



DARIO ARGENTO: DOORS INTO DARKNESS

Deep Red (Profondo rosso)

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Director: Dario Argento
Production Companies: Seda Spettacoli S.p.A. (Rome), Rizzoli Film
Producer: Salvatore Argento
Production Executive: Claudio Argento
Production Manager: Angelo Jacono
Production Co-ordinator: Cesare Jacolucci
Assistant Director: Stefano Rolla
Script Supervisor: Vivalda Vigorelli
Screenplay: Dario Argento, Bernardino Zapponi
Director of Photography: Luigi Kuveiller
Camera Operator: Ubaldo Terzano
Camera Assistants: Antonio Tonti, Antonio Annunziata
Still Photographer: Franco Bellomo
Special Photographic Effects: Germano Natali, Carlo Rambaldi
Special Optical Effects: Guiccar
Editor: Franco Fraticelli
Assistant Editor: Pietro Bozza
Production Designer: Giuseppe Bassan
Set Decorator: Armando Mannini
Costume Designer: Elena Mannini
Make-up Supervisor: Giuliano Laurenti
Make-up Artist: Gianni Morosi
Hair Stylist: Nicla Palombi
Laboratory: LV di Luciano Vittori
Colour by: Eastmancolor
Music: Giorgio Gaslini, Goblin
Music (as Goblin): Claudio Simonetti, Fabio Pignatelli, Walter Martino
Music Performed by: Goblin
Sound Recording: Mario Faraoni
Boom Operator: Eugenio Fiori
Sound Editor: Nick Alexander
English Language Version: Nick Alexander
Cast:
David Hemmings (*Marcus Daly*)
Daria Nicolodi (*Gianna Brezzi*)
Gabriele Lavia (*Carlo*)
Macha Méril (*Helga Ulmann*)
Eros Pagni (*Inspector Calabrini*)
Giuliana Calandra (*Amanda Righetti*)
Piero Mazzinghi (*Bardi*)
Glauco Mauri (*Professor Giordani*)
Clara Calamai (*Martha, Carlo's mother*)
Aldo Bonamano (*Carlo's father*)
Liana Del Balzo (*Elvira, Amanda's maid*)
Vittorio Fanfoni (*cop taking notes*)
Dante Fioretti (*police photographer*)
Geraldine Hooper (*Massimo Ricci, Carlo's lover*)
Iacopo Mariani (*young Carlo*)
Furio Meniconi (*Rodi*)
Fulvio Mingozzi (*agent Mingozzi*)
Lorenzo Piani (*fingerprint cop*)
Salvatore Puntillo (*police agent*)
Piero Vida (*fat cop*)
Nicoletta Elmi (*Olga, Rodi's daughter*)
Salvatore Baccaro (*fruit vendor*)*
Bruno Di Luia (*concerned man in restroom*)*
Attilio Dottiesio (*florist*)*
Tom Felleghy (*surgeon*)*
Glauco Onorato (*parapsychologist*)*
Mario Scaccia (*man at parapsychology conference*)*
Italy 1975
127 mins

* Uncredited

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away most of the plot.

In Argento's filmography, *Deep Red* comes between his early, densely plotted murder mysteries (*The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*) and his more recent exercises in supernaturally flavoured surrealism (*Suspiria*, *Inferno*). Not surprisingly, therefore, the film is a transitional work, featuring an intricate, cleverly constructed whodunit plot akin to the former, but made in the flamboyant, mosaic style of the latter. Alone among directors of Italian thrillers, Argento plays scrupulously fair by the audience in constructing his puzzles (a second viewing really does disclose a glimpse of the killer's face during the first murder). But his literary precursors in the mystery field are not so much Agatha Christie and Arthur Conan Doyle as Fredric Brown and Cornell Woolrich. While the early films contain explicit borrowings from these authors (between them, *The Bird* and *Four Flies* use just about all of Brown's *The Screaming Mimic*), *Deep Red* stands on its own as a legitimate work in the tradition rather than just a pastiche of it.

The presence of David Hemmings as the obsessive artist/detective is a nod towards Antonioni, who is further represented by some serpentine camerawork and stately Roman locations. Marc's teaming with Daria Nicolodi's screwball newswoman helps deflate the ponderousness of the reference, however, and signals a wry comedy amidst the gore that will blossom in the deliriously nonsensical *Inferno*. But even the comic relief dovetails with the plot: a very funny, and slightly disturbing, scene has Gianna rebuff Marc's male chauvinism with a challenge to an arm-wrestling contest which, by cheating, she wins. Her victory underlines the possibility that a woman, although not necessarily this woman, could be the powerful hatchet killer; while Marc's display of childishness at being bested ties in neatly with the infantile malice that characterises Olga, Carlo and the killer.

'There is magic all around us' remarks a character in *Suspiria*, aptly summing up the universe of Argento's recent work. Rational detection does bring the mystery down to earth in *Deep Red*, but there are already signs of the irrationality which will engulf *Suspiria* and *Inferno*. The plot is triggered off by the genuine insights of Macha Méril's chic medium, who is seen reacting with horror moments before the axe-wielding murderer breaks down her door. Thereafter, Argento carries through the precognition theme by dwelling on apparently irrelevant details which foreshadow the various deaths: Marc is scalded by steam from a coffee machine before the authoress meets her fate in a boiling bath; the battering of a parapsychologist against a table is prefigured by Marc's joking statement that he plays the piano because it represents a symbolic bashing-in of his father's teeth; an overturned bus in the street relates to Carlo's death under the wheels of two vehicles; and the removal of the chain from the gates to the house which harbours Martha's secret is echoed by the linked necklace which takes off her head. With the introduction of Olga, the lizard-torturing pupil of a school which seems to have been turning out child psychos for over thirty years ('Kill your mother and father' reads a piece of washroom graffiti), the film edges nearer to the work of Mario Bava, Argento's spiritual mentor. In fact, Nicoletta Elmi made her screen debut in Bava's *Gli orrori del castello di Norimberga/Baron Blood*.

Deep Red is nothing if not an elaborate mechanism, with the camera crawling among objets trouvés like the *Incredible Shrinking Man*, teasing scare sequences involving broken dolls (the old paperbackmystery cover standby), a score by The Goblins that appropriately alternates between delicacy and bludgeoning, and a reference to Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks* long before *Pennies from Heaven* and *Blade Runner* made it fashionable. What sets Argento apart from imitators like Lucio Fulci is his combination of genuine pain (the murders are as nasty as one could wish, but the camera flinches where Fulci's would linger) and self-mocking humour: among the toys and murder weapons on the killer's floor are her lost marbles.

Kim Newman, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, November 1984

For many of us, this is Argento's masterpiece, the very pinnacle of his career. He would continue making good or even great films right through to *Opera* in 1987 (after which the decline begins) but nothing would again quite scale the dizzy heights of *Profondo rosso*. Everything that Argento had been working towards in his first three horror films – *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (1970), *The Cat o'Nine Tails* (1971) and *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* (1971) – came to full fruition here.

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Deep Red (Profondo rosso)

Fri 5 May 20:35; Sat 13 May 15:00 (+ Q&A with Dario Argento); Tue 23 May 18:10

Four Flies on Grey Velvet (4 mosche di velluto grigio)

Sat 6 May 17:40

Do You Like Hitchcock? (Ti piace Hitchcock?)

Sat 6 May 20:40; Tue 30 May 20:40

The Stendhal Syndrome (La sindrome di Stendhal)

Sun 7 May 18:20

Trauma

Mon 8 May 15:50; Sun 28 May 15:40

Opera

Mon 8 May 18:30 (+ intro by Michael Blyth, season curator); Sat 27 May 20:45

Dark Glasses (Occhiali neri)

Wed 10 May 21:00; Wed 31 May 20:40

Suspiria

Fri 12 May 20:40 (+ intro by Dario Argento); Sat 20 May 18:10

The Cat o' Nine Tails (Il gatto a nove code)

Sat 13 May 11:20; Thu 16 May 20:45

Tenebrae (Tenebre)

Sat 13 May 18:20

(+ intro by Dario Argento); Wed 17 May 20:45; Tue 23 May 20:50

The Bird with the Crystal Plumage (L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo)

Sat 13 May 20:45; Tue 16 May 21:00

Inferno

Mon 15 May 20:45; Sat 20 May 20:45

The Five Days (Le cinque giornate)

Fri 19 May 18:15

Phenomena

Fri 19 May 20:45; Mon 29 May 15:50

The Phantom of the Opera (Il fantasma dell'opera)

Sat 20 May 15:50; Fri 26 May 20:40

Sleepless (Non ho sonno)

Sun 21 May 18:10; Sat 27 May 17:45

Two Evil Eyes (segment: The Black Cat) (Due occhi diabolici: Il gatto nero)

Mon 22 May 20:55

Mother of Tears – The Third Mother (La terza madre)

Wed 24 May 20:40; Mon 29 May 18:40

The Card Player (Il cartaio)

Thu 25 May 20:30; Sun 28 May 18:20

Strange Phenomena: Argento Season Introduction

This video will be available to watch for free on BFI YouTube from 19.30 on Mon 17 Apr

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In a variation on one of his favoured themes, it's an Englishman abroad in this one, David Hemmings as jazz pianist Marcus Daly who is in Rome (though the film was shot in Turin because Argento had been told there were more practising Satanists there than in any other city) when psychic medium Helga Ulmann (Macha Mériel) is killed following a demonstration interrupted by her detecting a terrible, murderous presence in the room. Like his predecessors, Daly is haunted by the idea that he's seen something that holds the key to unlocking the mystery and begins a dogged investigation that leads him to a book titled *House of the Screaming Child*, a mysterious villa and a childhood trauma that comes to threaten both him and journalist Gianna Brezzi (Daria Nicolodi) who has joined him on his quest.

The story is standard issue Argento *giallo*, albeit with the first stirrings of the supernatural that would inform his two subsequent films. What really matters is the presentation. While the earlier films had all been visually stunning, nothing in them prepared us for *Profondo rosso*. There are few of the bravura camera moves that would become more commonplace in subsequent Argento films (think of the camera swooping down on Daniel as he crosses the plaza at night in *Suspiria* (1977) or the camera crawling around the outside of the house in *Tenebre* (1982)), but each shot is framed, composed and lit like a work of art. Argento occasionally indulges, as when his camera scurries across the pages of a music score, winds between abandoned toys in the flashbacks (notably alighting in one shot on the killer's lost marbles...) or hovering over a piano keyboard. But the most memorable shots are the quieter ones, the less flashy and more meticulously crafted – the opening shots wherein a murder takes place entirely off camera but is later revealed to be the most important moment in the film; a silhouette at a glass door; Hemmings' uncomprehending face reflected in a pool of blood in the final moments.

No film that Argento had made thus far – and few that would follow – looked as extraordinary as *Profondo rosso*. The violence is more pronounced, more confrontational, the crude acts of murder and sadism deliberately clashing with the more refined and gorgeously decorated sets in which they usually happen. His playful if macabre humour is in evidence again.

And then there's the score. Music has always been a key element in a Dario Argento film, from the experimental, almost avant-garde jazz stylings of Ennio Morricone in the early films to the pounding heavy metal of later offerings. *Profondo rosso* was originally set to be scored by jazz pianist Giorgio Gaslini but Argento was unhappy with the work he turned in. Having been rejected by British band Pink Floyd he turned his attention closer to home and contracted up and coming Italian prog rockers Goblin who contributed the bulk of the score (three Gaslini pieces made the final cut). It was the start of a long collaborative relationship between Argento and the various members of the band (fallings out and 'musical differences' saw the band splinter with keyboard player Claudio Simonetti alternately going solo, leading the band Demonica and later fronting one of two different touring versions of Goblin). The score for *Profondo rosso* is a full-on prog assault, a nagging main theme sitting alongside more frenetic aural assaults. The cacophonous racket of the band's subsequent score for *Suspiria* may be the more experimental and daring but the soundtrack to *Profondo rosso* remains one of their most popular.

Profondo rosso boasts both Argento's warmest, most fully-rounded characters (Hemmings and Nicolodi are both particularly very good) but also his coldest, most sadistic killings to date. There's a perverse poetry to the violence which is simultaneously unbearable to watch but impossible to take your eyes off. The plot plays fair with the viewer (the thing that Daly believes he's seen while attempting to save Helga really is there – blink and you'll miss it), is more intriguing than any that Argento had come up with before (he co-wrote it with Bernardino Zapponi) and it seems to have inspired him to up his already considerable game by a few extra notches.

Argento still had *Suspiria*, *Inferno*, *Tenebre* and *Opera* to come (*Phenomena* is so insane it exists almost in a world all of its own) and they're all brilliant films, every one a perfectly formed gem. But nothing would quite match the brilliance of *Profondo rosso*, the film where everything comes together to form the quintessential Argento film.

Kevin Lyons, eofftvreview.wordpress.com, 27 October 2018

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Programme notes and credits compiled by Sight and Sound and the BFI Documentation Unit

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