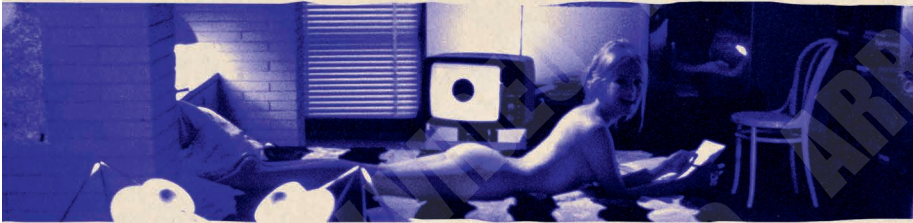






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THE FIFTH CORD

Giornata nera per l'ariete
1971

CAST

Franco Nero Andrea Bild
Silvia Monti Helene
Wolfgang Preiss Police Inspector
Ira von Fürstenberg Isabel Lancia
Edmund Purdom Edouard Vermont
Rossella Falk Sofia Bini
Renato Romano Dr Riccardo Bini

Guido Alberti Traversi
Luciano Bartoli Walter Auer
Agostina Belli Giulia
With
Maurizio Bonuglia John Lubbock
And
Pamela Tiffin Lù Auer

CREW

Directed by **Luigi Bazzoni**
Produced by **Manolo Bolognini**
Screenplay by **Mario di Nardo, Mario Fanelli & Luigi Bazzoni**
Based on the Novel by **D.M. Devine**
Director of Photography **Vittorio Storaro**
Film Editor **Eugenio Alabiso**
Music by **Ennio Morricone**
Production Designer **Gastone Carsetti**
Costumes by **Fiorenzo Senese**







“YOU REALLY CAN’T STAND ME. CAN YOU?”: ALIENATION AND LONELINESS IN THE FIFTH CORD

by Kat Ellinger

As a collective vision, Luigi Bazzoni’s giallo films, *The Fifth Cord* (*Giornata nera per l’ariete*, 1971) and *Footprints on the Moon* (*Le orme*, 1975), present an ode to the themes of loneliness, despair and alienation. While this essay will attempt to avoid spoilers for *Footprints on the Moon*, it is important to note that the similarities between the two films form a unified thematic concept. In the case of *The Fifth Cord*, the film doesn’t revel in graphic violence, and therefore consciously rejects certain established genre tropes. For *Footprints on the Moon* the director deliberately eschews all genre formula in favour of a more abstract presentation, thus giving viewers a giallo only in the broadest sense of the definition: a mystery-based thriller. What you find instead of convention are two mood-driven pieces with a lot to say about modern life, and its tendency to disconnect people from emotional experience and the wider communities around them.

It is often the case that *The Fifth Cord* is mentioned in the context of Dario Argento’s work, as one of the films to emerge off the back of the director’s ground-breaking *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (*L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo*, 1970). While previously the giallo had followed a more conventional melodramatic thriller formula, Argento’s work broke the mould. Gone were maidens in peril and complex inheritance plots, in favour of urban alienation, male loner protagonists forced into a mystery through circumstance, voyeurism, sadism, and stylised violence. The success of *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* launched the prolific cycle of gialli in Italy, which boomed during just five short years – 1970–1975 – with many of the directors who followed taking their cue from Argento in terms of sex, violence, and male-centric plots.

Even though *The Fifth Cord* shares some elements with *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, especially in the form of an outsider antihero who becomes the key to solving the central mystery – for Bazzoni’s film it is Andrea Bild, a washed-up alcoholic reporter, played by Franco Nero – when you strip them down this appears to be the only similarity. *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* focuses on protagonist Sam Dalmas (Tony Musante), who is an outsider by nationality, a writer who has been living and working in Italy – non-nationals in the mystery-solving role being a concept started in the film frequently credited as the very first giallo, Mario Bava’s *The Girl Who Knew Too Much* (*La ragazza che sapeva troppo*,



1963) – *The Fifth Cord*'s Bild is an outsider in his own country; a man who appears to have pushed everyone away by choice, in order to disappear into a bottle of J&B and a puddle of his own self-pity. Both films share an affinity with the alienated men of American film noir, which is not surprising given that Argento took his inspiration from a hardboiled detective novel, Fredric Brown's *The Screaming Mimi* (1949), when he changed the trajectory of the genre – detective pulp fiction being a literary style that heavily influenced the noir – thus introducing the character type into the lexicon of the seventies Italian thriller. Yet, through his use of a man alienated in his own community, Bazzoni progresses this theme in a way that updates the noir's pessimism, existential despair, paranoia and disconnected outsiders in a way that is very much his own, making it much more than just another commercial cash-in designed to ride on the coattails of Argento's success.

In *The Fifth Cord*, reporter Bild is a man who has a succession of throwaway love affairs, and someone who is bitter about life, with little in the way of friends or emotional attachments. Early on in the narrative he confesses to sometime lover Helene (Silvia Monti): "When I drink, I forget things. It makes life much easier." He is later seen recklessly swigging from a bottle of J&B while at the wheel of a moving vehicle – a frame which has become something of a poster shot for the giallo genre in general, despite the lack of critical acclaim for the film itself – hammering in the message that he is someone who is disenfranchised and angry. But then, who can blame him? Bild inhabits a universe where everyone is disconnected in one way or another. Dr Bini (Renato Romano), for example, admits contempt for his wife, even after her violent murder. The decadent party members we meet at the beginning, who are then killed off one by one, are largely presented as shallow, self-absorbed people, when their characters are allowed to develop. Helene is a single parent, and a career woman, who, despite her obvious love for her young son Tony, is rarely seen in the same frame as the child. Instead, mother and son are often shown occupying entirely different spaces within a shot, Tony always at the side of his nanny, instead of in the arms of his mother. In fact, in one scene where the boy runs towards his mother to receive a hug, the director abruptly cuts to another scene, thus denying the audience the satisfaction of seeing a happy emotional moment. But then, in the world of *The Fifth Cord* there doesn't appear to be any room for sentiment, and many of the relationships shown are presented as being built on practical necessity – for instance Bild's need for sex – rather than emotional intimacy.

For Bazzoni's *Footprints on the Moon*, it is a similar story when it comes to the urban environment and how it influences the lifestyle of its lead character, Alice Cespi (Florinda Bolkan). The story involves a woman who suffers memory loss, is plagued by some sort of past trauma, who then travels to a seaside resort when she discovers she appears to have lost days of her life, and may have visited there during the blackout. At the beginning of the film Bazzoni repeats the urban motifs seen in *The Fifth Cord*, showing Cespi as

an emotionless woman who appears to have little in the way of close ties. Cespi's ultra-modern apartment is sparse and unwelcoming. Her job as a transcriber requires her to spend her days sat in a sound booth, disconnected from any form of social experience with her peers because, the only time she is close to them, she is wearing headphones and focused on her work. It is only when Cespi leaves the city she is able to form relationships with people around her. For Cespi, like Bild, the modern urban environment is stripped of any semblance of warmth and intimacy. While the two characters can be seen as polar opposites in terms of temperament – Cespi's sensible efficiency versus Bild's alcoholic promiscuity – they are very much sides of the same coin when it comes to their level of disconnection from the personal and emotional. Each character appears to exist only to work. Everything else seems to have little meaning for them.

One aspect that is almost always guaranteed to be found in the giallo is sex, usually graphic, complete with nudity, which either involves sensual experience, or voyeuristic violence. *Footprints on the Moon* is devoid of this completely in favour of something completely different. While *The Fifth Cord* does have its sexual moments, they appear utterly detached from any form of emotional context. This can be seen through Bild's previously mentioned encounters with his various on/off girlfriends – who all appear to share his non-committed approach to their affairs – but it is most notable in one of the most outstanding scenes in the film: the sex show.

Presented in part as an abstract, in magic lantern cut-out style, Bild's visit to the sex club, and his consequent voyeurism, is a high point in the film because of its bold artistic elements, which are rich and decadent. It comes as something of a break from the stark-looking urban environments within which Bild is seen travelling for a large portion of the running time, given that the scene, by direct contrast, initially oozes a sensual sheen, which feels sumptuous, inviting and almost romantic. Two lovers are seen tenderly kissing and touching each other, carved out like silhouettes, in a room filled with plants and ornate furnishings. It is only when the camera draws back that the full picture becomes apparent: surrounding them are a bunch of leering voyeurs, including one man with a handheld camera. The scene juxtaposes this action with repeated close-ups of Bild's eyes, as he is drawn into the spectacle, just like the other men who are also present in the room. All of a sudden, the context changes, and the audience is once again denied any vicarious intimacy with the scene. Sensuality is replaced with cold hard capitalism, and sex becomes nothing more than a business transaction for those who can afford it. The mood quickly shifts to uncomfortable and seedy, despite the artistic veneer of the composition, once again revealing everything in this world as shallow and detached.



But then, Bild isn't just alienated because of his lack of attachment. One thing that is always noted and praised about the film is the incredible cinematography by Vittorio Storaro (*The Conformist*, 1970, *Apocalypse Now*, 1979 and *The Last Emperor*, 1987), which raises *The Fifth Cord's* production values high above that of a typical B-thriller. While many critics have struggled with the slow-burning plot, because there is little in the way of violent action, praise has been universally laden on the visual schema. While it would be easy to see this as just icing on a fairly hollow cake, it is important to note that much of the subtext – the pessimistic mood of loneliness and alienation that fills almost every frame – is drawn from the composition of its settings, and the way in which Storaro frames his shots, to show this detachment in a very literal sense.

In many of the exterior city scenes, the film once again rejects the typical giallo formula of the period. Many of the gialli from the boom years were set in brimming cosmopolitan cityscapes, buzzing with activity, traffic, noise, and crowds, the likes of which were then contrasted with moments of menace when victims, alone in areas of quiet, were preyed upon and violently murdered. *The Fifth Cord's* victim moments still happen in areas of relative quiet. However, the entire city as a whole is deliberately underpopulated. What Bazzoni, through Storaro's lens, presents instead is a series of wide-angled shots where people are continuously shown dwarfed by modern architecture. The lack of extra people milling around in these scenes (as would be usual for an inner-city environment) only enhances the effect. Bild's character wandering through the streets thus becomes a tiny, insignificant figure on a monstrous, shiny, ultra-modern landscape. This dwarfing effect is even evident in some of the quieter moments of the film, like when the girl has her throat slashed under the bridge after having sex. Even here, the pillars of the overhead bypass look monumentally massive compared to the tiny girl, and as the camera pans out to reveal her dead body, it looks like a small speck on an overwhelming landscape.

Storaro also captures many of the key scenes – for example, when Bild is arguing with his editor – behind windows, through glass – in the case of the aforementioned scene, the view is further obscured by a half-drawn venetian blind – or even via distorted reflections in mirrors. This again gives the illusion that the audience has an additional layer which prevents them from fully immersing themselves in the world on screen. Metaphorically, these elements describe the cut-off existence the film's main characters inhabit, which is especially the case for the main protagonist.

The theme of under-population is repeated in *Footsteps on the Moon*, even on beaches, which should be teeming with tourists, deliberately capitalising on the idea of a resort out of season. Cespi is quite often alone, or with only one or two other people, on an otherwise deserted beach. She too is lonely and alienated by an environment in which her presence seems of little importance in the grander scheme of things.

What's really interesting, if you take all this into account, is the fact that, far from using the giallo as commercial product, Bazzoni appears to have been commenting on the modern phenomena happening in Italy at the time, as a country which had seen vast modernisation over the previous few decades. Italy underwent radical changes in the post-war period, when it was freed from the Fascist regime under Mussolini, and it had experienced a progressive transformation, fuelled by the economic miracle. Many people were lured into the cities in search of a better life, but as these cities grew and the economy expanded, everything changed, and communities became vastly undermined by urban living. By the seventies, distrust in the establishment was rife, and this is reflected by many films of the period in their pessimistic tone. Bazzoni's impression of the themes of alienation, isolation and loneliness may be an exaggeration, over-stylised, overstated, but they are pertinent nevertheless, and it is something he seems keen to communicate over the course of both of his gialli. The fact that these same themes remain relevant – probably even more so – today, over forty years later, demonstrates that, as a filmmaker, Bazzoni had a lot more to say than many people have given him credit for. As a director, he may have failed in commercial terms to capitalise on the most lurid – and therefore profit-making – elements the giallo had to offer, but when it comes to exploring the isolating nature of modern living, he was a master at his craft.

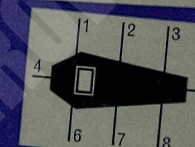
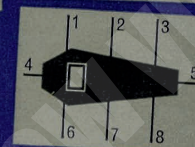
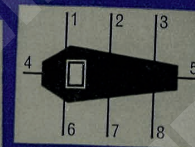
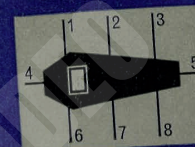
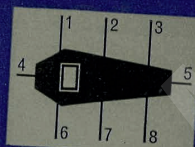
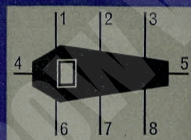
Kat Ellinger is a journalist, critic and columnist; currently writing for Scream Magazine, Fangoria, Diabolique Magazine and Shock Till You Drop.





D.M.
Devine

The Fifth Cord



D.M.
Devine

The Fifth Cord

CRIME
CLUB



CRIME
CLUB

FROM KENBURGH TO ROME: THE SCREEN ADAPTATION OF D.M. DEVINE'S *THE FIFTH CORD*

by Peter Jilmstad

Ask a fan of giallo cinema where the term originated, and chances are they will answer the Mondadori books. The eye-catching yellow covers of the long-running series of mystery novels gave the *filone* (an Italian term describing strand or sub-genre) its name and inextricably links the written and the filmed giallo. But despite the wealth of source material available, surprisingly few films were adapted from literary sources. Giorgio Scerbanenco's novels *I milanesi ammazzano al sabato* (1969) and *Al mare con la ragazza* (1965) were filmed as *Death Occurred Last Night* (*La morte risale a ieri sera*, Duccio Tessari, 1970) and *The Killer Must Kill Again* (*L'assassino è costretto ad uccidere ancora*, Luigi Cozzi, 1975) respectively. Libero Bigiaretti's *La Controfigura* (1968) was adapted to film as *The Double* (Romolo Guerrieri, 1971). D.M. Devine's *The Fifth Cord* was another of these rare exceptions.

David McDonald Devine was born in Greenock, Scotland in 1920. He had joined the University of St Andrews staff in 1946 as Assistant Secretary and was appointed Depute Secretary in 1961, the same year he made his literary debut with *My Brother's Killer*. He would go on to pen 12 more novels as either D.M. Devine or Dominic Devine before his death in 1980.



Author D.M. Devine

The Fifth Cord, Devine's sixth novel, was published by Crime Club in 1967 and the following year in Italy as part of the Giallo Mondadori series under the title *Il segno dell'assassino* (The Mark of the Assassin).

According to the cinematographer Vittorio Storaro, *The Fifth Cord* was not really the kind of project Bazzoni was hoping to do. It was more likely producer Manolo Bolognini (producer of Bazzoni's 1965 thriller *The Possessed* [*La donna del lago*]) as well as Sergio Corbucci's 1966 western *Django* who saw the opportunity to make a profit off the current giallo trend. The exact reasons why *The Fifth Cord* became the basis for the script is lost with Bazzoni and Bolognini, but it is easy to see why someone thought the novel work well on screen.

The tightly constructed mystery, the multiple murders and the false narrative of the killer's diary are all ingredients that suit the giallo genre well.

Bazzoni adapted the novel with Mario di Nardo and Mario Fanelli. Di Nardo was a screenwriter with titles like Mario Bava's *Five Dolls for an August Moon* (*5 bambole per la luna d'agosto*, 1970) and *Roy Colt & Winchester Jack* (1970) among his credits. Fanelli was a seasoned TV director with whom Bazzoni had worked on several short films in the 1960s. The two would later adapt Fanelli's 1970 novel *Las Huellas* as *Le Orme* (*Footprints on the Moon*) in 1975.

Devine's novels often take place in either Scotland or northern England, but the script saw the setting moved from the fictional Scottish town of Kenburgh to metropolitan Rome. The swanky New Year's Eve party that opens the film replaces a considerably less glamorous Parent-Teachers Association meeting.

The protagonists in Devine's puzzle mysteries are often male professionals. Lawyers, teachers and doctors are recurring professions and the plots often unfold in or around milieus such as law firms, universities, schools or newsrooms. The protagonist of *The Fifth Cord* is Jeremy Beald (Andrea Bild in the film), a 35-year-old journalist with the *Kenburgh Gazette*. An undisclosed incident at a prestigious city newspaper has left him dismissed, disillusioned and resentful. He is the author of a critically acclaimed novel, but is struggling with writer's block and is on the verge of full-blown alcoholism. His relationship with Kathleen Ryan (renamed Lù and played by Pamela Tiffin in the film) is on-again, off-again, and he still holds a torch for his old schoolfriend Helen Rhodes.

The tortured artist character is nothing new, but Devine provides Beald with enough humanity not to make him feel like a cliché. Franco Nero brings his usual charisma to the role, rendering the character likeable in spite of his darkness and the script's added violent behaviour towards Lù.

The women in Devine's novels often filled traditional roles, such as housewives, students, secretaries and schoolteachers. Helen Rhodes is a widow with an 11-year old son. She clearly has feelings for Jeremy and is protective of him, but she is also reluctant to let the self-destructive Jeremy into her and her son's life.

The script makes some interesting changes to Helene (no surname given in the film), making her a more interesting and well-rounded character. In the book, Beald and Rhodes end up in each other's arms, but the script dismisses any notion of romance between the

IL GIALLO MONDADORI 1023

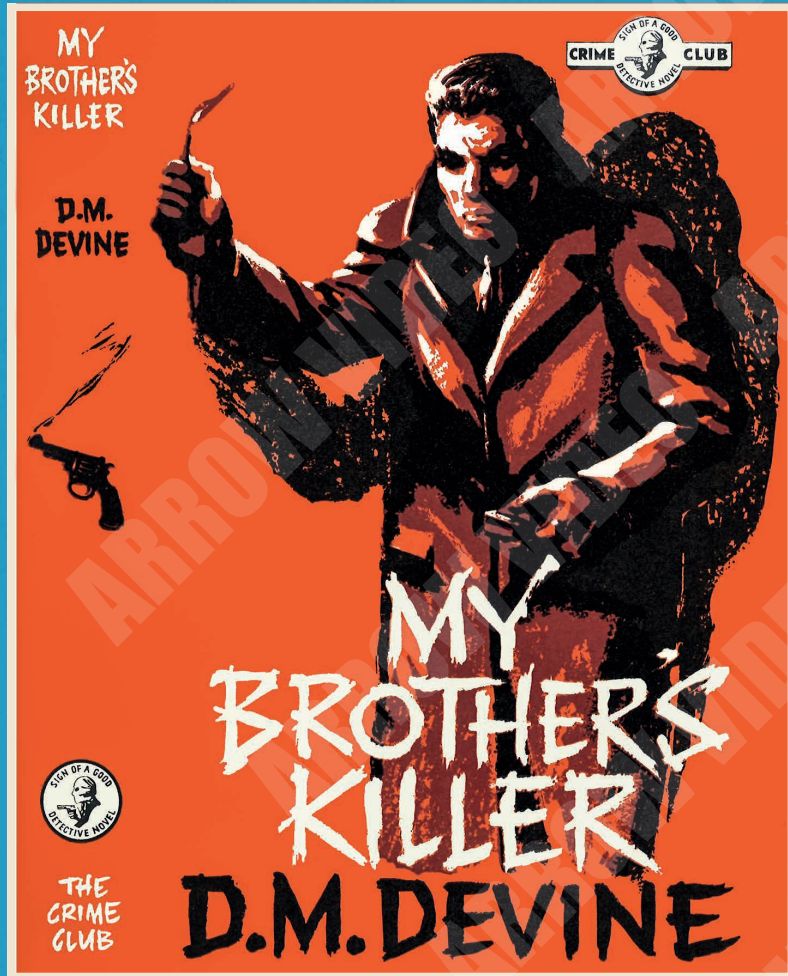
IL SEGNO DELL'ASSASSINO

D. M. Devine

in appendice
la Rivista di Ellery Queen



8-9-1968
SETTIMANALE
lire 250



two, leaving Helene a platonic female friend of Bild's. This gives Silvia Monti the opportunity to portray Helene as a professional single mother going through a divorce and neither sexualizes nor victimizes her, something quite unusual for an Italian genre film at the time. Her son, Peter, is renamed Tony and is played by Michel Barnes, younger brother of Lara Wendel (*Tenebrae*), in the film.

The film's title is bound to leave the first-time viewer flummoxed, but as a title for the book, it makes perfect sense. At the site of the first attack, the police find a card from an undertakers' firm. The card indicates the placement of the different cords at an interment. As new victims are found, new cards with new cords marked appear at the crime scenes. The script removes this plot device (presumably since it was not a common Italian custom) and replaces it with a glove that has a finger cut off left at each crime scene – a change echoed in the alternate English title, *Evil Fingers*.

The chain of events initially follows the book closely. The attack on Lubbock (Maurizio Bonuglia) and the murder of the doctor's wife are virtually unchanged, but the third murder in the film is an amalgamation of two murders in the book. The first is the murder of the newspaper editor Gordon Travers (renamed Traversi in the film) and the death of Duncan Edwards/Eduard Vermont's father, who succumbs to a heart attack before he is killed. Following the murder of Traversi, the film deviates to an increasing degree from the literary source. In the novel, the newsroom is a central location, but the film replaces it with a number of new scenes that offers the opportunity of more visual treats. The sex party subplot, Bild's visiting Lü's brother at the racetrack and the murders of Isabel and the prostitute are all added in the script.

The attempted killing of Peter/Tony and the denouement is less dramatic in the book. The killer attacks Peter during the day while Helen is at the hairdresser's, leaving Beald and the police to save the day. The film substitutes this ending with the suspenseful night-time attack in the house and adds the sequence where Nero chases the killer in the dilapidated factory.

The killer is the character that has undergone the most significant change in the film. In the book, Jean Lubbock, a 29-year old schoolteacher, commits the murders. She is in love with Duncan and thinks her feelings are reciprocated, but when his engagement to Isabel is announced, the humiliation becomes too much to bear. When randomly attacked on the way home from the PTA meeting, Lubbock hatches a plan to commit the murders and pin them on Duncan. She picks her victims among the frail or vulnerable, since she does not have the strength to overpower a healthy adult, and writes a false diary as the killer that subtly points to Duncan.

Many gialli at the time introduced 'deviant' sexuality as a motive for their killers, making the films even more salacious and sensational to the conservative Italian audiences of the day, so Jean becomes John, but Edward remains the object of the killer's affections. The unrequited love drives John to murder, taking great care to make them look like the work of a serial killer in an effort to hide his real motive: the punishment and death of Isabel.

A number of Italian thrillers made in the wake of the Dario Argento's commercially successful *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (*L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo*, 1970) used animals in their titles, and it is no coincidence that title was changed from *Il segno dell'assassino* to *Giornata nera per l'ariete*. The title refers to the significance of Zodiac signs in the film, and during the production of the film, trade publications frequently referred to the English title as either *Black Day for Aries* or *Black Day of the Ram*.

Today, D.M. Devine's work is largely forgotten and few of his books remain in print, but giallo enthusiasts should be grateful to Devine for providing the framework and story that, in the hands of Bazzoni, Nero, Storaro and others, would result in one of the very finest thrillers made during the giallo boom of the early 1970s.

Peter Jilmstad is the author of the upcoming book The Other Anita – The Life and Films of Anita Strindberg.



From left to right: Franco Nero, Silvia Monti and Maurizio Bonuglia on the set of *The Fifth Cord*



ABOUT THE RESTORATION

The Fifth Cord / Giornata nera per l'ariete is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.85:1 with Italian and English mono audio. Scanning and restoration work was completed at L'Immagine Ritrovata, Bologna. The original 35mm camera negative was scanned in 2K resolution on a pin-registered Arriscan. Thousands of instances of dirt, debris, scratches, picture instability and other instances of film wear were repaired or removed through a combination of digital restoration tools and techniques. The mono Italian and English language tracks were remastered from the optical sound negatives. The audio synch will appear slightly loose against the picture, due to the fact that the dialogue was recorded entirely in post-production, as per the production standards of the period.

The film was graded on Digital Vision's Nucoda Film Master at R3Store Studios, London.

All original materials used in this restoration were accessed from Surf Film.

Restoration supervised by James White, Arrow Films

L'Immagine Ritrovata:

Simone Arminio, Gilles Barberis, Valeria Bigongiali, Julia Mettenleiter, Alessia Navantieri, Charlotte Oddo, Caterina Palpacelli, Davide Pozzi, Elena Tammaccaro, Giandomenico Zeppa

R3Store Studios:

Gerry Gedge, Jo Griffin, Rich Watson, Nathan Leaman-Hill, Stephanie Mourey, Emily Kemp

Surf Film:

Stefania Carnevale



A person with long, dark hair is lying on their side on a dark floor. They are wearing a dark top and light-colored pants. The room is dimly lit, with a window in the background showing some light. The overall mood is somber and quiet.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **Michael Mackenzie**
Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**

Technical Producer **James White**

QC Manager **Nora Mehenni**

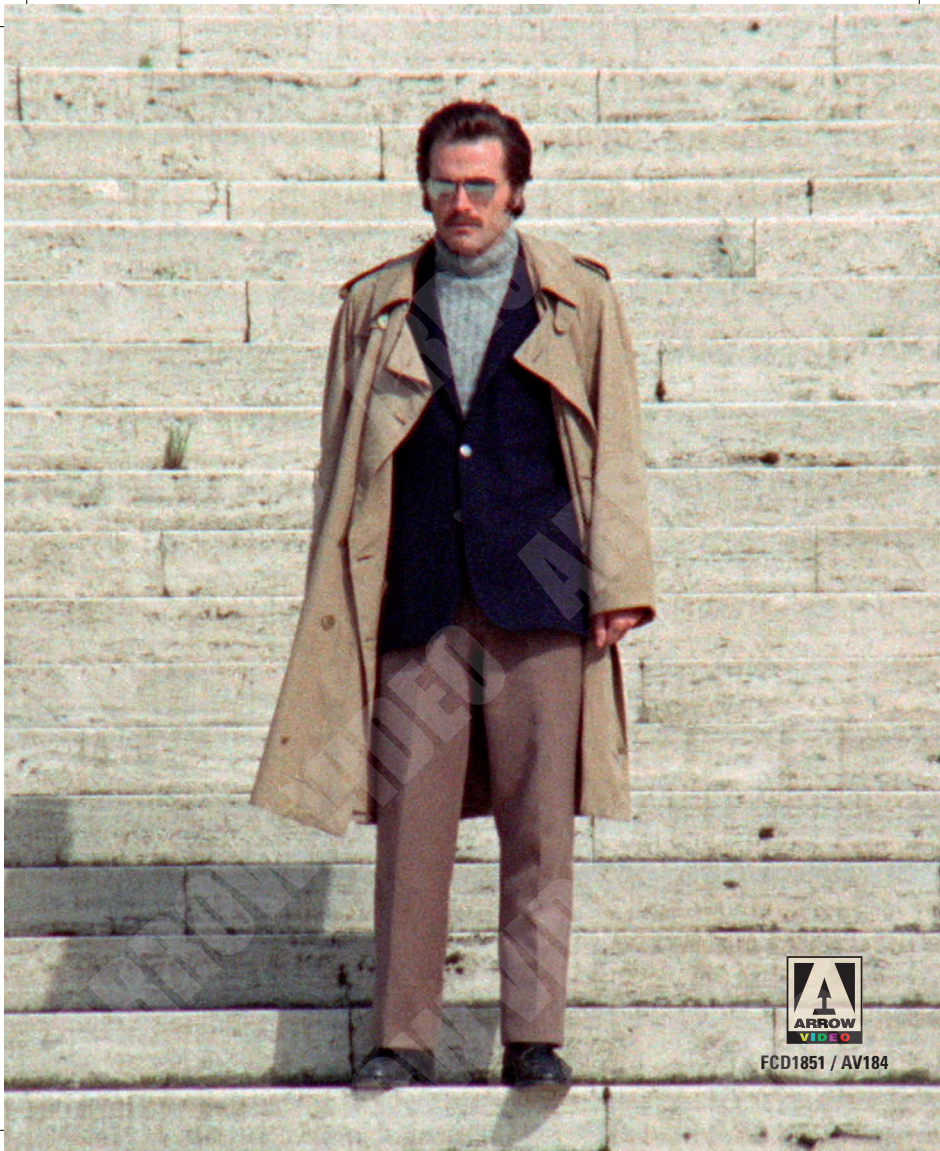
Blu-ray Mastering and Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**

Artist **Haunt Love**

Design **Obviously Creative**

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Eugenio Alabiso, Federico Caddeo, Travis Crawford, Kat Ellinger,
Manlio Gomasasca, Peter Jilmstad, Justin Miller, Franco Nero,
Rachael Nisbet, Frieda Smith



FCD1851 / AV184