

MAUSOLEUM

Directed by Michael Dugan

(1983) Vinegar Syndrome Blu-ray/DVD combo



Young Susan Nomed, distraught at the premature demise of her mother, defies consolation and runs off to hide in the family mausoleum. One might say "big mistake," but she really has no choice. The Nomed family is cursed; the curse falls on the first-born daughter of every generation; and now it's Susan's turn. There's your backstory. Cut to the present. Susan (Bobbie Bresee of the ever-mutating direct-to-video favorite *Evil Spawn*) is now Susan Farrell and she's enjoying life in a luxurious mansion with her husband Oliver (Marjoe Gortner). But now that she's thirty? Click! The curse kicks in, people start dying violently, and not even poor Marjoe's past experience with evangelism can help.

The best-known feature of sporadic director Michael Dugan (who started in 1976 with the G-rated obscurity *Super Seal*) beyond a doubt, *Mausoleum* coasts along with the bare minimum of post-*Exorcist* 70s genre tropes on which to proudly display an array of new-fangled makeup effects and plenty of skin courtesy of the obliging and eye-pleasing Ms. Bresee (pronounced "Braht-zee"). Plot? As adapted from Katherine Rosenwink's original screenplay by the team of producer/cinematographer Robert Barich and Robert Madero, the story simply consists of Susan, largely left to her own devices thanks to Oliver's busy schedule, attracting the attention of various men (starting with her own gardener); sometimes taking time out to seduce them, but eventually tearing them apart with supernatural fury regardless. And when victims stop showing up conveniently at her doorstep, she takes her act on the road (not to mention the *mall* in one of the more over-the-top set pieces). Unsurprisingly, this sort of behavior doesn't go completely unnoticed, and family friend/psychiatrist Simon Andrews (Norman Burton, perhaps most familiar as Felix Leiter in *Diamonds Are Forever*) subjects Susan to the requisite "hypnosis" scene. And after consulting with a learned colleague (who's just as open to the possibility of demonic possession as she is to abnormal psychology), he knows that the only thing that can stop Susan (and possibly end the curse) is the application of a handy relic known as the Crown of Thorns (why this supposedly obvious solution never occurred to any previous generation of Nomedes is left unexplained). LaWanda Page (*Sanford and Son*) is sadly wasted as a generically religious maid who survives the goings-on by running away when things get scary (you had *Aunt Esther* and *that's* what you did with her?!!).

Mausoleum straddles the line between old-fashioned hokiness (a display of supernatural power is always heralded by the freezing of the image and a green glow emanating from Susan's eyes while feedback builds on the soundtrack) and the most up to date practical makeup and gore effects then available, courtesy of John Carl Buechler. And to that end at the very least, Vinegar Syndrome proudly presents *Mausoleum* in its fully-uncut European version; restoring all the "chunky" bits missing from the U.S. theatrical release and previous video incarnations, and showcasing the artist's Blaisdell-esque "she creature" apparition at its brightest and best. The film benefits further from the dependable art direction of Robert Burns and the Corman factory pyrotechnics of the seasoned Roger George. In short, *Mausoleum* exhibits as little imagination as possible in concept—but it sure looks good on screen doing so. Vinegar Syndrome offers a 9m retrospective with Buechler, a trailer, TV spots and a still gallery on its short slate of extras.

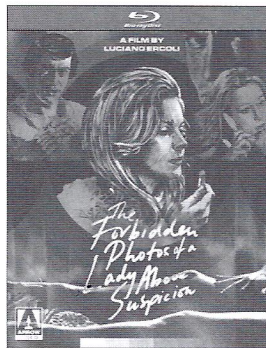
NOTE: Shortly after completing this review, word was received that John Carl Buechler had passed away at the age of 66. This reviewer spent much of the formative 1980s enjoying Buechler's monstrous creations on the big screen and had the pleasure of meeting the man in person at least once. While Buechler's work will live forever on film and in video, we offer our sincere condolences to his family, friends and legions of fans the world over.

Shane M. Dallmann

FORBIDDEN PHOTOS OF A LADY ABOVE SUSPICION

Directed by Luciano Ercoli

(1970) Arrow Video Blu-ray



The flood of well-appointed classic giallo Blu-ray releases of the last year or two continues with the long-awaited release of Luciano Ercoli's *Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion*. In this one, Dagmar Lassander plays Minou, the lonely wife of the concerned, but somewhat aloof Peter (Pier Paolini Capponi). While Peter is away one night, she is attacked by an assailant (Simon Andreu) who appears to be determined to rape her, but stops short and releases her after declaring that her husband has murdered someone. From there the situation escalates, as the blackmailer returns with further demands and hints about her husband's alleged misdeeds. Not sure what, or who, to believe, Minou finds herself in a tangled knot of blackmail, betrayal, and impending violence. The sadomasochistic undertones of the relationship between Minou and her blackmailer permeate the rest of the film, as Minou also adapts a markedly submissive stance with both her husband and the couple's free-spirited best friend (Susan Scott), both of whom tend to dismiss the stalker as essentially harmless or even non-existent.

As a giallo, (if one considers it a giallo, and some sticklers apparently do not) *Forbidden Photos* is fairly mild, substituting an atmosphere of claustrophobic dread for the high sex content and gruesome kill set pieces found in later works. This is much more of a psychological thriller than a horror film. Still, the visual style and cinematic craftsmanship on display here by Ercoli and the harrowing, yet ultimately logical scripting by his frequent collaborator Ernesto Gastald should satisfy most serious fans of the genre. A lively score by Ennio Morricone, with Bruno Nicolai handling the orchestration sweetens the deal.

Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion has been released on DVD in the past in North America by Blue Underground, but those with a special affinity for the film, or who just want the best edition available, should check out Arrow's new Blu-ray release. Newly



scanned in 2K from the original camera negative, the image here sparkles in the colorful scenes and renders darks (and there are many instances of darkness) as deep as this viewer could hope for (in most instances). This represents a notable upgrade from the already pleasing transfers on the DVD releases. The film's crisp Italian and English soundtracks are both available in LPCM 1.0 mono, with optional English subs available.

Not known for skimping on extras, Arrow has included a package of substantive bonus features which not only complement the film but are almost indispensable for a full understanding of its place in the history of the giallo form. A 44 minute featurette showcases interviews with Ercoli and Gastaldi, covering their early careers and partnership. Susan Scott also appears. Another 47 minute featurette focuses on giallo soundtrack music by Morricone, Nicoli, and others. There is also a 44-minute clip of a 2016 career-spanning Q&A with Dagmar Lassander. Trailers and image gallery are also provided. The first pressing contains a collectible booklet with an essay by author Michael Mackenzie.

At the heart of the extras, however, is a commentary track by giallo expert Kat Ellinger, who compares and contrasts films like *Forbidden Photos* with the rougher, decidedly meaner, and deliriously chaotic films that came after it. Her analysis is not to be missed, and whether the viewer ultimately agrees with all of her conclusions or not, she brings a fresh, welcome critical perspective to the table.

Chris Herzog