFERNO*. Argento's fluid camera movements caress seemingly insignificant details like the objects in the opening shots or a trickle of water flowing down the wall. Every shot is elegantly framed and strikingly lit by cameraman Romano Albani in bright reds, blues and greens, a colour scheme held over from *SUSPIRIA* but used here with more subtlety and scored to a slightly more restrained score by Keith Emerson. This is Argento's masterpiece.

INFERNO was submitted to the BBFC in 1980. To the best of my knowledge, it was passed uncut with an 'X' certificate (when I saw it at the Scala in London, it looked uncut and even contained the shot of the cat eating the live mouse). It was then released on video shortly afterwards by CBS/FOX in the same version, though it was pan & scan and the soundtrack was in mono. During the video nasties panic, *INFERNO* was singled out ridiculously for potential prosecution and was withdrawn from release. It remained banned for almost a decade until FOX video resubmitted it for a video certificate in 1993. The BBFC made 1 cut (6 seconds) deleting the aforementioned shot of the cat eating the mouse (some sources state that 28 seconds were cut, but this looked to me to be the only difference) before granting an '18' certificate. The print is a gorgeously pristine transfer letterboxed at 1.60:1 with beautiful, sharp colours, and is presented in stereo. The cut is only annoying when you consider that similar scenes are regularly allowed in David Attenborough's BBC TV. series' which are ironically exempt from classification. In all honesty, the effect is negligible. The American edition released by Key Video is uncut, but we believe FOX's version has the edge over it. It is also available in the U.K. on laserdisc from Encore Entertainment.

DANIEL



CITY OF THE LIVING DEAD(1980)

CITY OF THE LIVING DEAD (also known as PAURA NELLA CITTA' DI MORTE VIVENTI or FEAR IN THE CITY OF THE LIVING DEAD) is the second and least interesting part of Fulci's zombie quartet. Not only does it make no sense whatsoever (I defy anyone to explain the ending) but it commits the ultimate crime of being very, very boring.

Set in the community of Dunwich (H.P. Lovecraft country), the film begins with a priest hanging himself in the local cemetery. In doing so, he invokes an ancient curse that causes the gates of Hell to open and the dead to rise. This is witnessed in New York by medium Mary Woodhouse (Katherine MacColl) who appears to die of fright and is buried alive. But as luck would have it, a reporter rescues her and they team up with a psychoanalyst and his patient, and set off to Dunwich. Although they are on an urgent mission to stop Father Thomas before All Saints Day, they wander around very slowly and talk a lot, and we all get very bored.

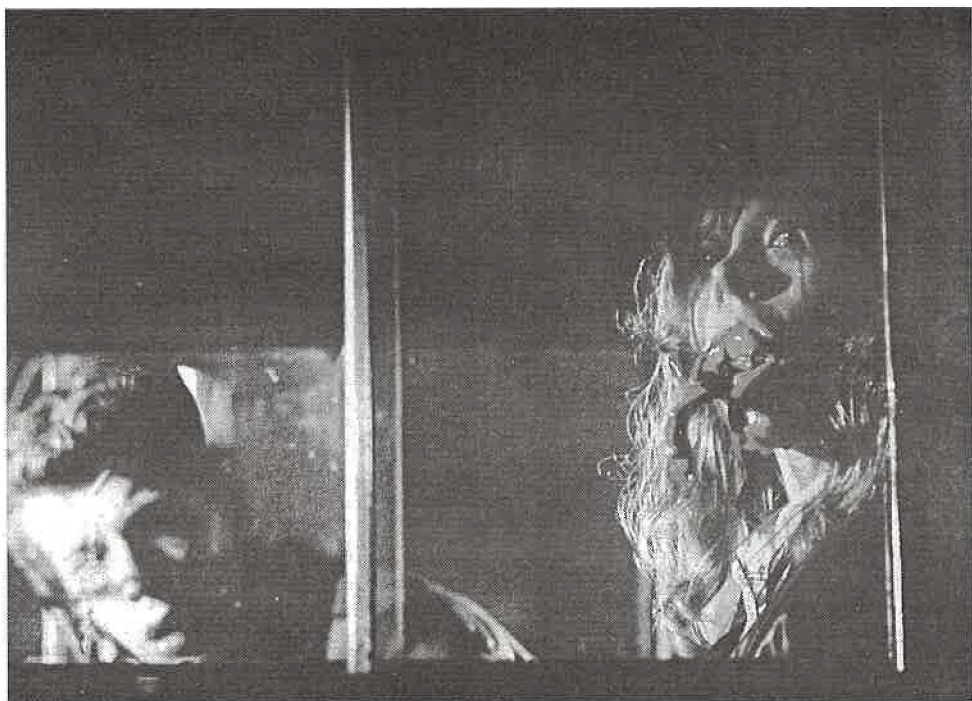
Meanwhile in Dunwich, bad things are happening and it is here that the films strengths lie. Brains are drilled, guts are vomited, brains are squeezed out of heads and maggots rain from the sky. To cut a long story short, after a fair amount of wandering around and talking our heroes seem to stop Father Thomas, only to be thwarted by a totally unintelligible ending. The credits roll and we all breath a sigh of relief before rewinding the tape to re-watch the few spectacular gore scenes. After all, that is what Fulci is best at.

CITY OF THE LIVING DEAD is a joy to behold for gorehounds as it contains some of the grossest effects ever laid down on celluloid. Franco Rufini - Giannani De Rossi's assistant on previous films - easily steps into the masters boots delivering some truly revolting moments. It was surprising then that when the film was submitted to

the BBFC in 1982, the board made only one cut of 1 minute 1 second to the scene where John Morgan gets his head drilled before passing the film with an 'X' certificate. In the uncut version, the scene plays out like a nightmare. The long build up to the actual drilling is accompanied by the ear assaulting sound of the whirring drill, and the effect when it comes is horribly realistic. However, the cut was made with care and the scene retains its essence, if not its original impact.

It was this version that was issued on video by Inter-Light and was somewhat amazingly *not* a target of the video nasties campaign, though the passing of the video recordings act led to its quiet removal from stores. When it was eventually reissued to buy in the early nineties by VIPCO, the BBFC insisted on a further 4 cuts totaling 1 minute 20 seconds before granting an '18' certificate. The scene in which Father Thomas comes across a couple making out in a parked car and possesses the girl, causing blood to flow freely from her eyes before forcing her to vomit out her entire intestinal track before he has her rip her boyfriends brains out was subjected to two cuts. The first of 53 seconds excises all shots of the actress disgorging mouthfuls of entrails and later shots where a dummy is used. Even more disgusting than the actual scene itself is how it was achieved. Old intestines apparently weren't moist enough, so the girl had to actually swallow the guts from a freshly slaughtered sheep and puke them on cue!! (Who said method acting was a bad thing - Ed) The second cut of 8 seconds deletes the scene where the boyfriend - played by a young Michele Soavi - has the back of his head ripped off and his brains fall out. The cuts are very clumsily made and cause a very noticeable jump on the soundtrack, and by such a complete removal of violence, the censors leave the audience in confusion as what has happened. One final





note on this scene; One of the first rental versions of CITY OF THE LIVING DEAD released by either Elephant Video Network Video did apparently retain the scene where she foams at the mouth before vomiting and most of Michele Soavi's reaction shots to the gut vomiting which resulted in multiple jump-cuts. It was just as confusing.

The two other cuts both involve the more explicit elements of brain squeezing. The first of 10 seconds occurs when Sandra falls victim to the female zombie, and the final cut is reserved for Christopher George's demise where 9 seconds of the now zombieified Sandra tearing out his grey matter has been removed.

The logic behind the cuts seems to be based around the notion that as there is no specific reason for the violence (apart from showing us that zombies are nasty buggers) then there is a danger in letting people witness it. What the BBFC seem to be unable to grasp is that the real horror of violence is its very senselessness. And that refusing to acknowledge this, they are also refusing to face the problem and solve it. I digress.

About the film, Fulci has said "There are few horror scenes in [CITY OF THE LIVING DEAD],...tension is the important thing..." Unfortunately, despite some splendidly moody night photography courtesy of regular cameraman Sergio Salvati and an eerie score, there is little to create tension in the film. The characters are all merely ciphers, and the disjointed structure of the piece destroys any involvement the viewer might have in the action. Instead one is left simply reaching for the remote control to fast forward to Fulci's trademark gore scenes. If you have the U.K. version then you are denied even these, and effective as they are, the "maggot rain" and

"buried alive" sequences do not a good movie make.

All of which is a shame because Fulci has proved in ZOMBIE FLESH-EATERS and THE BEYOND that he can make genuinely chilling films, whilst CITY OF THE LIVING DEAD presents itself as the perfect argument the "Fulci can only do gore" brigade.

The definitive version of CITY OF THE LIVING DEAD was issued on Japanese laserdisc by Mount-Light, uncut and letterboxed (2.35:1) in a set that included both the English and Italian language versions. The Dutch version on the EVC label is uncut, and the NTSC format American version released under the title THE GATES OF HELL on the Creature Features/ E.I. label is uncut and letterboxed. Avoid the U.K. version at all costs and track down the American version as it will show the head drill effect properly.

ALEX

THE BEYOND(1981)

If ZOMBIE FLESH-EATERS was an unrestrained attempt to gross out its audience and CITY OF THE LIVING DEAD was flawed experimentation with atmosphere, THE BEYOND was Lucio Fulci's attempt to find a balance between the two, and move his zombie sequence to a fresh creative level.

The film begins in 1920's Louisiana with a sepia tinted prologue in which a diabolist painter is whipped with chains, nailed to a wall and then has acid thrown on him, all the while claiming that the hotel in which he lives is situated on one of the seven gateways to Hell. Flash forward to the present day, and the hotel is inherited by a young woman (Katherine MacColl). As she begins to renovate it, strange things occur and people start to die in various gruesome ways including eye gouging - two of them - and a spider attack! She discovers with help of John (David Warbeck) that the hotel is linked by a short staircase to the hospital several miles away where the dead are returning to life. After attempting to drive back the hordes of the undead, they escape through the cellar of the hotel only to end up trapped in Hell itself, a vision reflected in the diabolist's oil paintings the we saw at the start of the picture.

THE BEYOND is now recognized by genre enthusiasts to be Lucio Fulci's masterpiece. The story is admittedly stolen from Michael Winner's THE SENTINEL(1976) which is in its own strange way a nastier and more repulsive film, using real deformed people to represent evil. Though THE BEYOND does contain its share of gruesome effects by Germano Natali and Fulci regular Gianetto de Rossi, its the quieter moments that make it so memorable. Eerie scenes such as when MacColl comes across a blind girl with her dog walking on the long causeway she is driving across, or the house that appears abandoned during the daytime but is inhabited by the blind girl at night. The pace is languid, but the film achieves a kind of Lovecraftian poetry, thanks largely to Sergio Salvati's splendidly atmospheric cinemascope photograph. Above all, THE BEYOND's most memorably coup is its brilliant depiction of Hell. Its a very low key scene using just a grey set with bodies (actually played by down-and-outs that the crew rounded up and got drunk so they wouldn't move) lying on the ground. The effect is haunting, and shows exactly where HELLBOUND: HELLRAISER II(1988) and EVENT



HORIZON(1997) went wrong in their attempts.

THE BEYOND was submitted to the BBFC in 1981 which made 9 cuts totaling 1 minute 39 seconds before passing the film with an 'X' certificate. These were: 1 cut (18 secs) removing three graphic chain whippings to the shoulder, chest and leg of the diabolist painter in the films prologue. 1 cut (6 secs) removing the shot of the handyman working in the cellar having his eye gouged out. 4 cuts (43 secs) during the spider attack on the librarian, shots of them biting his lip and nose, pulling his eye out and biting his tongue have been deleted. 1 cut (5 secs) when the cleaning lady has her head pushed on to the peg in the wall, the shot of it exiting her eye socket with the eye resting on it has been removed. 1 cut (26 secs) removing shots of the dog tearing out the blind girls throat out, shots of blood gushing from the wound and shots of her having her ear bitten off. 1 cut (1 sec) removing a shot of the little girl with part of her head blown away.

When it was released on video in the early 80's by Vampix, it was in this version. Unlike CITY OF THE LIVING DEAD, THE BEYOND was a target during the video nasties campaign, but in the end no action was taken against it. When VIPCO resubmitted the cinema version for a sell-thru release in the early 90's, it was passed without further cuts. Its letterboxed at 1.45:1.

It is a measure of the films strength that it survives the cuts and is still recognizably a classic. The cuts are poorly made with very noticeable delayed sound jumps (the sound from the previous scene continues into the next for about a second before abruptly stopping). The cuts were again made on grounds of disgust. The eyeball violations were cut as standard.

THE BEYOND was released on Japanese laserdisc uncut and letterboxed at 2.15:1. The uncut version of the film was released in Holland on the Video For Pleasure label (a beautiful print, letterboxed at 1.60:1) and by VIPCO (pan & scan) in Denmark. There are also two laserdisc versions of the film coming soon from Norway (NTSC format) and from The Roan Group in America (NTSC with commentary). Both discs will be letterboxed. They are all superior to VIPCO's censored version.

DANIEL



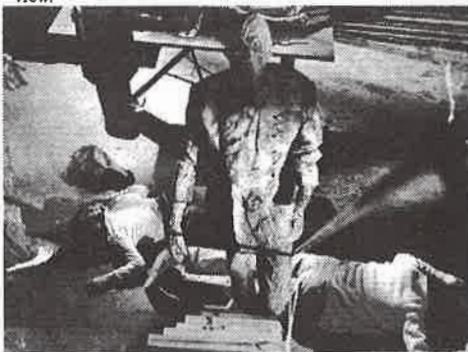
THE HOUSE BY THE CEMETERY(1981)

With *THE HOUSE BY THE CEMETERY*, Fulci brought his zombie quartet to an end. There is almost a case for arguing that this isn't in fact a proper zombie film as its protagonist is not literally posthumous. Its more correctly termed a "gothic horror" film.

The film begins with the murder of two teenagers in an isolated old house, The Freudstein House. In New York, Dr. Norman Boyle (Paolo Malco) is preparing to move to New Whitby with his wife (Katherine MacColl) to continue the research of his former colleague Dr. Peterson, while his young son Bob (Giovanni Frezza) stands in front of a picture of a house claiming that their is a little girl in the window telling him not to go. Dr. Peterson killed his mistress and then hung himself in a house that belonged to a Dr. Freudstein, and it is this house that Norman and his family are to stay in. Events begin quietly. A gravestone is discovered inside the house and the sounds of children crying can be heard, but these soon escalate into violence as Norman discovers the true nature of Peterson's research and fate of Dr. Freudstein.

If *THE BEYOND* is to be considered a masterpiece, then you would have to apply the term to this film as well. The gore that was so up front in *ZOMBIE FLESH-EATERS* recedes into the background here, but that's not to say that the film doesn't have several visceral death scenes. The poker murder of the estate agent is particularly gruesome, as is the throat slashing death of the nanny. The main strength of this film is, as in the three films that preceded it, Sergio Salvati's cinematography. His strong sense of composition and the very strong locations shot in subtle autumnal tones give

the film a surreal, dreamlike mood that rivals the best in the genre. And Fulci doesn't blow it at the end, pulling off an expertly sustained climax in which Bob attempts to evade Freudstien as his parents are killed that is every bit the equal of *THE BEYOND*. The overall treatment of children who previously had parts of their heads blown away without a second thought in *THE BEYOND* is quite tender here. Indeed it is Bob who is the only survivor in the film. After his parents have been killed, he climbs out of the cellar, escaping through the tombstone into a Victorian limbo where he meets the little girl - Freudstien's daughter - who he was able to communicate with, an ending that is both strangely lyrical and disturbingly insular. Its a close run thing, but in the ended I personally think *THE HOUSE BY THE CEMETERY* has the edge over *THE BEYOND*, though its not a popular view.



THE HOUSE BY THE CEMETERY was submitted to the BBFC in 1982 who made 6 cuts totaling 34 seconds before passing the film with an 'X' certificate. These were: 3 cuts (16 secs) deleting two poker stabs to the body of the estate agent and shots of blood gushing in slow motion from the wound to her neck. 3 cuts (18 secs) deleting all three shots of the nanny having her throat cut at the top of the cellar steps.

This censored version was released on video by Vampix shortly afterwards, and was later to become another of Fulci's films to be targeted by the video nasties campaign. The film was withdrawn from stores and remained banned until it was re-released by Elephant Video at the end of the 80's.

Of all of his films, *THE HOUSE BY THE CEMETERY* was the one to suffer least on its theatrical release, which makes the further 4 minutes 11 seconds of cuts required by the BBFC before they would issue an '18' video certificate hard to understand. The cuts were: Removal of all details of the girl stabbed through the back of the head, the knife exiting her mouth and shots of her blood soaked body being dragged away. The removal of the entire poker killing of the estate agent, plus shots of the blood soaked body being dragged away. Removal of most of the killing of the vampire bat including shot of the family being splattered with blood. All shots of the





decomposing bodies in the cellar while Peterson's tape recording plays. Shots of bodies in the cellar including the disemboweled man on the table have been cut. And Norman having his throat torn out by Fraudstein has been removed.

When VIPCO released the film on sell thru a few years ago, they apparently removed 7 mins 27 secs before they submitted it to the BBFC. The Elephant Video version was an atrocity, containing many messy jump cuts (to avoid showing *any* gore) that totally destroy the rhythm of the film and terminally blunt its expertly sustained tension. We haven't been able to track down the VIPCO print so we assume that the cuts were lengthened to tidy up the editing. The overall effect is the same and the badly worn print doesn't help either. *Never* buy this version.

THE HOUSE BY THE CEMETERY was released on laserdisc in Japan several years ago letterboxed at 2.20:1, and despite the fact that the final sepia tone sequence (as with THE BEYOND disc) was presented in normal colour, this version was the best way to see the film. The best version currently available is VIPCO's Danish version. Its an uncut pan & scan version, and its a decent print. Its available from Chainsaw Video in Holland and several other outlets. It may also be released sometime in the future by The Roan Group if the other Fulci releases go well. Keep your eyes peeled!

DANIEL



THE BLACK CAT(1980)

Filmed between ZOMBIE FLESH-EATERS and CITY OF THE LIVING DEAD (or between CITY OF THE LIVING DEAD and THE BEYOND, depending on which source you consult), THE BLACK CAT is usually considered by Giallo fans to be one of Fulci's minor films. This is due largely to the fact that it lacks the visceral thrills that made his "Zombie Quartet" so memorable. It could almost be considered his "calming down film".

A small unnamed English village is besieged by a series of unexplained deaths. When Jill (Mimsy Farmer), an American photographer, discovers a microphone in a crypt while taking pictures of ancient ruins, she reports it to the local police but is advised not to pursue it. Meanwhile, Scotland Yard dispatch an Inspector (David Warbeck) to investigate the killings. Jill traces the microphone back to a recluse, Professor Robert Miles (Patrick Magee), a medium who is attempting to record the sounds of the dead, and who is tormented by a black cat which he claims he is bound to by hatred. The cat is actually the instrument of murder which Professor Miles unconsciously controls and uses to kill people, including two teenagers in a boathouse and a drunk who witnessed him in the graveyard. When the cat kills Lillian, the mother of one of the murdered teenagers and Miles' former lover, he kills it, but it appears to cheat death and continue to terrorize Jill and the Professor, and nearly kills Warbeck.

Despite the title, the film owes very little to Edgar Allan Poe's short story. Indeed it is only the finale where Jill is walled up while unconscious that is recognizably Poe. The Technovision (2.35:1) photography, again by Sergio Salvati is not quite up to the standards that he set in Fulci's zombie films, but still impressive. This time out, the script by Biagio Proietti and Fulci is less interested in atmosphere and gory violence, instead focusing on the more psychological aspects of the story, mainly the contrast between the two main protagonists, the young American tourist and the old reclusive professor. Its also interesting that where as his zombie films were uncompromising bleak, THE BLACK CAT tends to cop out on some plot elements; Warbeck survives the seemingly terminal attempt on his life and Jill's fate is also unclear.

THE BLACK CAT was submitted to the BBFC in the early 80's and was passed uncut with an 'X' certificate. This version was then issued on video by VTC in a pan & scan version. It was released uncut practically everywhere. All these versions were rendered obsolete when Redemption issued the film on sell-thru in a 2.1:1 letterboxed version that boasts excellent picture quality, and was passed uncut by the BBFC with an '18' certificate. The tape also includes the letterboxed theatrical trailer which includes a more generous view of the female teenager's nude, decomposing body. Look no further than this version.

DANIEL

TENEBRAE(1982) Vs. THE NEW YORK RIPPER(1982)

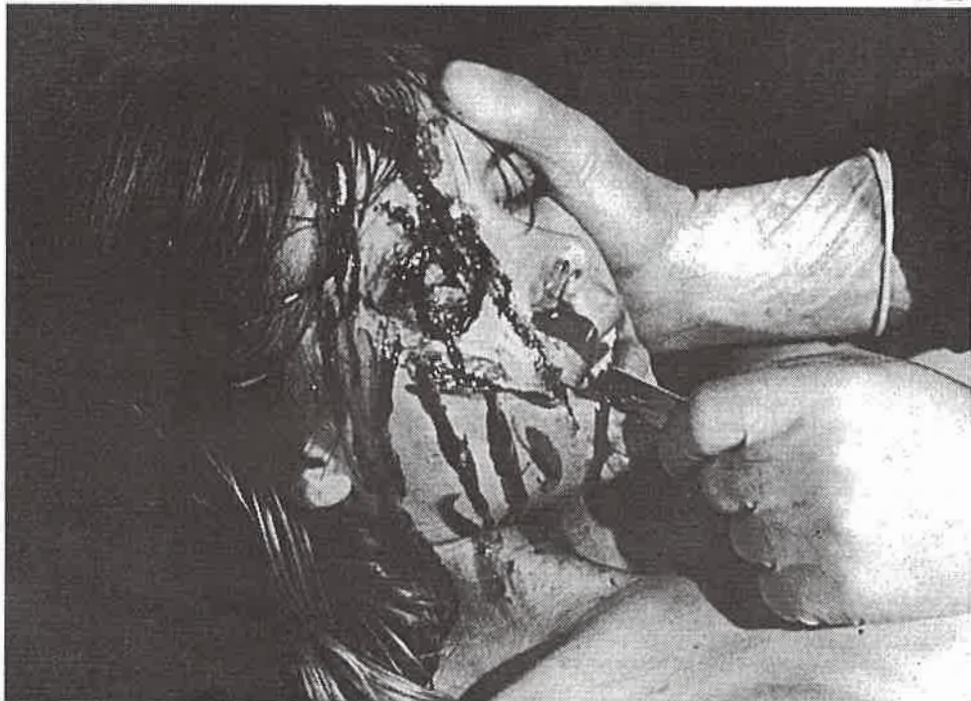
Argento and Fulci were both coming off their masterpieces, but while Argento's work was not that well known in the U.K., Fulci's "Zombie quartet" proved popular with the English audience despite their censorship difficulties. In 1982, the year of years for genre cinema, Fulci and Argento went head-to-head in the genre suddenly made popular by the success of FRIDAY THE 13TH(1980), that of the slasher film. Their approaches to their respective films could not have been more different.

The plot to TENEBRAE is partly a replay of Argento's own THE BIRD WITH THE CRYSTAL PLUMAGE. An American author, Peter Neal (Anthony Franciosa), flies into Rome to publicize his new novel, only to find himself trapped there when, almost as soon as he arrives, a series of murders begin in which women are killed with a straight razor, their mouths stuffed with pages from Neal's book entitled 'Tenebrae'. He is then taunted by the killer who sends him photographs of the crime scene and notes. As he tries to work out the possible identity of the killer with his long time secretary (Daria Nicolodi) and a young would-be agent called Gianni (Cristiano Banti), the murders continue. After the death of a lesbian along with her flatmate and a young girl, the chief suspect - T.V. host Christiano Berti (John Steiner) - is himself killed by an unseen assailant. The solution lies in a half understood clue and a recurring flashback to a man being humiliated by a woman and her

subsequent murder. Berti was the killer, but he was murdered by Peter Neal himself who then continued the killings because of the trauma he suffered when he killed a girl as a teenager, the events depicted in the flashback.

THE NEW YORK RIPPER begins with the discovery of a severed hand near the Brooklyn bridge. A police lieutenant, Fred Williams (Jack Hedley), begins an investigation and discovers that the victim was an exotic dancer and received calls from someone sounding like a duck. Then a female cyclist is violently murdered on a ferry by an unseen assailant making duck sounds. Seeing a connection, Williams calls in a psychiatrist for a psychological profile of the killer, and then begins to receive taunting phonecalls himself. As the murders continue, the list of potential suspects mounts to include almost everybody. Fay (Almanta Keller), one of the "Rippers" potential victims, survives the attack after being menaced by a man with two fingers missing from one of his hands. The evidence seems to point toward a Greek called Mickey Scellenda (Howard Ross) as the murderer until his body turns up after lying dead for eight days. It is unusually a one-armed little girl in hospital that provides the key to the puzzle. It is Peter (Andrew Painter), Fay's boyfriend and the little girl's father who is the "Ripper", a solution prefigured somewhat pedantically by Fay's nightmare following the attack on her.

Scripted by Argento and George Kemp,



TENEBRAE's narrative is complex and does add up, but as with Mario Bava before him, Argento is willing to sacrifice the plots logic in favor visual style.

On the other hand, story is all in THE NEW YORK RIPPER. Scripted by Fulci, Gianfranco Clerici, Dardano Sacchetti and Vincenzo Mannino, it offers a watertight story where everything does eventually add up.

Stylistically, TENEBRAE - beautifully photographed in 1.66:1 widescreen by Luciani Tovoli using Kodak 300 ASA to give crystal clear definition - sees Argento at the peak of his powers as a filmmaker, employing every directorial flourish at his command. This is particularly evident in the famed loutma crane shot as the camera prowls over the roof and down the wall of a building just before one of the murders.

Starkly contrasting this, THE NEW YORK RIPPER - photographed in 2.35:1 cinemascope by Luigi Kuveiller - is filmed in a neutral, TV. movie style. Apart from occasionally strong pieces of location work, it is almost as blank as a documentary. This must have been a conscious decision on Fulci's part considering his previous work with former cameraman Sergio Salvati, but the compositions do tend to look ugly. This is amazing when you realize that Kuveiller was responsible for the stunning camerawork on DEEP RED.

The music in TENEBRAE by ex Goblin members, Simoetti, Pignatelli & Morante is specifically designed to give a hi-tech feel the action which it complements perfectly. Francesco De Masi's score for THE NEW YORK RIPPER is like some 'Starsky And Hutch' reject, though some of the electronic incidental music is better.

The depiction of violence in TENEBRAE has an undeniably aesthetic quality. Brief, shocking scenes in which people are either slashed with razors or axed to death, followed by elegant spurts of blood carry a cumulative effect which is electrifying.

THE NEW YORK RIPPER depicts its carnage in blankly recorded scenes of prolonged mutilation in which pretty girls are repeatedly slashed in graphic detail, violated with broken bottles or have certain body parts (nipples and eyes) razored in close up, killings that became increasingly sexual in nature.

It is, however, the question of misogyny - an accusation leveled at both directors - that fuels the most debate about these two films. Argento uses the plot in TENEBRAE, most explicitly in the scene where Franciasca defends his book during an attack by a female journalist, to explain his use of women as victim in his movies, and the connection between art/cinema violence and real life. To complicate matters, he also falls back on the Hitchcockian device of the explanatory flashback.

Fulci's killer targets sexy women because they represent exactly what his dying daughter will be denied. This also explains the sexual nature of the killings. It could be argued that Fulci's film does ultimately side step the accusations of misogyny by "explaining" his killers motivations. Fulci also uses extreme violence as a narrative short cut to create tension, threatening to let an unspeakable act occur and then allowing it to happen. This is especially evident when the policeman's prostitute girlfriend is tortured, while he and the entire police force stand by helplessly looking at the telephone which the killer tricked them into going to.



On the whole, critics bought Argento's self analyses, but loathed Fulci's conventional approach to extraordinarily unconventional material (THE NEW YORK RIPPER received only *one* positive review, written by Alan Jones in Starburst #53). Between the two of them, Fulci and Argento took the slasher film to the limit, both in terms of violence and visual style. After this, the genre had nowhere to go, eventually petering out and finally being reinvented by Wes Craven in A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET (1984) with supernatural elements (Ironically, Craven is also responsible for its revival in the nineties with SCREAM (1996)). It was somehow fitting that a genre that started in Italy a decade earlier should end in Italy.

Their treatment at the hands of the BBFC could not by more different either. When TENEBRAE was submitted to them in 1982, they made only 1 cut (3 secs) to the arm chopping scene removing the shot of her holding the stump as blood sprays between her fingers, before they issued an '18' certificate. It was this version which was then released on video by Videomedia, letterboxed at approximately 1.60:1. It was later singled out as a video nasty and was banned. It has never been reissued, though Redemption have displayed an interest in releasing it. But this is unlikely due to the cost of the print and the severe cuts that would very probably be inflicted on it.

When THE NEW YORK RIPPER was submitted to the BBFC, it suffered the indignity of being refused a certificate outright with no suggestion of cuts. Rumors even circulated that all prints of the film were given a police escort out of the country! The leniency with which TENEBRAE was treated is surprising, but even Helen Keller could understand the banning of THE NEW YORK RIPPER.

TENEBRAE was released on laserdisc in Japan a few years ago in an uncut, letterboxed version that was the best way to see the film. The best version of the film currently available is the Australian cassette on the Palace label which is in pan & scan - though not significantly damaging - and is uncut with good picture quality. This version is also available from certain European outlets as well.

THE NEW YORK RIPPER is available uncut and letterboxed from Sweden, Greece, Denmark and Belgium, but the best version that we know of is the Italian Gore Classic's release by Professional Cine Media in Austria. Issued on both laserdisc (NTSC format and now deleted) and video (PAL format) in a remastered, uncut version letterboxed at 2.00:1, its and excellent way to see this much maligned film.

DANIEL

PHENOMENA(1985)

Critically slammed on its initial release, PHENOMENA - retitled CREEPERS in the U.K. and America - is fast turning into one of Argento's most interesting and richly textured films, if not because of its overall effect than for the sheer number of themes and ideas that are packed into its running time.

The gorgeous Jennifer Connelly plays a young girl at a school in Zurich, Switzerland whose pupils keep falling prey to a deranged killer. Through her psychic link to insects, she discovers that the killer is the mutant son of the school's headmistress, and with the help of her insect friends and a vengeful razor wielding chimpanzee, she dispatches them in a violent and bloody finale. But this being an Argento movie, there is far more to it than that...

The film marks a distinct change in style for Argento. Gone is the claustrophobic feel of his earlier films such as SUSPIRIA and INFERNO. Instead the action is set in the vast open spaces of the very beautiful Swiss countryside. Also gone is the quickfire editing that has characterized so many of Argento's murder sequences, replaced by an almost leisurely pace. Its as if in the open spaces, time has dilated and terror can take its time.

Traditional themes are still present however, The emergence of the person within and the revulsion felt toward procreation. The former is especially noticeable in the similarity between Connelly character and that of Suzy Bannion in SUSPIRIA, both of who must believe in themselves before the evil can be vanquished. There is also the theme of the "Normal" world being out of touch with all primeval forces. Whilst everyone around her sees the emergence of her new personality as a form of madness, only the crippled entomologist McGregor (Donald Pleasence) seems to understand.

There is also the conflict between the spiritual world and the world of the flesh. Indeed this conflict is at the heart of the film with the spiritual Connelly being the heroine of the piece, whilst the killer is a mutant of twisted flesh and evil intent.

Most critics failed to see beyond the technicalities of the film, dismissing it merely as "distasteful" and "absurd". While it does contain many wince worthy elements (note some truly terrible dialogue e.g. "What if the saw me? I'm really scared". "I would be too") it also contains some stunning set pieces for the viewers' delectation.

The scene where Connelly is sleepwalking along the roof at the school only to be confronted by the killers latest victim is a moment of sublime terror. Mirroring the first death of the film, the victims screaming head smashes through a window only to have a knife stabbed through her head and out of her mouth. But in the nightmarish confines of the film, the terror does not end there, and she then falls through a hole in the roof, held only by her nightgown. The surreal aspect of such scenes is further heightened by the eclectic soundtrack, supplied as usual by The Goblins. What one is presented with is an attack on the senses, but in a far less violent - though no less visceral - style than usual for Argento.

It is only in the end scenes that we descend into truly familiar Argento territory. From the moment Connelly starts to crawl down the tunnel in her attempt to retrieve the telephone, the traditional feelings of claustrophobia and entrapment return. No surprise then that it is this scene that most of the films detractors held up as being the most effective. Unable to see beyond Argento's technical style, they were unable to appreciate the film that had gone before. In the finale, he presents what is probably his most revolting set piece ever. Pushed by Daria Nicolodi into a cesspit full of maggots and decaying corpses, her fate lies in the hands of a policeman chained to the wall who has to very painfully break his thumbs to help her.

But this is only the beginning, the precursor to her discovery of the real killer, the sheet of steel decapitation scene and the face slashing death of Daria Nicolodi at the hands of the straight razor wielding chimpanzee. Despite what critics have said, Argento had lost none of his style, none of his skill and certainly none of his nerve.

PHENOMENA originally ran for 110 minutes, but was cut down to 82 minutes for distribution in the U.K. and U.S. When it was submitted to the BBFC in 1985, they made 2 cuts totaling 6 seconds before granting an '18' certificate deleting the last shots of Nicolodi having her face and throat slashed with a razor. The subsequent Palace Video release suffered 1 further cut of 2 seconds removing the last remaining shot of Nicolodi savaged face.

Objectively speaking, neither version was liked. The 110 minute version is paced correctly but many thought it contained too many banal or ridiculous scenes, and while the 82 minute version omitted many of these scenes, the fast pace is at odds with the languid mood of the picture.

The best version of PHENOMENA available was the limited edition Japanese laserdisc which offered an unratified full screen version of the uncut Italian print in English. The Italian cassette is the same but is dubbed. The best English language version that we know of was released in Australia on the Palace label (no connection to the now defunct British label that released the film in the U.K. It is a nice quality full screen version that contains all the footage cut in the U.K. and virtually all the distributor cuts, though apparently there are still some discrepancies with the Italian version. We still think that at this time, it is still your best bet.

ALEX

STAGEFRIGHT(1986)

Michele Soavi was born in Milan on 7th March 1957. After quitting his studies, he started acting lessons at the Fersen studios and decided that he wanted to get involved in the film industry professionally, starting right at the bottom of the ladder. One of his first jobs was on **BAMBULE**(1979) in which he acted, produced and was assistant director. He acted in **PICCOLE LABBRA**(1979), **ALIEN TERROR**(1980) and in Fulci's **CITY OF THE LIVING DEAD** on which he was also a set hand.

While he was assistant director on **CALIGULA: THE UNTOLD STORY**(1982) in which he also acted, he formed a friendship with director Aristide Massaccesi (better known as Joe D'Amato) which led to him working on some of his later films such as **ATOR: THE FIGHTING EAGLE**(1982) as screenwriter, **ENDGAME**(1983) as assistant director and actor, and **ANNO 2020**(1983) as assistant director. He also assisted director Dario Argento on **TENEBRAE** (as second assistant) and **PHENOMENA** (as first assistant, but he also shot the video clip with Bill Wyman), and shot second unit on **OPERA**(1987) and Lamberto Bava's **DEMONS**(1985) in which he also acted. In addition, he directed the documentary **DARIO ARGENTO'S WORLD OF HORROR**(1985). With this impressive list of credits, Soavi wanted to debut as a director in his own right. Argento somewhat surprisingly passed on producing, unwilling to take a risk, leaving the way clear for Soavi's mentor Massaccesi to step in. Soavi chose a script called 'StageFright - Aquarius' that Massaccesi commissioned from actor Luigi Montefiore, better known as George Eastman (the baby eating cannibal from Massaccesi's **ANTROPOPHAGUS**(1980)) though he is credited as Lew Cooper in **STAGEFRIGHT**. After a rough patch, Soavi's film was the kick start that the Italian Giallo/ horror genre needed.

The film is set in a theater where a group of hopeful young actors are rehearsing for an avant-garde version of the Jack The Ripper story called 'The Night Owl'. The play's arrogant director (David Brandon) believes that its sensational aspects - having the victim rape her would be attacker - will prove controversial enough to make the play a hit and establish his name. When the lead dancer, Alicia (Barbara Cupisti from **THE NEW YORK RIPPER**), sprains her ankle, she is taken to a local hospital by her dresser, Betty (Ulrike Schwerk). On arriving there, they discover that it is a psychiatric hospital, and unknown to them, a multiple killer called Irving Wallace escapes and hides in the back of their car. On their arrival back at the theater, Betty is pick-axed in the head by Wallace. Instead of halting the production, the ambitious director attempts to use the tragedy to boost ticket sales. He persuades his cast to carry on with the play by waving an advance under their noses, and by getting one of the young actresses, Corinne (Lorendana Parella), to hid the key to the only exit. It seems like the perfect way to ensure commitment from his actors until Corinne is murdered, and the cast find themselves locked in with an insane killer intent on bumping the all off.

The opening shots of **STAGEFRIGHT** are brilliantly deceptive. As a prostitute is murdered in a dark street, people gather round to view the body. It looks as if we are watching some pathetic slasher garbage until a man in an owl mask jumps out of the darkness and the scene is revealed to be a dress rehearsal for a play. This is only the first of several "fourth wall violations", a process whereby the viewer's ability to differentiate between real and unreal events on screen is broken down. During the on stage murder of Corinne, the killer wearing the owl mask is egged on to stab her until the onlookers realize that what is happening is not part of the play. The gun found by Alicia could be real, or it could be a replica, dead bodies are stacked up on stage like props and during the drill murder, real blood mixes with fake blood.

The build up to the killings is quite long, but this just adds to their power as people are dispatched with a variety of implements. This power is actually deceptive. As with Tobe Hooper's **THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE**(1974) which Soavi has admitted was an influence on **STAGEFRIGHT**, the actual on screen violence is lower than you think. For example, Wallace's chainsaw killing of the misguided actor who jumps through the hole in the floor to confront him is so shocking because his dismemberment is glimpsed only briefly as the beam of a torch flashes over his body while his screams are heard on the soundtrack. Hooper's film also provides the inspiration for the scene in which the killer sits on stage amongst the dead bodies while a fan blows feathers everywhere.

Though he is reticent to admit it, **STAGEFRIGHT** does contain references to the work of Dario Argento. The idea of people trapped in an enclosed space was inspired by the scene in **THE BIRD WITH THE CRYSTAL PLUMAGE** where Tony Mustane is trapped between the shop windows like fish in a tank, hence the films sub-title **AQUARIUS**. The persistent rain outside of the theater underlines the reference. Soavi himself cites John Carpenter's **HALLOWEEN**(1978) (the idea of the unkillable killer, and the twist ending) as an influence, and also **THE CASSANDRA CROSSING**(1979), although we couldn't spot it.

STAGE FRIGHT went straight to video on the Avatar label in the U.K. When it was submitted to the BBFC, they made 1 cut (4 secs) removing shots of the drill bit exiting the man's chest during the drill murder before granting an '18' certificate.

When Redemption submitted the complete version - letterboxed at 1.45:1 with good picture quality - for their recent sell thru release, it was passed uncut! Why this happened is hard to understand as it goes against BBFC policy, but it makes it the best version of this fantastic film currently available.

DANIEL

OPERA(1987)

After crumming PHENOMENA so full of ideas, OPERA is seemingly a thematic step backwards. Indeed when questioned about this, Argento stated that "PHENOMENA picks up where OPERA ends". Opera ends with a director going off to Switzerland to make a film about insects. It seems that it is not only in Argento's films that reality and the fantastic cross...

The film revolves around rehearsals for a contemporary version of the "Scottish Play". The famous curse seems to be rearing its ugly head when the star of the piece is knocked down by a car after storming out of the theater. Her role is taken by her understudy Betty (Christina Marsillach), and that is when the horror begins.

For a modern horror film, OPERA contains surprisingly few deaths, the killer claiming only three victims. However Argento films each one so beautiful and surrounds them with such stunning set pieces that the casual viewer is left believing that the film is comprised of one carefully crafted scene of butchery after another. The audience finds themselves lambasted by stunning tracking shots around the opera house, close-ups of the killers pulsating brain and a strident rock score that often threatens to reach the heights of The Goblins screeching score for SUSPIRIA. A veritable assault on the senses!

The killer's first victim is the stage manager Urbano (William McNamara) who is also Betty's lover. This is undoubtedly the most shocking moment of sheer violence in the film. Urbano enters a room to find Betty tied to a post with needles taped under her eyes. As he approaches her he is viciously stabbed in the neck, skewering his tongue. As he falls to the floor, Betty is forced to watch as he is repeatedly knifed in the face and palms until dead.

The next murder is that of the wardrobe mistress. Once again Betty is forced to watch, and through character identification so are we. During the murder, the wardrobe mistress swallows a bracelet that can identify the killer, forcing the him to cut her throat open with a pair of scissors to retrieve it.

It is however the next murder that is often lauded as one of Argento's most audacious. Betty is in her apartment with a friend (Daria Nicolodi) when the killer arrives outside. While Betty slowly drags the phone along the floor towards her, her friend spies on the killer through the doors peep-hole, only to have him fire his gun

through the hole, killing her. The slow-motion shots of the bullet coming down the barrel of the gun, piercing her eye and exiting the back of her head are followed by Betty's point of view as the bullet hits the phone and her friends body crumples to the floor.

The killer is finally unmasked when the ravens to be used in the production are released and peck out his eye, the scenes of the ravens swooping down on the audience being filmed with great panache. Unfortunately this climax is followed by a ridiculous plot twist taken from the Thomas Harris novel 'Red Dragon' but unused in Michael Mann's film version MANHUNTER(1986). No police force in the world would be stupid enough to confuse a tailor's dummy with a real corpse, but then Argento then does redeem himself by killing off the obnoxious show director and having the killer merely dragged away by the police. Justice is not served.

There is an unsettling element of voyeurism in OPERA that although being an important element in all of Argento's films has never been as prominent as it is here. It seems that this time the murders must not only be done, but be seen to be done. Betty is forced to watch each killing and so are we. But unlike most horror films where murders are shown simply for plot reasons, Argento shows us the murders from the characters point of view, forcing us to share the killers excitement and the victims pain. A very guilty pleasure indeed!

Even if the plot is weak, the film remains afloat due to its sheer style, and the confrontational method of presentation outlined above that separates it from the more conventional stalk'n/slash cinema. Argento has made a film that presents murder not as a nasty occurrence to be turned away from, but a thrilling event (note the rock score that punctuates each murder) that simply has to be viewed. In doing so, he has crafted one of the most mesmerizing horror films in recent years.

OPERA premiered in Italy at 107 minutes where it played uncut for three week before prints were withdrawn and extensively cut. It was this version that was issued on video in Italy. It was then picked up for distribution by Orion in a version cut to 90 minutes losing many expository dialogue scenes and the much despised "communing with nature ending".

Except for a few screenings at repertory theaters, OPERA - retitled TERROR AT THE OPERA - went straight to video in England, but the BBFC made 3 cuts totaling 33 seconds before granting an '18' certificate. The cuts were a zoom in to Urbano's skewered tongue (4 secs), virtually all details of Urbano being stabbed (20 secs approx.) and a shot of the killer forcing the scissors into the wardrobe mistress' mouth (9 secs approx.). The video version is damaged less by the cuts than the cropping of Ronnie Taylor's incredible camerawork.

The Rumored uncut and letterboxed laserdisc of OPERA from Elite Entertainment in America has still not materialized. Until then, Southgate Video's hard to find pan & scan cassette from America released under the U.K. title contains the most complete version of the film available anywhere in the world.

ALEX



THE CHURCH (1989)

After helming *STAGEFRIGHT*, Michele Soavi was hired as second unit director on Terry Gilliam's much vilified \$45 million fantasy masterpiece *THE ADVENTURES OF BARON MUNCHHAUSEN* (1988). With this impressive credit and a solid debut under his belt, Dario Argento this time agreed to act as producer, also co-writing the screenplay with Soavi and Franco Ferrini. The film promised to be a huge event in Italian horror cinema, but it was not to be. Despite some impressive set pieces and a script with huge potential, the film fails due to the lack of cohesion between its many parts.

The film opens with its most impressive sequence - a slow and ominous attack by a group of Templar Knights upon a village of Devil worshippers. Both shot and scored like a scene from Amando de Osorio's *TOMBS OF THE BLIND DEAD* (1971), this sequence details the massacre of the village, and the occupant's burial in a huge mass grave. This destruction is witnessed by a young girl (Asia Argento, who also provides the films "twist") who is subsequently murdered. The action then flashes forward to the present day, and we discover that a church has been erected on the grave in order to contain its demons.

Of course, the demons escape and the rest of the film follows the misfortunes of those trapped inside the church when the evil is let loose. This movement of the film as we follow various groups of survivors in their desperate bid to escape is uncannily like Lamberto Bava's *DEMONS* (1985), but without the excitement.

The most upsetting thing about *THE CHURCH* is that there is a great horror film in there somewhere, but Soavi somehow ends up with a movie that is distinctly less than the sum of its parts. This has a great deal to do with the very disjointed script. There seems to be at least six sub-plots going on at one time or another, but the film refuses to allow the audience involvement with any of them.

Instead Soavi relies on staging a number of impressive, but rather uninvolved set pieces that rely solely upon visual experience. Indeed the only truly effective moment in this movement of the film is when the ancient mechanisms that seal up the church are set in motion. There is a real sense of foreboding developed as the doors slowly swing shut and the tablets turn around to reveal ancient, chilling prophecies. Unfortunately this sense of dread is never realized as after this sequence, Soavi falls back on standard shock tactics and well worn clichés.

From here on in the film is just a series of disappointments: A wonderful escape attempt into a railway tunnel has its climax ruined by awful effects work. The demons that we all want to see are glimpsed far too briefly to provide any real satisfaction. Entire sequences are lifted out of *DEMONS* and reshaped at half strength, and even the potentially brilliant shot of an old woman ringing the church bell by beating her husband's severed head against it fails to arouse interest. *DEMONS* worked because it built up a great kinetic pace as it went along, ending up at an almost hysterical pitch. *THE CHURCH* on the other hand just coughs and wheezes a bit before grinding to a halt.

During the first half, the film does contain some rather meaty gore scenes such as a surreal heart removal and a well staged pneumatic drill through the stomach, but these scenes are only interesting for what they are...Gore. They bear little relevance to the film as a whole. Despite the irrelevance of such early scenes, we find ourselves willing something similar to happen later on, anything to relieve the boredom. Soavi may have been attempting to scare us rather than revolt us toward the end of the film, but a two dimensional priest figuring out what we've all guessed about half an hour before doesn't make for fun viewing. We want excitement!

In *STAGEFRIGHT*, Soavi showed that he had the talent to pull off some serious scares. The film zipped along at a crisp pace, the plot kept the audience guessing and the murder scenes well shot and often disturbing. Why this project went wrong is anyone's guess, but a simple comparison between the drill murder in *STAGEFRIGHT* and the model being stabbed with the railings in *THE CHURCH* reveals that something here is seriously amiss. Perhaps the size of the project scared Soavi off form. Maybe it was two major talents canceling each other out.

The film is also let down by its hysterically over the top performances. There is nothing naturalistic about any of the players, especially the head priests who comes across more as mad puritans. The ridiculous performances also serve to diminish the potentially disturbing element of child abuse that is present at the start of the film. What could have been a horrific element of the story becomes simply laughable, and making child abuse laughable is *really* horrific.

This is not to say that I didn't like the film... I hated it! *THE CHURCH* simply confirms the belief of many genre commentators that the halcyon days of the Italian horror film are over. There is no denying that this film marked a clear decline in quality for the genre, but there were bigger disappointments in store.

THE CHURCH was never given a theatrical release in the U.K. other than its appearance at the 'Shock Around The Clock' horror festival in 1989. It was released on video by First Independent amidst rumors that the "pneumatic drill" suicide scene had been cut, but the current sell-thru cassette appears to have been passed uncut by the BBFC with an '18' certificate. Its in Pan & Scan but doesn't look noticeably cropped. The American edition of *THE CHURCH* released on the Southgate label does offer the complete version with very slight letterboxing, but should you want to buy the film, the U.K. edition is as good as any.

ALEX

TWO EVIL EYES(1989)

Considering the immense amount of talent involved in this production - and could a project that re-teams George A. Romero, Dario Argento and effects whiz Tom Savini who last collaboration was the undisputed genre masterpiece DAWN OF THE DEAD(1978) be anything but brilliant - it is more than a little disappointing that the final result is...well, total shit.

Both directors seemed to have left the skills they obviously possess as far away from this production as possible, and Savini was obviously trying to out do an Ed Wood film in terms of rank effects. As a result, what should have been a roller-coaster ride through horror heaven turns out to be a tedious trip on a carousel of crap.

TWO EVIL EYES comprises of two stories adapted from the works of Edgar Allen Poe. Throughout his short and tragic life, Poe was plagued by nightmares, and it was these that formed the basis for his many short stories and poems. These often harrowing stories were rarely supernatural, but still led to him becoming one of the most influential figures in literary horror. His work was most famously adapted by Roger Corman in his run of studio bound classics: THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER(1960), THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM(1961), THE PREMATURE BURIAL(1962), TALES OF TERROR(1962), THE RAVEN(1963), THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH(1964) and THE TOMB OF LEGIA(1964).

Romero take's on 'The Facts In The Case Of M. Valdemar'. Written in 1845, it is Poe's only zombie story and an obvious choice for gory George, but instead it turns out to be about as interesting as rigor mortis. It concerns the ill fated attempts by an adulterous wife and her lover to cheat her husband out of his money. Their plan involves hypnotizing him in order to get him to sign all his belongings over to her before killing him. Unfortunately the trance they put him in allows him to conquer death and come back for revenge.

Romero's segment owes less to Poe than it does to the 'Something To Tide You Over' and 'The Crate' episodes of his own CREEPSHOW(1982). The idea of the hypnotic trance lasting after death is the most interesting aspect of this tale, but any possible examination of this is jettisoned in favor of the shallow and very predictable story. As he has proved in the past, Romero needs time to tell his stories. In this short format he tends to forget subtle nuances and just shoves in a number of shock scenes, and as we don't care about any of the characters they just become failed shocks. Even the climax involving a metronome as a murder weapon comes across as simply silly, even though it is the best effect in the film. Not even Adrienne Barbeau can make a difference to this one.

Originally, Argento was to have adapted 'The Masque Of The Red Death', but considered Roger Corman's version to be a masterpiece that he could not improve on. Instead he opted for Poe's 1843 story 'The Black Cat', but if you were thinking that things might get better with Argento at the helm then think again. His direction here is boring and flat, which is a real shame because this is one of Poe's best stories. Interestingly Argento

incorporates several references to other Poe stories such as 'The Pit And The Pendulum' and 'Madeline', but their resonance is shockingly minimal. The story holds many possibilities for some real horror, all of which are wasted along a magnificent performance by Harvey Keitel that would have benefited a far superior production.

Keitel plays a twisted crime photographer who kills his girlfriend with a meat cleaver and then hides the corpse behind a fake wall in her apartment. He then finds himself haunted by a mysterious black cat which through a series of sinister events, exacts retribution on him.

The story is brought down right at the beginning by a scene in which Keitel is seen photographing the naked corpse of a woman who has been cut in half by a pendulum. It sounds shocking, but Savini's truly awful effects work provides one of most plastic looking bodies in movie history that that ruins the effect of the entire scene. After starting on such a bummer, Argento continues in much the same way.

Taking the same route as Romero, he jettisons all the elements needed to make a successful horror - suspense, intelligence and audience involvement - and just shoves in a few scenes of gore that don't work. Successful anthology horror films have always been rare. Examples such as ASYLUM(1972), DEAD OF NIGHT(1945) and Corman's own Poe adaptation TALES OF TERROR are few and far between. Their success came from the fact that they kept their shocks to the end of each installment, and built to these climaxes with solid story and character development so that when the twist is revealed, the audience is involved in the action and actually cares.

The greatest example's of the horror short are to be found in the original 'Twilight Zone' television series in episodes such as 'The Eye Of The Beholder' and many others. If only Romero and Argento had followed this example instead of pandering to the modern horror audience's desire for instant and gory gratification. TWO EVIL EYES will probably end up being nothing more than an annoying footnote in the careers of two of the horror genre's greatest talents. Terror is not a fleeting emotion. It takes time to build and longer to dissipate. Only rarely can it be encapsulated into 50 minutes, and this is not one of those occasions. A big, big let down.

TWO EVIL EYES premiered in the U.K. at the 'Shock Around The Clock' film festival in 1990. It was released straight to video by Medusa, passed uncut by the BBFC with an '18' certificate. There is currently no sell thru version available. The U.S. theatrical version was cut from 115 minutes to 95 minutes, but the footage was restored for the Media cassette release. Until Elite Entertainment's letterboxed laserdisc and cassette releases comes out, take your pick between these two versions.

ALEX

THE SECT(1991)

THE CHURCH was something of a letdown for Michele Soavi after his auspicious debut. His third feature was something else entirely. Produced by Dario Argento, THE SECT showed much more of an American influence while remaining distinctly Italian.

The film opens in 1970 with a Charles Manson style massacre of a peaceful hippie commune in California, led by Damon (Thomas Arana), a mysterious figure wandering the desert. Twenty years on, Miriam (Kelly Curtis, Jamie Lee Curtis' younger sister), a German school teacher, "accidentally" knocks down an apparent down-and-out (Herbert Lom). She takes him home to recover, but while he is there he puts some kind of insect up her nose and then dies! The man is actually Moebius Kelly, the leader of a Devil worshipping sect who is putting into effect a masterplan that has secretly determined the path that Miriam's life has taken, and that will result in the birth of the child of Satan.

THE SECT is reminiscent of both Roman Polanski's classic ROSEMARY'S BABY(1968) and Argento's INFERNO but has considerably less effect than either of these. This is not to say that the film isn't ambitious. The surreal dream sequences are distinguish by sudden bursts of nastiness, the ritual face ripping sequence is impressive, and the climactic lowering of Miriam in to the gateway to Hell for the birth is striking lit. But THE SECT is flawed.

Some of the set pieces are silly, the obvious candidate is the rabbit using the remote control, and herein lies the film's main problem. The removal of the rabbit scene would eliminate an important plot detail, and its this purposeful structuring of the film by Soavi at a slightly punishing 2 hours running time that ultimately detracts from its effectiveness. He also fudges the climax in which Miriam kills herself, the child and the Sect only to be spared by the shred of innocence the child she bore possesses. Soavi could be accused of coping out where as Polanski, Argento and even Richard Donner on THE OMEN(1976) didn't.

Before its release Romoli promised several visceral gore killings, but these scenes which included a supermarket checkout girl being crucified with a rivet gun and having her heart ripped out, and a scene where Maria Angela Giordano, after being slashed by a truck driver, has her stitching spraying blood everywhere were removed by Soavi so as not to deflect attention away from the central story. There omission is nothing to do with censorship.

THE SECT went straight to video in the U.K. When it was submitted to the BBFC, they passed the film uncut with an '18' certificate which was then released on the Guild label in a version letterboxed at 1.60:1. Guild have recently announced a sell thru edition which should be the same version, but if it isn't, seek out and buy the rental edition as its an excellent print. The film was released as THE DEVIL'S DAUGHTER in America by Republic Home Video.

DANIEL

TRAUMA(1993)

The dreadful failure of TWO EVIL EYES(1990) put Argento back on the comeback trail. The resulting feature, his first in six years was not the hit he needed to re-establish his name.

Aura Petrescu (Asia Argento) is an anorexic teenager who witnesses the decapitation of both of her parents after a seance conducted by her mother (Piper Laurie). The killings appear to be the work of a maniac the papers have dubbed "The Headhunter". It is another of Argento's "half remember flashback" plot devices that provides the solution to both her own trauma, and why a series of nurses are being killed.

The killer is (quite obviously) Aura's mother, the murders being a revenge on the doctors who covered up the fact that one of them had accidentally decapitated her baby during delivery.

The model for this film is Argento's own DEEP RED, but the reason for taking a masterpiece and watering it down in a partial remake is perplexing. Tom Savini's effect work is terrible, resulting in them being significantly pared down before release. The acting is very much a mixed bag. Asia Argento is very attractive and very good in a tough, harrowing role, but Christopher Rydell as the former drug addict who wants to help her is not so good. Piper Laurie reprises her CARRIE(1976) role on auto pilot, Frederick Forrester as the crazy doctor is bland, James Russo as the investigating cop is terrible and Brad Douir in yet another cameo fails to register.

So who is to blame for this mess? Distinguished horror writer T.E.D. Klein is one candidate as it was he that revised Gianni Romoli and Franco Ferrini's original script, and Argento himself for trying to Americanize his distinctly European vision. The producers of TRAUMA somewhat unsure of how to promote it said it was like "A horror movie if David Lynch directed one". The irony of this statement is that Lynch has directed four horror movies, and the two that he made in the 90's, TWIN PEAKS: FIRE WALK WITH ME(1992) and LOST HIGHWAY(1996) - both with an Italian influence - are both truly terrifying masterpieces that make Argento's work in the same decade look totally redundant.

TRAUMA was released in Italy with a unrestricted rating, a family film in other words. This 109 minute version was cut by 7 minutes for overseas distribution. When it was submitted to the BBFC by Guild for a release straight to video, the BBFC made cuts to 2 scenes for the '18' certificate, removing a brief shot of the wire cutting into Linda's neck, and similar shots of the same wire cutting through Piper Laurie's throat in the film's climax. The cuts have the unusual effect of making the deaths nastier.

The Dutch cassette restores the Guild cuts but is shorter than the Italian version and the American cassette and disc on the Worldvision label run 106 mins unrated, as does the Japanese disc. All are pan & scan with mono sound mix. The best available version of TRAUMA is a bootleg cassette circulating in the U.K. which includes 7 mins of extra footage and is letterboxed (2.35:1). Its illegal (sadly) but seek it out.

DANIEL

DELLAMORTE DELLAMORE(1993)

In an attempt to free himself from the creative strangle hold that Dario Argento exerted over his last two films, Soavi set up his own production company with screenwriter Gianni Romoli and producer/publicist Tilde Corsi called Audifilm. For their first project, they chose Tiziano Sclavi's cult novel 'Dellamorte Dellamore', the inspiration for the 'Dylan Dog' comic book phenomena.

Francesco Dellamorte (Rupert Everett) looks after a cemetery with his half white assistant Gnaghi (French pop star Francois Hadja Lazaro) who communicates only in grunts. But this is no ordinary cemetery. In it the dead are returning to life - they are referred to as 'returners' instead of zombies - and it is their job to kill them before they can infect the surrounding town of Buffalora in which the cemetery is situated. When he meets She (Anna Falchi) a young bride burying here dead husband, Francesco falls in love with her. While they are having sex on her husband's grave, he returns and bites her, forcing Francesco to shoot her. But she was not actually dead and she returns, forcing Francesco to shoot her again. Unable to come to terms with killing the only woman he has ever loved, he is cursed by seeing her face on every woman he meets including the mayor's assistant and a hooker. The differences between the living and the dead become blurred in his mind, and he starts to dream of killing living people only to have the dreams come alarmingly true, but no one believes he could be responsible. He resolves to leave the town with Gnaghi, but discovers that the road leads nowhere, and there is no outside world. In the final shot, Gnaghi speaks for the first time asking to be taken home. Francesco just grunts.

DELLAMORTE DELLAMORE is a masterpiece. Just when it seemed that the Italian horror industry had forgotten what one looked like, Soavi redefined the genre with a film that is at once funny, sad, poetic, violent and hugely entertaining. On its release, he insisted that the film wasn't really a horror movie at all, describing it as an "ironic fantasy". This *sounds* like an attempt to "leave home", a phrase used mainly in sci-fi fandom to describe when an author takes the tropes of the genre in which the he/she became famous, and uses them in mainstream novels to gain wider respectability, a view that while not totally unjustified is disarmingly narrow minded, but Soavi's claim is totally correct.

DELLAMORTE DELLAMORE does contain some stylistic references to other films. The scene between Dellamorte and She in the ossuary, surrounded by several skeletons recalls the scene from THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE(1974) in which Marilyn Burns stumbles into the room filled with human and animal bones. Gnaghi's affair with the decapitated head of the mayor's daughter who he was in love with is very reminiscent of Lamberto Bava's debut MACABRE(1980), even going as far as to reenact the final scene from Bava's film exactly when her head jumps up to bite her father. There are also references to Stanley Kubrick's A CLOCK WORK ORANGE(1971) and even Richard Marquand's very mediocre THE LEGACY(1978) in a vague way, but DELLAMORTE DELLAMORE remains above all, a true original.

The cast is unusual but very successful. I have never rated Rupert Everett as an actor in the past, but his performance here is ideally suited to the material, indeed the character in the 'Dylan Dog' comic strip was drawn to look like him. What better actor to get for the role! Lazaro is another strange choice, but again a total success as the monosyllabic Gnaghi, but its former model Anna Falchi who makes the biggest impact as She, the beautiful object of Dellamorte's desire. Thanks to her, you really understand his anguish when he is forced to shoot her for the second time.

The film has many crowd pleasing moments. The scene in which zombie Boy Scouts are casually gunned down by Dellamorte and the zombified Hell's Angel emerging from his grave atop his Harley Davidson are the obvious candidates, along with the sex, violence and black humour that permeate throughout. But this is never allowed to detract from the central theme. DELLAMORTE DELLAMORE is a metaphor for life, and the lead character's fear of it. In a truly haunting finale that will stay with you long after the credits role, he realizes that the only thing he is trying to escape from is himself, but by then its too late!

Mario Bava's masterpiece LISA AND THE DEVIL was virtually plotless as was Argento's INFERNO, and narrative was not Fulci's primary concern in THE BEYOND. When Italian critics wrote that Soavi was the new Freda, Argento or Bava, it was just laziness that seriously undercut his achievement. In underpinning his film with such a wrenching subtext, Soavi took the Italian horror film to an impressive new level. Armed with total control this is the first true Soavi picture.

All this makes subsequent events doubly tragic. Soavi constantly doubted his talent as a filmmaker which led to increasing anxiety behind the camera. An attempt at an American film (DOMINION(1994) starring Dolph Lundgren) resulted in him being dismissed after just two days. To add to this Soavi's new baby son was born in ill health, after which he announced he would turn his back on cinema to care for him. It is now very unlikely that he will ever return to filmmaking. Its a very sad loss.

DELLAMORTE DELLAMORE when straight to video in the U.K. When it was submitted to the BBFC under its American title CEMETERY MAN for release by Entertainment in Video, it was passed uncut with an '18' certificate thanks largely to its comic tone. No sell thru release has been announced but take note: Any future edition will almost certainly have the shooting of the troupe of zombified Boy Scouts removed in the light of the Dumbane massacre. Our advice is to seek out an ex-rental copy and snap it up quick as its an excellent transfer, even though the cropping to full screen does hamper some of Mauro Marchetti's excellent photography. Its almost as good as the Japanese laserdisc which was slightly letterboxed but now very hard to find.

DANIEL

THE STENDAHL SYNDROME(1996)

After TWO EVIL EYES and TRAUMA - attempt's to Americanize his uniquely European vision - Argento desperately needed a hit. With THE STENDAHL SYNDROME he returned to Italy in search of something closer to the horror cinema he pioneered in the 70's. It was not the conclusive hit he hoped for but a definite step up in quality.

Anna Manni (Asia Argento sporting a ridiculous wig) is a policewoman in pursuit of a viscous serial killer. While in Florence, she receives a telephone tip-off that the killer will be visiting an art gallery there. While trying to figure out which visitor it is, she suffers a hallucination and blacks out while looking at one of the painting, and is helped to her feet by Alfredo Grossi (Thomas Kretschmann). Of course Alfredo is the killer, who then attacks and rapes Anna in her hotel room. He then graphically kills a woman he has abducted right in front of her. In an attempt to get over the ordeal, she goes back to her home town (thankfully loosing the wig along the way), but is followed there by Alfredo who after killing another woman, abducts and rapes Anna again. This time she manages to turn the tables on him, killing him and dumping his body in the river. But the murders continue. Is Alfredo - whose body wasn't recovered - still alive?

There is much to recommend THE STENDAHL SYNDROME, mainly in the first hour which contains Argento's best work for almost a decade. The painting that drips away to form a doorway which Anna steps through is a very disorienting way of filling the audience in on the plot so far, and the killing of the woman in the car is an astonishing sequence that one ups the similar scene in OPERA. We actually see the bullet pass through both cheeks in slow motion! On the other hand the CGI pill swallowing scene is terrible and the film does fall apart somewhat in the last half. The decision to totally drop the significance of "The Stendahl Syndrome", an

actual medical condition taken from Graziella Magherini's text book of the same name is also very odd. Asia Argento so good in the routine TRAUMA is miscast here, but the film looks terrific thanks to Giuseppe Rotunno's luminous photography.

After THE STENDAHL SYNDROME, Argento's future looks uncertain. He produced Sergio Salvati's soon to be released directorial debut WAX MASK(1997), and has started work on a musical adaptation of PHANTOM OF THE OPERA starring John Malkovich (sadly one of my least favorite actors). If he would bite the bullet and complete the "Three Mothers" trilogy, it could give him the masterpiece he so desperately needs at this point in his career to restore his tarnished reputation, and reassert his position as one of the genres cutting edge talents.

THE STENDAHL SYNDROME was released in Italy with a '14' rating. Two scenes were subsequently dropped for release overseas: A telephone call Anna makes to one of the victim's father and Veronica Lazar's cameo as Maria's mother. All the violence was left intact.

When THE STENDAHL SYNDROME was submitted to the BBFC by Guild for release straight to video, it was passed uncut, until it became clear that Guild had made 11 cuts totaling 2 minutes 47 secs themselves prior to submission. The cuts they made were: 2 cuts (11 secs) removing shots of Alfredo rotating the razor blade in his mouth and a shot him taking the blade out of his mouth plus some shots of Anna's face. 3 cuts (15 secs) deleting all details of the woman in the car being shot in the face after she is raped, including having the gun put to her head, the shot of the bullet passing straight through cheek (see picture), through her mouth and exiting the other side, and Alfredo looking at Anna through the bullet hole. 1 cut (1 min. 40 secs) removing a chunk of narrative after Anna arrives back in her home town, including a meeting with an old friend, and Anna's meeting with her family in which she is told her new haircut makes her look like a boy. 2 cuts (16 secs) removing shots of the woman being strangled and hit during the rape in the abandoned warehouse, and the scene were she is shot in the head at point blank range, the killers face being reflected in the bullet as it passes his face. 1 cut (11 secs) removing part of Anna's second rape by Alfredo, and Alfredo punching her in the face. 1 cut (10 secs) removing the shot of Alfredo cutting Anna's face with a razor blade just after the rape. 1 cut (4 secs) removing several blows to the back of Alfredo's neck, inflicted by Anna with a gun.

The cuts result in the loss of the films best effects (the bullet through the face) and one of Argento's trademark shots (the reflection of the killers face in the bullet) as well as reducing the overall sense of sadism, though it remains hair-raising. The narrative cut is bewildering as there was no need for its removal.

The American video release has also been cut, but these were made by the distributor, not the MPAA. The best version of the film is the Japanese laserdisc which - though time compressed - is uncut and letterboxed at 1.50:1. European versions of the film should also be uncut.

DANIEL



AFTERMATH(1994)

A relative newcomer to filmmaking, Nacho Cerda's short film is a leap in the void of experimentation. AFTERMATH is a 30 minute "trip" into the state of the body after death; The "what comes next?", a journey into the darkest part of every mind. Cerda says this of a short film, "You have to go all the way or not at all." Nothing could be closer to the truth than what has been achieved with this film.

The opening title sequence is the spring board into the visceral realms of death and decay of the flesh. It provides the viewer with more than an introduction, not a mere preview of what is to follow, but a sublime warning to one of the most harrowing viewing experiences you are ever likely to encounter. I will not provide a detailed synopsis of Cerda's film, but attempt to prepare you for the uneasy viewing experience it really is.

Set predominantly in a state of the art autopsy room; clean, white and cold, the images convey the pure clinical nature of the setting. An orderly wheels a corpse into the waiting hands of a forensic surgeon like meat on a conveyor belt awaiting quality control. At this moment the viewer is tempted to make assumptions and draw conclusions about what is likely to take place in this most intimate and secretive of rooms.

AFTERMATH is not a gore movie. Cerda describes gore movies as being "festive". AFTERMATH is not gratuitous; the images are necessary. AFTERMATH is a part of the director, the result of Cerda's own personal fear of death and the subsequent "unknown" associated with autopsies.

Instead of gore, Cerda has chosen a scientific approach that is the result of many elements working together, but most of all it is the result of viewing real autopsies prior to production. The rawness of the images can only come from having actually experienced the work of forensic surgeons in their own environment. The sober portrayal of the corpses approaches the realism of a medical documentary. It is this realism that is the source of pure horror, yet AFTERMATH is not a "horror" movie.

AFTERMATH contains one of the most unpleasant scenes of necrophilia witnessed in recent years. This scene is the nerve centre around which Cerda's film builds a complex and personal thesis on the decadence of the flesh and death. One could say that the intercourse looks more like a clinical examination than a celebration of pleasure, but then one could easily say the opposite.

Cerda has used dramatic lighting effects that he says were essential to the understanding of the snaking moral path of the main character. The appearance of the film is very distant and the audience is forced to look at the images.

A Dolby digital surround mix has been masterfully employed, with over 25 tracks of music and effects. Due to the absence of dialogue, much impact has been achieved through the use of sound. After all, "Words aren't always necessary, particularly when the story is being told from the point of view of the corpses".

AFTERMATH is a film for the most demanding and discriminating palates with a conclusion that is jaw-

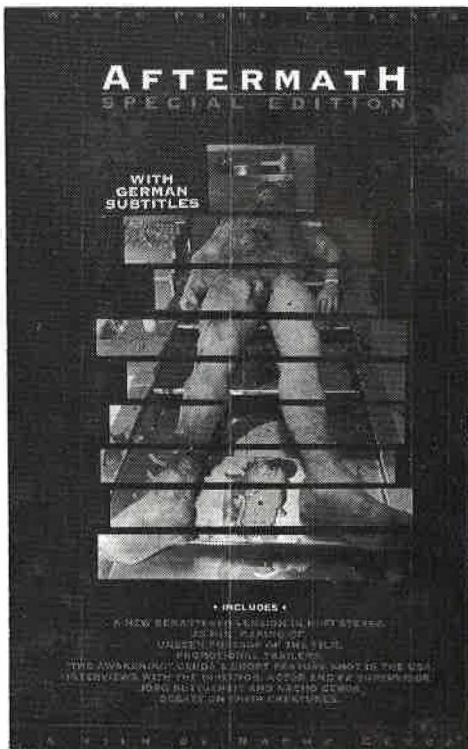
dropping, and a film that Cerda describes as "a nightmare that no one will wake up from".

AFTERMATH is unlikely to be released in the U.K. in any version, but a special edition video containing the uncut print letterboxed at 1.70:1, a documentary of the making of the film, Cerda's earlier short film AWAKENINGS(1991) and a debate between Nacho Cerda and Jorg Buttgeriet is available directly from Cerda's own production company in Barcelona, and its available in and English subtitled edition. The address is: WAKEN PRODUCTIONS, C/ San Elias, 29, Escalera A 4 '3, BARCELONA 08006, SPAIN.

e-mail: waken@ctv.es fax 343 414 1136

It is also available in Holland from CREAMSAW VIDEO, TWINSTRAAT 7, 3517 XG UTRECHT, NETHERLANDS but the tape is subtitled in Dutch.

ANDREW



THE DATE IS SET



APRIL '98