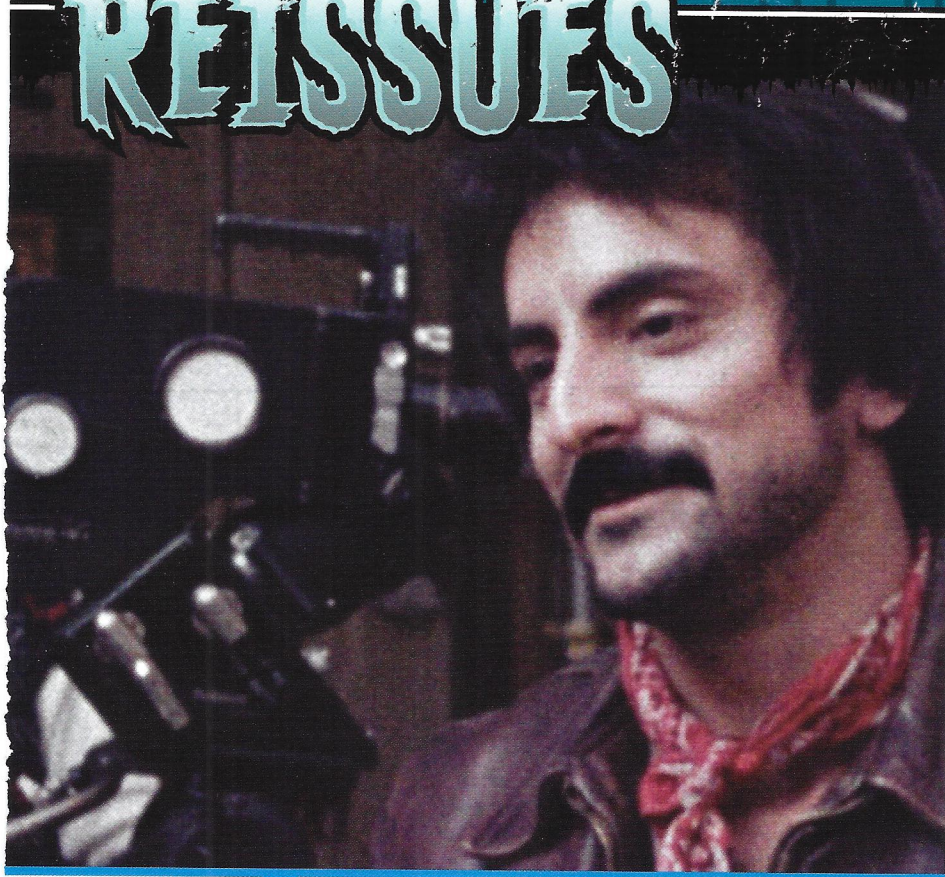


REISSUES

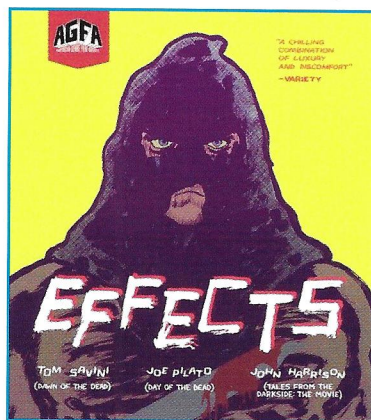


AN UNDESIRABLE EFFECT

EFFECTS (1980) Blu-ray

Starring Joseph Pilato, John Harrison and Tom Savini
Written and Directed by Dusty Nelson
AGFA

The urban legend that was the snuff film was the bugaboo du jour for pearl clutchers in the late 1970s and early '80s, because even though there was no hard evidence to support its existence (and still none today), law enforcement and the media were typically reluctant to debunk such a seemingly perfect symptom of widespread moral decay. With this in mind, it's surprising that relatively few genre filmmakers of the era attempted to cash in (without making any actual snuff films themselves). *Snuff*, a clumsy 1975 cheapie by exploitation producers Michael and Roberta Finlay, caused a minor sensation but receded quickly into the pop culture ether when it was outed as a fake; most others, including the hitherto "lost" 1980 film *Effects*, barely rate a footnote.



A shoestring-budgeted collaboration of George Romero acolytes including Joseph Pilato (*Day of the Dead*) and Tom Savini (yeah, him), *Effects* is a sort-of-but-not-quite-meta film-within-a-film deal in which the douche cokehead cast and crew of the low-budget thriller *Duped* begin eyeing each other suspiciously as "accidents" (or are they?) begin plaguing production of their film about a fictitious snuff film. Have they unwittingly been making a real snuff film of their own? Will the snuffers become the snuffees? Did I just write that?

Performances are solid throughout and there are a few cool directorial flourishes, but leaden pacing leaves us largely beyond caring by the time shit starts getting real (at around an hour into a skimpy 84-minute runtime) and the irony of frequently lacklustre effects by effects prodigy Tom Savini in a film called *Effects* is just too much to bear. Props to the folks at American Genre Film Archives – a non-profit B-movie preservation society staffed by some true cult film heavyweights – for their efforts; upcoming AGFA releases include *The Curious Dr. Humpp*

(Bowen's Basement, RM#109), *Godmonster of Indian Flats* and titles from John Waters and Andy Milligan. Bring it, AGFA – we're officially intrigued.

JOHN W. BOWEN

DARIO DOES DAMAGE

THE STENDHAL SYNDROME (1996) Blu-ray

Starring Asia Argento, Thomas Kretschmann and Marco Leonardi
Directed by Dario Argento
Written by Dario Argento and Franco Ferrini
Blue Underground

Written off as a dud upon its theatrical release in 1996 and the recipient of less-than-ideal DVD editions, *The Stendhal Syndrome* befuddled Dario Argento fans expecting a kinetic *giallo*, but the past 21 years have been very kind to this psychological thriller that features gorgeous cinematography by Giuseppe Rotunno, haunting music by from Ennio Morricone, and truly disturbing images as well as atypical subtext.

The opening sequences show detective Anna Manni (Asia Argento) falling victim to the titular state in which an overabundance of art overstimulates and causes sudden unconsciousness, if not a temporary loss of memory. When her memory returns, she's soon abducted by her target, serial killer Alfredo Grossi (played by the underrated Thomas Kretschmann), who makes her watch a brutal rape that culminates with a gunshot to the victim's temple.

It's not long before Anna finds herself wired to a mattress, and it's in this prolonged rape sequence that the film gets deeply unnerving, as Argento directs his own daughter through horrific torment. But unlike his other work, there's a twist that proves satisfying, as the second hour focuses exclusively on Anna's wobbly attempts to recover and regain her mind and independence. It's a daring move on Argento's part – with the exception of 2004's *The Card Player*, I don't think he's built any drama so exclusively on such a multifaceted heroine – and although Asia is way too young to play a hardened detective, her character's breadth yields one of her best screen performances.

There's also interesting subtext on rage, gender, and dominance in both sexual and professional relationships. *Stendhal* has its share of outrageous visuals, but this is ultimately a strangely affecting drama about the mind's struggle to repair itself after one too many traumas. Blue Underground's uncut HD transfer is near perfect, and this three-disc set sports new and archival interviews.

MARK R. HASAN

