

More murders follow, of the 'meet me and I'll give you the name of the killer...ahhh!' sort. Malden disappears for a while during the 112-minute feature, but it is still great casting, and trading off the two stars not only enhances a viewer's involvement with the film (you're satisfied one is on the screen, but you still want the other to return), but puts their fates in greater peril, since one of the two could always be expendable without harming the remainder of the film. Although there are none of the virtuoso cinematic sequences that highlight some of Argento's other movies, there are plenty of stylish moments, exhibiting everything from clever balances and placements of colors to an exhilarating car ride through the cramped streets of Turin. Elegantly staged and enjoyably played—because of Malden and Franciscus, the English track is the preferable playback; Catherine Spaak is also featured, and has one topless sequence, which is the movie's only touch of eroticism but all that it needs to feel like a well-rounded thriller—even the numerous red herrings are presented with a tongue in cheek wit that allows you to embrace their moments rather than dismissing them as dead ends.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. Both versions have optional English subtitles, and two trailers. The Blue Underground release has a French stereo audio track, optional French and Spanish subtitles, and contains the same special features that were on the Anchor Bay DVD (Oct 01), including a 14-minute retrospective featurette, 8 minutes of radio interviews with Malden and Franciscus, a second trailer, two TV commercials and two radio commercials. Arrow has its usual utilitarian menu, which is fine, but Blue Underground's menu design is very cute, and melted our elaborately-designed-menu-hating heart.

The Arrow release has a third trailer; a 3-minute reconstructed alternate ending combining script passages and stills; a 16-minute interview with Argento who explains how some scenes were staged, talks about his collaborators (he bad mouths the cinematography) and says that he was disappointed with how the movie came out, even though it made a bundle; a 15-minute interview with production manager Angelo Iacono about his experiences with the actors and the other jobs he did working with Argento; and a 35-minute interview with writer Dardano Sacchetti about the early days of working with Argento and how their estrangement led to his working with Mario Bava and others. The interview with Sacchetti appears twice, since it also comes up when you attempt to access an otherwise unavailable interview with actress Cinzia De Carolis.

Finally, there is an entertaining commentary track featuring Italian exploitation enthusiasts Alan Jones and Kim Newman, who share plenty of background information about the cast and crew, talk about what went on behind the scenes of the production, and provide insightful analyses of its artistry and its shortcomings. Malden's character creates crossword puzzles, and they point out that the story itself is structured in a similar manner, seeming to jump around all over the place before eventually making sense. They point out that unlike Argento's other films in this period, "There's no actual point trying to sort of work out who the murderer is in any of this." "It could be any of the suspects, there's no particular reason for it." "If the actor had walked off the film, it could have been rewritten. Any of the other suspects could have turned out to be the killer." "It's so arbitrary who it is in this film, which just goes to show that Dario's not really interested in this kind of thing. It's all about the style, how to film, how to do it. It's nothing else apart from the technique." "This is a film that works on a scene-by-scene basis, and it's got people in it who you like, but it doesn't really hang together."

And they also have fun pointing out the movie's quirks and inanities. "There's the lab with the so many different colored chemicals, which isn't true, because most chemicals which are in liquid form are exactly the same color, so, this is all sort of like an art directed look for the film."

"I love this wallpaper. It's almost like gold blood thrown at the wall. It's so fantastic. Did anybody actually have this sort of wallpaper in their homes?" "I remember thinking that the apartments seen in gialli were unrealistic, until I visited Rome and went to a couple that looked exactly like it."

And during the movie's over-the-top gay bar sequence: "Frankly, Franciscus would have been pounced within 2 seconds of walking through the door."

Elements of clownish humor compromise what is otherwise the excellent suspense thriller that immediately followed *Cat O'Nine Tails* in 1971, *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*, a Mya Communications release (UPC#81-2592010103). A rock drummer played by Michael Brandon is being blackmailed because he believes he has killed someone, but as he tries to discover who the blackmailer is, there are several related murders. Mimsy Farmer plays the drummer's wife and Bud Spencer is also featured. At one point the hero beats up a mailman that he thinks is the blackmailer, and it is played for laughs. There are a few other scenes like that, too, disrupting the film's atmosphere. Nevertheless, the story is strong—the hero's anger often gets the best of him—and the mystery is compelling. Argento, still exploring as an artist, experiments in a number of ways. An elaborately edited sequence depicts the passage of time by showing people in a park suddenly disappearing within a shot. It gives the film a freewheeling tone, encouraging you to think that anything can and will happen, thus justifying later the very slightly fantastically way that the identity of the murderer is discovered. Running 102 minutes, the film concluded Argento's initial burst of creativity

(*Bird, Cat and Flies* are often called his 'Animal Trilogy,' although they have no shared characters), and had he not made another movie, he would still be considered a genius for what he achieved with them.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1 and an accommodation for enhanced 16:9 playback. The colors look very fresh, and while the presentation does not have quite the gloss the BDs have, it still looks quite nice. The sound, on the other hand, is a drab mono and fairly noisy. There is an effective Ennio Morricone musical score—the music for the finale is wonderful—that contrasts quite well with the rock music the band is recording, but having it all centered takes away some of the film's stylistic potential. The film is available in Italian and in English, with optional English subtitles (there are some brief segments that remains in Italian, where the subtitles must be activated to translate what is being said; on the other hand, headlines carrying key information are left in Italian and never translated). There are three trailers, a 3-minute montage of promotional materials, and a 6-minute presentation of the film's English language opening and closing credits.

Even after you know the trick, Argento's 1975 *Deep Red* is still a great deal of fun (provided you keep your hands off the freeze frame for the key moment). Generally following the plot of *Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, David Hemmings is a jazz musician in Italy who witnesses a murder, knows that he has seen something he can't quite remember, and starts investigating for himself. Daria Nicolodi plays a reporter who helps him and also provides an enjoyable love interest. Like *Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, the film is intensely stylish, and has many close-ups of objects and designs to enhance the atmosphere as well as the mystery. There are a couple of terrific screams, and many highly suspenseful sequences to keep a viewer alert and engaged, with a twisty plot that makes sense—pretty much, at least—once everything is over.

Again, there are dueling Blu-ray releases, both of which contain the film's 'Italian version,' which runs 126 minutes, and an abridged 105-minute version that was created for the English language markets, a two-platter release from Arrow (UPC#760137117384, \$40) and a single-platter release from Blue Underground (UPC#827058702690, \$30). And again, if you are a fan, you have to get both. The Arrow release, from a 2014 restoration, has a much better picture. It looks smooth, slick and glossy, with rich fleshtones, while the Blue Underground version, although it looks fine enough on its own, is grainy and slightly pale in comparison. Conversely, although Arrow, along with the monophonic track for the English language version, has provided a 5.1-channel DTS audio track for the Italian release, Blue Underground (which identifies the Italian version by its original title, *Profondo Rosso*) ups it to 7.1, and provides a 7.1 DTS track for the English language version, as well as a 5.1-channel English language track for the longer Italian release, which leaves the added sequences in Italian. Arrow also has the English/Italian version of the longer film, but its track is in mono. With another dizzying musical score from Goblin, the more encompassing the audio (which also has some fine environmental effects), the better. The film is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1, and every version on both releases has optional English subtitles. The abridged version is pretty much useless, removing too much character substance, so that film feels as stereotypically superficial as detractors to Argento's work in general would expect.

The Blue Underground release comes with optional French and Spanish subtitles for the English language version, two trailers, a great Goblin music video, an amusing Daemonia music video that pays tribute to the film, and a good 11-minute interview with Argento, screenwriter Bernardino Zapponi and all four members of Goblin.

The Arrow release comes with two trailers; a very good 33-minute deconstruction of the film ("The style is the substance, a perfect symphony of form in which every individual element, from the plot to the performances to the set design to the camerawork to the music works in harmony to create a cinematic experience unlike any other. This is a form of filmmaking which rejects the orthodox view that plot is king, and as a result Argento isn't overly concerned if a particular stylistic flourish takes the viewer out of the narrative for a while, because the narrative works in service to the spectacle, not the other way around."); a 12-minute interview with Argento that contains clips from nearly all of his movies; a good 19-minute interview with Nicolodi who shares her recollections about Argento (she married him), her performance strategy, Hemmings ("He was drinking too much.") and many other aspects of the production; a decent 14-minute interview with Goblin member Claudio Simonetti (as well as a half-minute introduction), who talks about the origins of his band, working with Argento and the successes he has had since the film came out; and a nice 14-minute promotional look at the Argento memorabilia shop in Rome that is named after the film.

Arrow's version also features a commentary track over the long version by Argento expert Thomas Rostock, who says that the creation of the shorter version was likely supervised and approved by Argento, who understood the market demanded it, and was overseen by the film's creative team. He provides backgrounds for the cast and crew, a history of the production and some good artistic insights. "Underlined in [the character's] remark that telepathy is a faculty which comes naturally to the newborn in the early stages of life, but they lose it as they learn verbal communication. Argento's giving us a head's up that taking things too literally or verbally will get us nowhere. He's approaching this film with a newborn mind, and if we

## Argentos (Continued)

follow him, and are open and intuitive, we'll gain access to many hidden layers and meanings within the film. It will take us to a whole new level of perception, to the cinematic equivalent of telepathy."

The bulk of his talk, however, is a close play-by-play description of what is occurring on the screen, with just enough added to it to prevent it from seeming tiresome and redundant. "The camera first tracks and pans very close with Mark, as he walks the empty square and reaches the Blue Bar. Then suddenly the camera will pull back and crane up as he freezes in his movement. The story is about to make a 180° turnaround, and visually, Argento announces this with surging violins and a full 180° tracking shot here on Mark, followed by an overdramatic banging of drums. It's very theatrical. 'Something's wrong,' Mark thinks. He remembers now, and talks almost directly to us, the viewers."

Ultimately, it is his passion for Argento's filmmaking, and his understanding of that passion, that makes his talk worthwhile. "There is so many things to say about this film and so many wonderful things to discover that 2 hours simply isn't enough time to talk about it. My only hope is that you'd feel the urge to watch the film one more time. I know I've done so on more occasions than I'd even dare to count, and I still find new ideas, new rhyming images, new beautiful interconnections of imagery and sound. *Profondo Rosso* becomes this bottomless pit of horrific visuals that you can dive into and find new things every time. And in the end, that's what's so truly fascinating about this film. It digs so deep and possesses such a complexity that it is a constant source of invention."

Argento's 1980 quasi-supernatural thriller, *Inferno*, available on Blu-ray from Blue Underground (UPC#82705870259, \$30), ostensibly the sequel to *Suspiria*, is a beautiful mess. The story is nonsensical, and the presence of a (quite attractive) ghostly character is never resolved when the end credits suddenly start to scroll after 106 minutes. But the film is rescued by its intoxicating dream logic and masterful touches of horror and gore. In the beginning of the film, it appears that there are two women who are the movie's heroines, one in New York played by Irene Miracle and one in Italy played by Eleonora Giorgi, both researching a book about some sort of witches' coven and its three locations (the third would be the *Suspiria* setting). The brother of Miracle's character, played by Leigh McCloskey, is actually the central character, a music student who journeys from Italy to New York searching for the sister, after she goes missing, and trying to determine her fate. The apartment building where she lived has a *Rosemary's Baby* vibe and a mysterious history, along with more secret passages, apparently, than there are apartments. In any case, the story is far less important—at least, Argento hoped it was—that the flow of the narrative. There are fairy tale references and motifs associated with the women that initially enhance the film's fantasy potential, although again, these sort of fall by the wayside once the attention settles on McCloskey. Nevertheless, the film's superb sense of style and its punctuations of terror can be captivating so long as you accept that there is nothing more to the film than its visceral pleasures.

Valli co-stars again, and while it is not the character she played in *Suspiria*, one could argue that the two characters are intrinsically related. The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1. The color transfer looks luscious, and grain is fleeting. Because of the plot's innocuousness, the film's design is critical to holding a viewer in rapture. The movie's balance of colors and light are dazzling, and although the 7.1 DTS sound does not have the full body of later sound mixes, its dimensional presentation is occasionally effective, particularly during a very well executed underwater sequence. The musical score is by keyboardist Keith Emerson and while it lacks the elegance of the images, it does hammer home the movie's thrills at times, and Emerson, who is not unfamiliar with doing to classical music pieces what Argento's villains do to their victims, incorporates Giuseppe Verdi's *Va pensiero* in one passage, after McCloskey's character has been listening to the real version in class. There is an Italian track in mono that flattens the film's thrills, and optional English, French and Spanish subtitles. Along with a trailer, there is a decent 8-minute interview with Argento and his assistant, Lamberto Bava, who share various anecdotes about the production; an interesting 15-minute interview with McCloskey, who talks about the movie and the rest of his career; and a nice 11-minute interview with Miracle, who recalls her experiences working on the film. "I was extremely frustrated because I felt like I didn't have a lot of direction. I didn't feel I had a lot of story to work with. In fact, I don't quite understand the film even when I watch it today."

We reviewed Blue Underground's single-platter Blu-ray release of Argento's 1996 *The Stendhal Syndrome* in Feb 09. Blue Underground has since released a *3-Disc Limited Edition* (UPC#827058801393, \$40), which presents the 103 minutes of special features from the previous BD (primarily interviews with various members of the crew, including Argento) on one DVD platter, the movie and a whole new set of special features on a BD platter, and the movie with the new special features on another DVD platter.

The picture is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1, and the image transfer is substantially improved over Blue Underground's previous release. Not only are the colors a bit more accurate, but grain that was constantly present on the image of the old BD is completely eliminated. The picture is smooth and clear. The film's audio mix is outstanding. Featuring another Morricone musical score, the sound's dimensionality is

highly involving and enveloping, enhancing the movie's atmosphere and suspense. Ostensibly, the 7.1 DTS English language track that was featured on the older BD is carried over, as are its various subsets (5.1 Surround EX, 5.1 Dolby, & 2-channel stereo), but the older BD only presented the Italian language version in 5.1 Dolby only, while the new BD matches each English audio track with a similar Italian track from the 7.1 DTS to the 2-channel stereo. Additionally, the strength of the audio delivery is improved, with greater separation detail and strength. The older BD had just English subtitled, while the new one has optional English, French and Spanish subtitles.

Set in Florence, with fanous-Italian-movie-director-gets-to-shoot-where-nobody-else-does access to the legendary art museums, Asia Argento is a cop tracking a serial murderer who gets caught in the murderer's web after collapsing in one of the aforementioned museums and hallucinating that she has entered the paintings. Thomas Kretschmann co-stars. Running 119 minutes, the film shows Dario Argento at the top of his game, combining the swirl of classical art with the film's design and drama for a bountiful brocade of images and ideas. Bowing to the Darwinian inevitability of such matters, the film's violence is more explicit and disturbing, but the narrative is fairly clever, following the always unguessable pattern of many of his classic murder thrillers (hint, there is more than one killer). The presentation of detail in close-ups is carefully and deliberately modulated, as it is with Argento's best movies, and while, emotionally, the film may seem a bit more oppressive than his best features, it is a welcome addition to a unique line of cinematic treasures. It's not for everyone, but those who are open to its aesthetic spectacle will not be disappointed.

The new special features include a nice 20-minute interview with Asia Argento; a good 14-minute interview with writer Franco Ferrini; and an enjoyable 10-minute interview with makeup artist Franco Casagni ("The director's requests about the blood are quite important because there's not just one kind of blood. There are different ones, different colors. Depending upon the cinematography, the blood can be more or less orange or copper or less red, depending on the lighting of the scene in order to make the effect as visible as possible. In horror movies, blood is one of the most important things."); a collection of stills and promotional materials in still frame; and a trailer.

Finally, there is a passable commentary track with Howarth, deconstructing the film, discussing its production history, going over the backgrounds of the cast and the crew, and defending its artistry. "I will continue to stand up for *The Stendhal Syndrome* as not only [Argento's] last great film, but is one of his best films, period." He also addresses the meta-elephant in the room, as it were. "Many critics have, to say the least, had a field day dissecting the way in which Argento the father presents Argento the daughter in such a sexualized fashion in these movies. He's always insisted that on the set she's simply another actress and he holds her to the same standard as any other performer, but let's be honest, there is something a little bit 'off' a father casting his daughter in roles where she's often seen taking showers, [engaged in sexual violence and so on], but it's no matter, it's not for me to pass judgment on, I'm just stating the obvious."

In the supplementary features for *Deep Red*, there are suggestions that Argento at least toyed with the idea of remaking the film and shooting it in 3D. That has never come to pass, at least so far, but Argento did try his hand with the format in a 2012 feature available on Blu-ray from IFC Midnight and MPI Media Group, *Argento's Dracula 3D* (UPC#03030619-2192, \$30). Asia Argento and Kretschmann co-star again, as Lucy and the Count, with Rutger Hauer making a nice, career-reinforcing kickbutt appearance as Van Helsing. Set in the Nineteenth Century in Transylvania, there are enough variations to the usual Bram Stoker tale that you can never anticipate what will happen next, and Kretschmann's character is given a fair amount of sympathy for the tragedies he has endured in the past, his goal being to use the characters for the purpose of luring in another victim, played by Marta Gastini, who bears a strong resemblance to his original wife. Unlike the harshness of the violence in some of his other later films, the gore in *Dracula* may be plentiful, but it is all good fun, punctuated with a giddy enthusiasm by the 3D effects. There is also an enjoyable amount of nudity. The film breaks no new ground, and by the standards of Argento's masterpieces it is a middling film, but it certainly holds its own in comparison to the countless vampire exploitation features that are out there, and running 110 minutes, it does what it has to do and wraps up without wearing out its welcome.

The most unfortunate aspect to the production, however, is that Argento's heart really doesn't seem to be into the 3D effects. Since his legacy is so steeped in an appreciation of design, the anticipation of what he could do given an extra dimension to work with is tantalizing, but there is nothing exceptional about how the film is staged or presented. Yes, the sex and violence are good fun, but they are good fun in every exploitation 3D feature, because that's the purpose of using the format. As for the set designs and so on, the 3D effects bring out the artificiality of the backdrops that are otherwise seamlessly realistic when one watches the 2D presentation that is also available on the disc. The placement of objects in the foreground to enhance the perspective effects, however, something that, for example, Alfred Hitchcock took great care in positioning, are haphazardly applied. Once in a