

NEXT OF KIN

Directed by Tony Williams
(1982) Severin Films Blu-ray

On the passing of her mother, young Linda Stevens (Jackie Kerin) inherits the family estate; but Mom and her sister had long previously converted said sprawling mansion into a retirement home. Linda's the new owner, all right, but one Dr. Barton (Alex Scott) is in charge of the operation

along with his assistant Connie (Gerda Nicolson). Linda does her best to settle into her new surroundings, but when some nagging childhood memories start haunting her dreams, she has cause to wonder just what her subconscious is trying to tell her . . . and then the elderly residents start turning up dead. Signs certainly seem to point to the facility administrators, but can Linda truly trust anybody?

Next of Kin (obviously not to be confused with the subsequent Patrick Swayze vehicle) offers a deceptively simple story that could have been set virtually anywhere but stands out as the sort of story Alfred Hitchcock himself might happily have seized on—had he been Australian. Unfortunately for U.S. viewers, the Down Under origins of this early feature from director Tony Williams (who co-wrote the film with Michael Heath) gave little impetus for American theatrical distributors (who by that time had all the big-studio and independent horror titles they could juggle and then some) to handle it. Instead, *Next of Kin* went straight to VHS in the States and spent the next couple of decades slowly but surely building in reputation as fans discovered its remarkable intensity for themselves. (Quentin Tarantino was an early champion of the film, and at least one local California cable horror host made use of a dub of the long-out-of-print tape to spread the word long before the film was even legitimately available on DVD.)

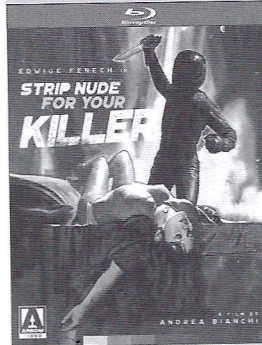
Today's theatrical market might have proven more accommodating for *Next of Kin*; for a start, seasoned horror fans would recognize the name of John Jarratt as the actor behind the murderous Mick Taylor in the sadistic *Wolf Creek* films—but would also likely be stunned at his appearance here as Linda's handsome, charming (but is he for real?) boyfriend Barney. Truth be told, Jarratt was already a familiar face to American "art house" patrons thanks to his appearances in such well-received imports as *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* and *The Odd Angry Shot*. Beyond that, the film remains completely accessible to casual Yank viewers (one might remember the American dub job imposed on the original *Mad Max* when the Aussie accents were deemed too heavy; such would never be a consideration here) and more than capable of delivering the requisite suspense and shocks. Severin's Blu-ray menu gives away what is probably *Next of Kin*'s biggest grossout moment (as an old man steps into a bathtub only to encounter the flabby corpse of one of his fellow residents early on); but the film continues to keep the unwary viewer on edge throughout. Perhaps the best suspense device deployed by Williams comes in the form of a pair of "nerve tests" Linda performs for an appreciative youngster at an isolated diner that bookends the film: at the beginning she's balancing forks atop a drinking glass for simple amusement; but at the end she's building a castle of sugar cubes in an attempt to settle her thoroughly wracked system, only for... but that would be telling. *Next of Kin* deserves to be seen with minimal preparation.

Severin's Blu-ray at long last offers us the beautiful digital widescreen version (previously only released in Australia and Germany) of this much-requested title, with a wealth of supplements ported over from the Australian disc. Two feature audio commentaries are provided; one offering writer/director Williams teamed with producer Tim White; the other highlighting cast members Jarratt, Kerin and Robert Ratti (one of many suspicious characters) as interviewed by Mark Hartley, whose documentary *Not Quite Hollywood* was the source of some additional interview material with Williams and Jarratt found here. There's an elaborately shot contemporary return to the original shooting location and a selection of (anticlimactic) deleted material which survives only in still photographs. Trailers for the Australian, German and UK releases, an image gallery and other odds and ends have been included. Exclusive to the Severin release is an introduction by author Kier-La Janisse designed to accompany her column "The Psychotronic Tourist."

Shane M. Dallmann

STRIP NUDE FOR YOUR KILLER

Directed by Andrea Bianchi
(1975) Arrow Video Blu-ray



The most salaciously titled *giallo* of them all, director Andrea Bianchi's *Strip Nude for Your Killer* arrived in 1975, when the cycle of stylish, sexy, blood-spattered Italian mysteries was rapidly running out of gas. Unfortunately, films like this one demonstrate why the form was in decline. Although *Strip Nude* delivers the goods in certain respects—the story features more nudity and simulated sex than some softcore porn flicks of the era, along with an exceptionally high body count—the picture never really takes flight. It boasts none of the visual panache that filmmakers like Dario Argento, Mario Bava, and Sergio Martino brought to the genre, its plot and characterizations are reduced to the bare minimum, and its murder sequences (which should be the highlight of any *giallo*) seem perfunctory. It's as if Bianchi and

screenwriter Massimo Felisatti took a beautifully furnished mansion, threw out all the furniture, pulled up the flooring, and tore the walls down to the studs. The bones of a good thriller are present, but that's about all.

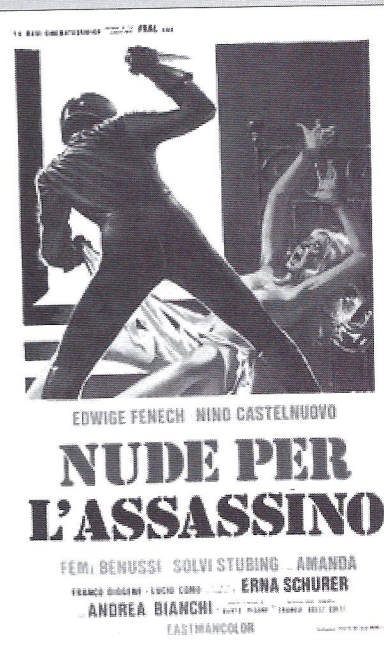
In a pre-credit sequence, a woman dies during an illegal abortion. Shortly afterward, a figure in a black leather motorcycle outfit and a full-face helmet leaps out of the shadows and stabs the abortionist to death. After the credits roll, we meet smarmy fashion photographer Carlo (Nino Castelnuovo), who recruits and quickly beds a new model, Lucia (Femi Benussi). Carlo works at an agency run by predatory lesbian Gisella (Amanda) and her cuckolded husband Maurizio (Franco Diogene), who can only function sexually with a blow-up doll. When the agency's models, including Lucia, begin to turn up dead—killed by the same mysterious, motorcycle-helmeted assassin—Carlo and fellow photographer Magda (Edwige Fenech) decide to solve the mystery themselves, even if they become targets for the murderer.

Other than an extremely attractive and often extremely naked cast, headlined by the always-appealing Fenech, there's little here for *giallo* aficionados to get excited about. Not only are the murder scenes lackluster, they're extremely repetitive, all variations on the theme of killer-jumps-out-of-the-shadows/shower/wherever-with-a-big-knife-and-attacks. The high body count (every 10 minutes or so, somebody gets slashed) means the pool of suspects grows progressively shallower as the story progresses; by the end, there's not much mystery left in this mystery. Fenech, Castelnuovo, and Amanda deliver earnest performances but have little to work with. Berto Pisano's jazz-rock score is pretty groovy, so that's a plus.

Still, *Strip Nude for Your Killer* must have its fans and whoever those people are they should be ecstatic about Arrow's Blu-ray package, which is much, much better than the film itself would seem to warrant. Arrow presents the film in a new 2K restoration from the original camera negative, in 1.85:1, and the results are practically perfect. Every *giallo* should look this great: Image clarity, color, and sound are all ideal, and the print is spotless. There are two options for viewing the pre-credit sequence, one tinted blue and one with natural color. Apparently, the film was distributed in both versions. As usual for an Arrow *giallo* release, both the original Italian audio (with removable English subtitles) and the English dub track are included.

The disc also features a wealth of supplements, highlighted by a 23-minute tribute to Fenech by *Diabolique* magazine's Kat Ellinger, which proves more entertaining than the movie itself. Adrian J. Smith and David Flint of Horrorpedia.com contribute an audio commentary, which provides production details and orients the film in the broader context of the *giallo* cycle. Also on board are a slew of interviews: 14 minutes with Castelnuovo, 18 with actress Erna Schurer; 44(!) assistant director Daniele Sangiorgi, and 22 with actor and production manager Tino Polegghi. Plus, the film's Italian and English language trailers (3:40 each), and an image gallery. It's great that Arrow is paying someone to conduct these interviews, and diehard fans probably want to hear every word these people have to say, but less invested viewers may lose patience with some of these lengthy and rambling discussions, especially when the subjects devote relatively little time to the movie at hand.

Ardent admirers of *Strip Nude for Your Killer* will find Arrow's Blu-ray well worth the upgrade, but—given the movie's shortcomings, and the disc's pricey \$39.95 MSRP—the uninitiated are advised to rent or stream first.



Mark Clark