

## ***They Came From The Basement!***

**By John Seal**

### **THE PARALLEL CORPSE (1982)**

♫♫♫1/2

D: Soren Melson, Hans-Erik Philip, Jorgen Kiil, Buster Larsen, Masja Dessau, Agnetta Ekmanner. 88/116 mins. (n.i.d.)

The place: a steamy shower in Denmark. The time: that magical moment when love (or lust) trumps good old-fashioned common sense. The participants: a middle-aged man and his much younger partner who, in typically unashamed Scandinavian fashion, are making hot steamy love behind frosted glass. After drying themselves off and retiring to the bedroom, the young lady expresses her wish that the man inform his spouse of their ongoing affair and deep, genuine love for each other. She also tells him she's pregnant—and if *he* won't tell wifey everything, *she* will. Cut to the bucolic countryside, where once again the pair are *in flagrante delicto*. It's summer—the woman is wearing a light cotton dress—and after completing their business the lovers recline peacefully in post-coital bliss beneath a spreading tree. All's well with the world—until, of course, the man calmly places his hands around his paramour's neck and begins to squeeze.

Thus begins Melson and Philip's **The Parallel Corpse (Det parallele lig)**, a unique mystery-thriller with noir overtones adapted from a 1968 novel (never translated into English) by Danish writer Frits Remar. Our cold-blooded killer is industrialist Allan Berg (the aptly named Kiil), and his victim—shockingly—is his 17-year-old stepdaughter Marie-Louise (Dessau, sporting a **Breathless**-period Jean Seberg pixie cut).

Belying the appearance that his was a crime of passion, the meticulous and cold-blooded Allan has a plan to dispose of Marie-Louise's body at a nearby crematorium. Under cover of darkness he opens a coffin lying in readiness for a morning service, removes its current occupant, lays his victim at the bottom, and places the original body atop her. Come the dawn the service will take place, the coffin will go into the oven, and all evidence of murder will be incinerated.

There's someone, however, whom Allan hasn't taken into account. In addition to purloining the corpses' valuables before consigning them to the flames, crooked funeral parlor attendant Hans (Larsen) has a sweet deal recycling empty coffins with the local casket merchant. Unsurprisingly, he discovers the "parallel corpse" and takes note of the suspicious bruising around its neck.

Going to the police, of course, is impossible under the circumstances, but when the evening news reports the disappearance of the daughter of a wealthy couple, Hans identifies his mark. Initially contacting Allan with a hard-to-refuse offer—he'll return the girl's ring in exchange for the relatively small sum of 3200 Kroner (equivalent to about \$450 today)—Hans celebrates his good luck by opening a can of peaches. Mmm mmm good!

It's a small price for Allan to pay for peace of mind, and an arrangement is made to swap the ring for the money via a rail station locker. The transaction goes smoothly—so smoothly, in fact, that Hans can't resist going back to the well. This time he offers Marie-Louise's brooch for a slightly more substantial sum: 60,000 Kroner (over \$8500). Allan realizes he's on the hook for life—and immediately begins plotting to turn the tables on the blackmailer.

As cat and mouse switch places, a third party is also aware that something's wrong: Allan's wife (and Marie-Louise's biological mother) Karen (Ekmanner). Increasingly suspicious of her husband's activities, the worried mother turned amateur gumshoe discovers that he's lied to her about spending large sums of money on car repairs. What *did* he do with the cash he withdrew from their bank account?

**The Parallel Corpse** is intelligent, believable and suspenseful. Though blessed with an outstanding cast—the avuncular Larsen, his stout frame and heavy-lidded eyes reminiscent of the elder Jean Gabin, deserves particular kudos—the film's lifeless English dubbing does it no favors. (There are also quite a few English-language text inserts, which were made with obvious care and are more effective than the voice actors.) There's visual compensation courtesy of cinematographer Henning Kristiansen (whose next film would be the Academy Award-winner **Babette's Feast**), whose use of oranges and browns lends the later stages of the film an autumnal hue.

Media Home Entertainment's now ancient VHS tape offers a full-frame print in decent condition. The print clocks in at 88 minutes, in contrast to both IMDb (which posits the existence of 85 and 113 minute versions) and the Danish Film Institute's website, which suggests the original cut ran for 116 minutes. Assuming the latter source is correct, there's a great opportunity here for a full subtitled restoration, especially as the film seems never to have been released on DVD or Blu-ray anywhere. Quietly screaming for rediscovery, **The Parallel Corpse** would be a perfect film for Kino, Olive, or (in a perfect world) The Criterion Collection to exhume. ♫

### Get'em While They Last!

Order your **VideoScope**  
back issues today!  
See page 54 for details.

## **MONDO GIALLO**

### **THE BLOODSTAINED BUTTERFLY (1971)**

♫♫1/2

D: Duccio Tessari. Helmut Berger, Giancarlo Sbragia, Ida Galli, Wendy D'Olive, Carole Andre. 99 mins. (Arrow Video) 9/16

When teen beauty Françoise (Andre) is found dead in a park, middle-aged TV personality Alessandro Marchi (Sbragia) comes up as the best possible suspect. The defense attorney tries to sway the court into believing all the evidence is circumstantial, while sleeping with Maria Marchi (Galli), Alessandro's wife, during the proceedings. Young, rich Giorgio (Berger) gets involved with Sara Marchi (D'Olive), who was friends with Françoise. As the court case lingers, two more murders occur, both with the same M.O. as the original, but prosecutors are reluctant to release Alessandro. Finally, Alessandro is set free and, in a climactic confrontation, the final pieces of the mystery puzzle fall together. An unconventional giallo that many deem worthy for its characterizations and climax, I found **Butterfly** a solid effort that hit a couple of slow spots with all the courtroom drama. It's sleazy enough, with everyone jumping into bed with everyone else, but with the emphasis on the courtroom cross-examination instead of the flick-knife slayings, it's not as satisfying as other entries in the genre. Berger does well as the wealthy brat who has everything but embarrasses his parents by living in a commoner's flat. Galli appears here under her nom de cinema Evelyn Stewart. While Tessari made a trio of giallos, he was a journeyman filmmaker who, not unlike Lucio Fulci, delivered films of all genres and is mostly known today for two of his spaghetti westerns, **A Pistol for Ringo** and **The Return of Ringo**. Arrow Video offers another great presentation that takes advantage of the lush scope photography. Extras include an introduction and interview with star Berger, an interview with Galli, **Murder in B-Flat Minor**, a visual essay about the film and the genre by giallo scholar Troy Howarth, picture gallery, trailers and more. ♫

—Rob Freese

