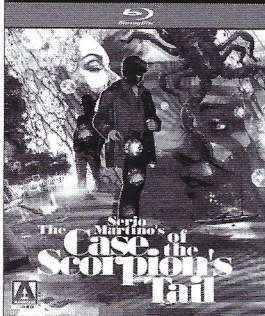


## THE CASE OF THE SCORPION'S TAIL

Directed by Sergio Martino  
(1971) Arrow Video Blu-ray



Set primarily in Greece, *The Case of the Scorpion's Tail*—co-written by the estimable Ernesto Gastaldi—follows a faithless wife, Lisa (Evelyn Stewart), who inherits a million dollars after her estranged husband dies in a plane crash. Local police, international detectives, insurance investigator Peter Lynch (George Hilton), and reporter Cleo Dupont (Anita Strindberg) all suspect Lisa somehow murdered her husband, Kurt, but can't figure out how. Then

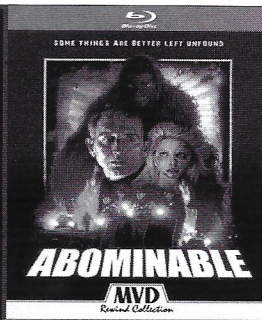
Lisa has her throat slashed by a masked, black-gloved killer, who makes off with the million bucks. Still more women (all attractive blondes and redheads, all connected in some way to Lisa and Kurt) are slashed to death. Is this about the missing money, or is a "sex killer" on the loose? Later, evidence points back at the supposedly dead Kurt. Might he still live? Could all this be some elaborate revenge scheme?

While all gialli operate under the gravitational pull of Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Les Diaboliques* (1955) and Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), few are as blatant about it as *The Case of the Scorpion's Tail*, which borrows key elements wholesale—including Hitch's gambit of killing off the character viewers presume to be the lead about 20 minutes into the story (Lisa = Marion Crane), and the is-the-victim-dead-or-not? gimmick from Clouzot. Fortunately, even though it employs familiar elements, Gastaldi's clever, twisty screenplay keeps viewers guessing up to the very end.

The cast is composed almost entirely of reliable genre veterans—Hilton, Strindberg, Stewart (real name: Ida Galli), Alberto de Mendoza, Luigi Pistilli—all working at their peak. While not a visionary, Martino was a talented and reliable filmmaker. The opening act of *Scorpion's Tail* remains prosaic. But after the showcase sequence that hooked me on first viewing, the picture finds a new gear and remains in overdrive the rest of the way. Maybe Martino wanted it that way. Some laughable visual effects, including very crude knife/blood work and an exploding airplane that recalls the oeuvre of Edward D. Wood Jr., represent the picture's only major drawback.

Arrow offers *The Case of The Scorpion's Tail* in a fresh 2K transfer from the original negative, in its original 2.35:1 aspect ratio. The results are ravishing—spotlessly clean, with a crisp and pleasingly film-like image, featuring vibrant reds, greens, and blues and lifelike flesh tones. The uncompressed 24-bit mono audio (in English or Italian, with or without subtitles) works wonders for Bruno Nicolai's underrated, pulse-quickening score. I was skeptical this release would represent a major improvement over the commendable but now out of print DVD Special Edition from No Shame, and yet it does. *Scorpion's Tail* ranks among Arrow's very best work, which is high praise. As usual, Arrow also includes an enticing menu of supplements: an audio commentary with Gastaldi and filmmaker Federico Caddeo, ported over from an earlier Region 2 DVD release of the film (note that this track is in Italian, with English subs); a candid 21-minute interview with Hilton, who seemingly shares all his memories of the production—even those about Strindberg's breast implants(!); a 47-minute interview with Martino, who talks about, among other things, the influence of Costa-Gavras' Oscar-winning thriller *Z* (based on events in Greece) on *Scorpion's Tail*; a 20-minute interview with scholar Mikel J. Koven about Martino's career and style; a 16-minute video essay by Troy Howarth, who argues that Gastaldi should be considered an auteur; a two-minute image gallery; and the original theatrical trailer. Distributors pulled out all the stops for this preview, which compares *Scorpion's Tail* to other "masterpieces of violence" including Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*, Fritz Lang's *M*, and Luis Bunuel's *L'Age d'Or*! Arrow serves up a full plate of supplements, but it's too bad they couldn't have also included No Shame's excellent 30-minute featurette on the making of the film. If you have that disc, you may want to hang onto it, even after upgrading to this exceptional release.

Mark Clark



## ABOMINABLE

Directed by Ryan Schifrin  
(2006) MVD Rewind Blu-ray/DVD combo

It's good to have friends. No one knows that better than director Ryan Schifrin, whose debut feature film boasts plenty of them before and behind the camera. The son of world-famous composer Lalo Schifrin, Ryan calls in plenty of favors—from Drew Struzan (poster art) to genre stalwarts Dee Wallace Stone (*Halloween*, 2007; *Cujo*, 1983), Jeffrey Combs (*Re-Animator*, 1985), and Lance Henriksen (*Harbinger Down*, 2015; *Alien*, 1986); from casting director Junie Lowry-Johnson (*True Blood*, 2008) to cinematographer Neil Fredericks (*The Blair Witch Project*, 1999)—making *Abominable* a low-budget film with an impressive pedigree.

Preston Rogers (Matt McCoy; *Deepstar Six*, 1989; *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle*, 1992) is broken in body and spirit. Paralyzed in a rock climbing accident—in which his wife also died—he returns to his mountain home at his doctor's orders as part of his recuperative therapy. Assisting him is Otis (Christien Tinsley, makeup artist on HBO's *Westworld* and FX's *American Horror Story*), his antagonizing porn-stached nurse. The two have no more than gotten settled when four young ladies arrive for a bachelorette party at an adjacent cabin.

Left alone when Otis goes back into town, Preston is sure he's witnessed one of the women being abducted by something in the forest. He tries to contact the girls but the phone lines are down, and his attempts to get their attention make them think he's a Peeping Tom. When Otis returns he is unmoved by Preston's desperate claim that something is out there. Otis attempts to sedate Preston but the tables are turned. He injects Otis instead (an action that further isolates him by removing the one person who might be able to help him warn the neighbors).

Preston takes up a vigil by the window, searching the forest with flashlight and binoculars. And he sees a Bigfoot-like monstrosity start picking off the women one by one. His attempt to email the local police (through a internet satellite link) leave Sheriff Halderman (Paul Gleason; Principal Richard Vernon in *The Breakfast Club*, 1985) thinking it's just a prank.

Meanwhile, Amanda (Haley Joel) — whose poster image bears a striking resemblance to Angelique Pettyjohn [Shahna from the *Star Trek* episode "The Gamesters of Triskelion"] — escapes the Sasquatch-styled carnage and finds refuge with Preston. Together they plan their escape but it isn't long before the Abominable smashes in. Preston and Amanda flee the house. But how long can a paralyzed man and traumatized young woman survive in the woods, pursued by an unstoppable menace? And when the police finally do arrive, what is the horrifying secret they discover—and where are all the bodies that Preston and Amanda claim to have seen?

*Abominable* is old school creature-feature fun, the sort of thing that populated video store shelves in the 1980s (emphasized by the retro packaging design), or that would've shown up on 1970s television as a Movie of the Week, sans the gore. It's a simple story of isolation and survival that is probably better than it has a right to be, owing to the incredible talent Schifrin had to work with. Schifrin embraces his influences—Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954), Anatol Litvak's *Sorry, Wrong Number* (1948), and "Nightmare At 20,000 Feet," the 1963 nerve-jangling episode of *The Twilight Zone*, directed by Richard Donner—and uses them to the fullest, unapologetically melding them into a monstrous love letter to the films he grew up watching.

Since it is a low budget production, there are some obvious gaffs that make it into the final cut: blood on the bathroom wall mysteriously vanishes in the next shot, and the death of one character (who's face is literally bitten off—an homage to "The Crate" segment of *Creepshow*, 1982) fails to leave a single drop of blood on the floor. But they are typical missteps for a young director helming his first feature. Another aesthetic choice Schifrin makes is to rely heavily on close ups, crowding the screen with talking faces and little else. Yes, it adds to the sense of claustrophobia inherent in the story but does get rather tedious after a while.

Filed in 35mm in 2006, Schifrin decided to scan the negative and digitally upgrade it for preservation purposes. In an (optional) introduction to the film, Schifrin spends a significant amount of time explaining the upgrade process and the reasons behind it. While informative it would've likely been better served as a supplement instead of an introduction.

There is no doubt that the 2K transfer is an impressive upgrade. Blacks are solid throughout thanks to improved color timing. Details such as tree bark, moss and hair spring into clarity. Colors also hold their balance. The new version is so good that it's easy to tell that the "forest" outside the fake window is just a painting. Audio quality is clean and solid with only the occasional bit of dialog sounding too thin.

MVD Visual has released the film in a Blu-ray/DVD combo Collector's Edition as part of their MVD Rewind Collection. Included in the extras is Schifrin's introduction; two of the director's short films—Basil & Mobius: No Rest For The Wicked (starring more genre stalwarts Ray Park, Malcolm McDowell and Kane Hodder), and Shadows, his USC student film; a poster and stills gallery; a storyboard gallery; outtakes; and deleted and extended scenes. "Back to Genre: Making *Abominable*" is a 35+ minute featurette with interviews from key cast and crewmembers. An audio commentary with Schifrin, McCoy, Combs and editor Chris Conlee is an enjoyable time spent in the company of friends, adding depth and appreciation to the production.

For the *Abominable* fan that just can't get enough of the shaggy behemoth there's the original 2006 cut of the film (without the enhanced CGI effects and color correction of the 2K transfer). Two trailers for the film, along with other MVD titles (*Attack of the Killer Tomatoes*, *Savannah Smiles*, *Black Eagle*, and *Return of the Swamp Thing*), are also included. A collectible poster rounds out the contents.

J. Todd Kingree