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Join us as we delve into the macabre territory of the Italian Giallo genre. How would you describe gialli in one sentence and what fascinates you most about them? The giallo is an Italian genre of effectively gory murder mysteries. Sometimes they're

sexy, but they are usually quite hyper-violent. They bridge between murder

mysteries and horror films in that regard. My fascination with them is a strange one, in that the study seems to have chosen me, rather than me choosing it. I wanted to write on North American slasher films and it was suggested that in order to do that I look at the giallo. I was just looking for a couple of articles that would bridge the gap for me, that I could do my research on the slasher films. Those articles didn't exist back when I was looking for them. So I started to write them and I discovered—it sort of turned into the book, La Dolce Morte. And I've not been able to escape the Italian exploitation scene ever since. Looking at them historically, they seem to be a big shift from the gothic chillers coming out through the '60s in Italy. What were some of the things that you noticed in your research that were going on in the Italian film industry and the culture as well?

Italian horror films really don't begin until the late 1950s with the Riccardo Freda-Mario Bava film, I Vampiri. What you had early on in the '60s was a whole series of gothic ghost stories and witchcraft stories like Bava's Black Sunday, for example. But almost immediately after Black Sunday, Bava follows it up with The Girl Who Knew Too Much in 1962. Clearly the title is meant to evoke Hitchcock's The Man Who Knew Too Much. So he's trying to create that sense of the suspense film, a different

type of film than what he had done with Black Sunday. Throughout the 1960s while

the Barbara Steele Italian gothic films were taking off, Bava is continuing to

experiment with the murder mystery scenarios that we come to expect from the giallo. Starting in the mid-1960s, you had a bunch of other filmmakers trying to cash in on Bava's success by exploring what I call the "hysterical giallo," which are movies about trying to drive somebody insane in order to get an inheritance or something. Usually there's much of adultery going on and love triangles. And this carries the giallo through the late 1960s.

Bay of Blood comes to mind because they're trying to fight for an inheritance. But I believe that was in '71.

Bay of Blood though—also known as Twitch of a Death Nerve—by Bava is early 1970s. Even before the Bava film you had a bunch of movies coming out by Umberto Lenzi and Lucio Fulci in the late '60s before Dario Argento really changes the game with The Bird with the Crystal Plumage—which takes the erotic thrillers that had been very popular up until that point and introduces the black-gloved killer we've come to associate with the giallo today. So, the giallo did exist before Argento, but it existed in a very different form. It was much more like a murder mystery than a

horror film. Argento really brought the horror dimension to the genre and it's never really looked back. Since you mentioned black-gloved killers and some other tropes of the genre, how do their structures really set them apart—because there's a whodunnit aspect to it and the murder set pieces—but what else makes them unique, and how did producers try to cash in on their popularity to try to sell them back in the day? Well, back in the day—that's still true with Hollywood today—was the idea that "if the formula works, don't mess with it." So they keep trying to reproduce the same formula that an earlier successful film had. They'll change one ingredient or add a different ingredient and try different combinations until they get a new winning

formula. That's sort of how these things develop. Their producers are just trying to

supernatural elements like All the Colors of the Dark and The Strange Vice of

They can. But again, it's all one-upmanship. How are they going to get noticed? How

figure out the new combination that audiences can get behind.

Mrs. Wardh. They can get kinda out there.

Some of them go into weird places, though. There are some that have

is their new film going to get noticed? Because this is before DVD and video. So all this stuff is competing. Whether it's Argento, Sergio Martino, or Lucio Fulci—any of these classic giallo filmmakers throughout the 1970s are constantly trying to outdo each other.

giallo films you would recommend? Well, Deep Red (Profondo Rosso) obviously, as well as Argento's Bird with the Crystal Plumage. But I'm also a big fan of Lucio Fulci's Don't Torture a Duckling and Sergio Martino's films as well: All the Colours of the Dark, The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh. Torso is a particular favorite of mine. Any of those George Hilton-Edwige Fenech-starring films are absolutely classic films.

I just picked up Arrow's release of [Martino's] Case of the Scorpion's Tail.

A film like Case of the Scorpion's Tail is particularly interesting in what I was saying about the "hysterical giallo" because it is really an older style giallo, but made after Bird with the Crystal Plumage. So you can really see how the insurance scam plot evolves in the early '70s by trying to bring more sex and more horror into the mix.

Since you mentioned that you were originally going to start researching U.S. slasher films, how have gialli influenced slashers and that entire craze?

The connection isn't direct. It's not like John Carpenter saw Bird with the Crystal Plumage and said, "That's what I'm going to do!" In fact, I wrote about this in Film, Folklore, and Urban Legends. There are different kinds of slasher films. There are ones modeled like Halloween and Friday the 13th, where anytime you encounter the killer, you're dead because the killer is always the killer. Those are different than the Prom Nights and the Terror Trains which work more like these murder mysteries. So, these more murder mystery-oriented slasher films tend to be picking up a lot of the traditions from the giallo, even with the black-gloved killers, the different

For anyone that's interested in discovering the genre, what are the quintessential

murder weapons and those sorts of things.

Through this point they've achieved cult status.

and love seeing it in a theater.

public display of the film.

films?

suddenly labeled a cult film. I appreciate inclusivity and various academic colleagues of mine trying to expand that inclusion. That's great in certain respects, but the world "cult" has become so expanded that it's become absolutely meaningless. For me, a cult film requires a public audience, so the fact that we buy the stuff on Blu-Ray or DVD and watch it at home destroys the cult quality to it. For example, I'm from Toronto originally. A couple of years ago I was back home and there was a screening that the magazine Rue Morgue was doing of Zombie Holocaust, also known as Dr. Butcher, M.D. That got a great audience out for it. You know, we all have it on Blu-Ray or whatever, it's a film we're all familiar with. But there was something really wonderful about seeing it projected with a public audience. That's more cult than having a really good Blu-Ray collection at home where you just watch the stuff with your friends. That's not a cult audience anymore. So it really needs the event of the cult film to really make it something different than run-of-the-mill exploitation films.

I can see how a lot of revival theaters—there are a few here like the Egyptian, the New Beverly, and a few others—really keep that tradition alive. Even in 35mm, and the prints are God-awful sometimes. They've all turned red with so many scratches, sometimes warping, but people are there because they love the film

Absolutely. Now, it's a question of are audiences coming to see that again and again? Another element of cult is, of course, repeat viewings. While seeing Dr. Butcher at the Regal in Toronto was a great kind of cult event, I don't know if I would consider that a cult film unless every time it is being shown at a different cinema, everybody is still going to it in the same way. So it does need that repetition in addition to the

It's slightly blasphemous, but I'll admit that I've been teaching Deep Red (Profondo Rosso) for quite a few years now and I'm getting pretty bored with it. So if we were to have a screening here at Worcester of Deep Red, yeah . . . I'd probably go see it because it's Deep Red. But I'm not going to keep viewing the film again and again and again. I have to do that anyway with teaching. So, are any of these actually cult

Sometimes there are points where [Deep Red] just drags or you know the conceit and wonder "Am I really watching this again?" But then there are times when

Going off what we were saying about rewatching them in a theater, on the other side of the spectrum we have them being re-released and restored recently—the DVD boom craze since the 1990s. We had companies like Anchor Bay which became Blue Underground, you have Arrow Films, Scorpion Releasing. You have so many niche boutique labels releasing these films in definitive releases. How do

you view these, because you said it really depends on repeat viewings in a

there's a new restoration so we revisit them on certain occasions.

The word "cult" is really overused. Pretty much anything that is slightly different is

theatrical setting? Is it from a preservation aspect that you appreciate these There's definitely a preservation aspect. When I wrote La Dolce Morte I was buying bootleg videos off of ebay in order to see these films. And they were horrible, horrible versions. In fact, a bunch of them weren't even subtitled, so my learning of Italian sort of had a very quick upturn. But now that we have these in subtitled, newly restored, amazing collections—both through 88 Films and Arrow, in particular—it's really great that we have this sense of preservation for these films and that everyone can build up their collection. So I think that's really good. One of the things when I teach the giallo, I do tend to use a dubbed English version rather than a pristine subtitled version. And I explain to students that part of the

encounter—particularly in the English-speaking world, whether Britain, Canada, or the States—would have been through dubbed copies of these films. To see it like it's an art film—and some of these films do deserve to be seen as art films, but the vast majority of them don't—to get that sense of weirdness with the dubbing, I think it is part of the aura as well. So, it is great from a preservation perspective. I do think the ubiquity of the availability of these films does create its own sense of problems as

Do you think that it is necessary for someone to have a region-free Blu-Ray

For example, I've tracked down some 88 Films releases just because I have that

It is a licensing issue. For example, I just contributed an interview to a disc that I won't name that Arrow is releasing, but it's a U.S.-only release because a different company has the U.K. rights to it. So my interview won't be on that one, it's only going to be for the U.S. market. So region-free players are useful for this if you've got

the money, but I think that economic burden on fans is deeply unfortunate.

I think I have maybe five different versions of Suspiria. It adds up, that's all I'll

You were just mentioning that you were working on a new special feature for a disc. What's it been like working with these companies to supply supplements and also to write about these subjects in an academic setting, along with people

There are a few things you are talking about there. People like Alan Jones and Maitland McDonagh are brilliant writers in their own way, but they aren't academics —Maitland probably more so than Alan. They are writing for the knowledgeable fan. It is without a doubt intelligent film writing. But it is not specifically for a scholarly

player in order to track down every release?

capability. A lot of it is licensing issues, though.

like Alan Jones, Maitland McDonagh and others?

I don't know.

I'm sure.

audience.

The scholarly market is a different animal altogether. That's really only for other academics to read and it becomes very incestuous in many respects in regards to that. Which is one of the reasons why I do these extras—they keep me honest. I do feel bad that people like Kim Newman, Alan Jones, Michael Mackenzie as well up in Scotland—this is their living, this is how they make their money to survive. I have an academic job, I don't need to do these [supplements]. I do them because I enjoy doing them and Arrow and 88 Films and 101 Films, they pay me in stuff. Which is great—I have a great Blu-Ray collection because that's my payment for doing all these little bits and pieces. So, pardon the phrase, but I really do these extras for "shits and giggles."

It's not the main body of my work. I do it because I'm also a fan and I like talking to other fans about this stuff. I'm currently working on the relationship between the slasher films and giallo, but that's going to be entirely for an academic audience. So

Well, my favorite gialli are probably Señora Wardh, definitely, and Torso. There's something wonderful about Torso. Profondo Rosso, obviously. Probably Don't

I noticed that there have been lots of modern reinterpretations of gialli like The Strange Color of Your Body's Tears and others. What do you think of them carrying on that tradition—is it more so experimenting with something new or

To be honest, I don't think they're even doing that. With all respect to films like Body's Tears and Amer and that giallo nostalgia film, they're copying the style. They're not copying the content. What they're not doing is updating them to contemporary sensibility. This is me as an academic now—when we look at these '70s gialli or the ones coming out in the late '60s, they are really of their time and they give us an insight into the socio-political world in which these films were made. So they're interesting from a historical perspective. Whereas, these other films are just copying the surface style. I want to like them. I keep going back to them saying, "Ok, this time I'm going to really enjoy it." But I don't because they tend to be too

that's kind of two different worlds I'm playing in.

What would you say are your favorite giallo films?

Torture a Duckling as well, I really like Fulci's film.

just hearkening back with references?

superficial.

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Aug 6 FittMFindingtHeel8dicoriCollnemgEtreePyrolflougIBocrit Torture a Duckling (1972)Sean Woodard

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