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**Sergio Martino's**  
**The Case of the Scorpion's Tail**

*La coda dello scorpione*  
1971

## CAST

**George Hilton** as Peter Lynch  
**Anita Strindberg** as Cléo Dupont  
**Alberto de Mendoza** as John Stanley  
**Evelyn Stewart** as Lisa Baumer  
**Janine Reynaud** as Lara Florakis  
**Luigi Pistilli** as Inspector Stavros  
**Tom Felleghy** as Mr. Brenton  
**Luis Barboo** as Sharif

## CREW

Directed by **Sergio Martino**  
Produced by **Luciano Martino**  
Story by **Eduardo M. Brochero**  
Screenplay by **Eduardo M. Brochero, Ernesto Gastaldi** and **Sauro Scavolini**  
Director of Photography **Emilio Foriscot**  
Film Editor **Eugenio Alabiso**  
Music by **Bruno Nicolai**  
Production Designers **José Luis Galicia** and **Jaime Pérez Cubero**  
Costume Designer **Luciana Marinucci**







## RE-EVALUATING THE CASE OF THE SCORPION'S TAIL: SERGIO MARTINO'S HITCHCOCKIAN GIALLO

by Rachael Nisbet

Sergio Martino's 1971 *giallo* *The Case of the Scorpion's Tail* (*La coda dello scorpione*) is one of the director's less-celebrated works in a genre arguably overshadowed by his Edwige Fenech-led thrillers of the early 1970s. Yet despite the film's reputation as one of the lesser-known *gialli* of his career, *The Case of the Scorpion's Tail* is perhaps one of Martino's most successful examples of the genre, exemplifying the elaborately plotted whodunit narrative that is at heart of the *giallo*. The film's competent screenplay from prolific Italian screenwriter Ernesto Gastaldi elevates the film beyond traditional *giallo* fare with a story that utilises traditional whodunit elements borrowing from the work of Alfred Hitchcock whilst embracing the established tropes of the *giallo*.

Sergio Martino proved himself to be a skilled director of *gialli* throughout the course of his career, producing many key films of the genre. Martino's films were narratively and visually inventive, often playing with the established tropes of the genre whilst bringing in influences from other popular forms of cinema of the time. Martino's first foray into the Italian thriller, *The Strange Vice of Mrs Wardh* (*Lo strano vizio della Signora Wardh*, 1971), combined traditional conspiratorial elements with a psychosexual tone whilst his next Edwige Fenech-led *giallo*, *All the Colours of the Dark* (*Tutti i colori del buio*, 1972), expanded on this concept, drawing on Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) to create a psychedelic satanic take on the *giallo*. His final thriller with Fenech, the Edgar Allan Poe inspired *Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key* (*Il tuo vizio è una stanza chiusa e solo io ne ho la chiave*, 1972) echoed the films of Emilio Miraglia and Riccardo Freda with its blend of the Gothic and the modernity of the *giallo*, whereas Martino's final *giallo* and arguably his most famous film, *Torso* (*I corpi presentano tracce di violenza carnale*, 1973), went on to inspire the American slasher film whilst setting a precedent for the more violent Italian thrillers that came at the tail end of the decade.

In relation to Martino's aforementioned *gialli*, *The Case of the Scorpion's Tail* is a far more traditional interpretation of the genre that has more in common narratively and stylistically with Dario Argento's Animal Trilogy than the erotically charged *The Strange Vice of Mrs Wardh* or the paranoid cultish nightmare of *All the Colours of the Dark*. Whilst the more traditional story and adherence to genre tropes may make *Scorpion's Tail* one of Martino's lesser discussed *gialli*, it is still a significant film in the director's oeuvre, demonstrating Martino's masterful approach to constructing a quintessential *giallo* in the vein of his contemporaries whilst still subverting the genre through clever set pieces and narrative trickery.

*Scorpion's Tail's* premise, the investigation of a woman suspected of insurance fraud that soon escalates into a spate of violent killings, embodies the classic tropes of the genre, featuring adultery, blackmail and extortion as key narrative cornerstones. Further examples of the conventions of the *giallo* lie in the film's predilection with concepts of modernity, the use of Grand Guignol murder set pieces and a fascination with 1970s jet set-style protagonists. Despite *Scorpion's Tail* adhering to many of the tropes associated with the genre as well as acting as more of a traditional whodunit than Martino's previous thriller, the film still feels distinctive in the *giallo* canon, offering a more complex narrative structure via its Hitchcockian first act but also in its casting of a killer in an investigatory role and the various techniques that Martino employs to distract the audience from identifying them.

The success of *Scorpion's Tail* arguably lies in Martino's ability to manipulate his audience through clever narrative and visual tricks which obscure the true identity of the film's killer. Gastaldi's script assumes that the audience will be suspicious of Peter Lynch (George Hilton) so conceals his identity as the killer by framing this as what appears to be an impossibility in the film's timeline. It is only when the killer's motivations and identity are revealed at the film's end that one is able to revisit the film and understand how Lynch was able to commit the murders. This makes *Scorpion's Tail* a highly effective *giallo* in terms of its ability to obscure the killer's identity in a way that is logically consistent within the film. It also lends the film to repeated viewings as the significance of key scenes are only fully realised and understood once the killer's identity and motivations are revealed. This is particularly evident at the end of the film's first act during the murder of Lisa Baumer (Ida Galli, aka Evelyn Stewart). In the scene that precedes the murder we see Peter downstairs in the hotel lobby making enquires to the concierge about Lisa's whereabouts, thus establishing a timeline of where Peter is during the murder. In actual fact, Peter is merely in the hotel lobby engaging with the concierge to provide an alibi for himself, removing the possibility that he could be a suspect in Lisa's death. Inspector Stavros' (Luigi Pistilli) initial focus on Lynch as a suspect as well as the press and public's perception of him as "the monster" further distances Lynch from the audience's mind as the killer. In another pivotal scene, we see the

attacker grapple with Cléo Dupont (Anita Strindberg) and Lynch and the assailant appear to be present in the same frame which, again, draws suspicion away from Lynch. However, this is revealed as a red herring as Lynch employs an accomplice to attack Cléo, thus casting suspicion away from his true identity as the killer. Other hints alluding to Lynch's involvement in the murders are presented both narratively and visually, from Lynch's reference to a quote he attributes to Oscar Wilde to his completion of Inspector Stavros' jigsaw puzzle, the final puzzle piece alluding to Lynch's key role in the mystery. By framing Lynch initially as the number one suspect in the murder of Lisa Baumer, Martino diverts suspicion away from Lynch and continues to successfully do so by continually presenting this as a near impossibility whilst still providing subtle clues to his role as murderer.

Peter Lynch is arguably the main protagonist of *Scorpion's Tail*, but the film is somewhat of an ensemble piece, populated by a rich cast of characters. The film's uniqueness lies in its focus on four prominent characters, all in investigatory roles. The Greek Inspector Stavros, French photo journalist Cléo Dupont, American Interpol agent John Stanley (Alberto de Mendoza) and British insurance investigator Peter Lynch make up the core cast and the ways in which their investigations intersect is part of the film's charm and sense of intrigue. Secondary characters such as Lara Florakis (Janine Reynaud), Sharif (Luis Barboo) and the off-screen Kurt Baumer (Fulvio Mingozzi) round off the film's cast, providing an ample list of suspects with valid motivations, making the mystery at the heart of *Scorpion's Tail* all the more compelling. The reveal of the killer is particularly novel for the genre in that a character in an investigatory role is found to be the culprit. *Scorpion's Tail* is arguably one of the better *gialli* for its colourful cast of characters and its portrayal of their various complex motivations.

Yet what's perhaps interesting about the characters in *Scorpion's Tail* is Martino's use of a false heroine in the film's opening scenes. Lisa Baumer is initially presented to us as the film's protagonist, but at the end of the film's first act she is brutally murdered, effectively resetting the film's premise. Therefore, Gastaldi's screenplay feels almost Hitchcockian in nature, sharing similarities and drawing comparison with Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). Like in Hitchcock's famed thriller, *Scorpion's Tail* is initially set up as the story of a female protagonist involved in nefarious financial activity before radically shifting narrative, achieved via Martino and Hitchcock dispatching their main heroines in the first half of their respective films. Not only does this significantly alter the course of events in both films but it also effectively challenges the audience's perception of what to expect from each film, giving them the sense that anything could happen as narrative convention has been abandoned. This choice of narrative model is an excellent tool in subverting the audience's expectation of what the film is and in which direction it is moving, and by utilising this technique in *Scorpion's Tail*, Martino arguably creates one of the most surprising twists



and one of the most innovative narrative structures in the *giallo*. *Scorpion's Tail* bears other similarities to *Psycho* via the introduction of a new protagonist in Peter Lynch, who, like Norman Bates, turns out to be the film's antagonist in the final reveal. By utilising these Hitchcockian style elements, Gastaldi draws upon a successful narrative plot twist but frames it within the modern context of the *giallo*.

The Hitchcockian-influenced narrative structure of Martino's second foray into the *giallo* is balanced with elements more traditionally associated with the 1970s Italian thriller as well as nods to the influential British thriller *Blow Up* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966). The genre's predilection with modernity is particularly evident in *Scorpion's Tail*, a film which features jet set protagonists, travelogue-style locations and extravagant displays of wealth and glamour. At times *Scorpion's Tail* feels like a celebration of the societal and material excesses of the early 1970s, but despite the film's ostentatious characters and locations, it also offers somewhat of a critique of that lifestyle in terms of its killer's motivations. Lynch is driven to murder Lisa, as well as those who seek to access her insurance pay-out, for financial gain. Lynch wants the freedom that the pay-out will afford him. However, his primary motivation is not financial but a contempt for those with money who do not appreciate what they have, to the point that it drives him to near insanity. He resents having to work hard only to see a fraction of the money that passes between his employer and its rich clients. Lynch appears to be driven by a sense of inequality and injustice, highlighting the disparity between the wealthy protagonists of the *giallo* and the everyman character who tries to assimilate into their world.

Gastaldi's screenplay alludes to further sociocultural issues through the character of photojournalist Cléo Dupont. Dupont feels surprisingly progressive as a *giallo* heroine and her character is somewhat of a precursor to Daria Nicolodi's performance as feisty journalist Gianna Brezzi in Dario Argento's *Deep Red* (*Profondo rosso*, 1975). Dupont laments to Lynch that the newspaper are "always looking for an excuse to fire a girl", and that the nightman says "covering riots and murders isn't work for a woman". This illustrates something of an awareness in Gastaldi's script of the tumultuous gender politics of the 1970s, an issue rarely actively acknowledged in *gialli*. Yet *Scorpion's Tail* fails to further expand on this idea and regresses back into traditional gender roles with a typical (albeit well-conceived romance) between Dupont and Lynch. In the film's closing scene, Stavros advises Dupont to find work covering the fashion pages, which again feels like a missed opportunity to reinforce Dupont's capability as a female journalist.

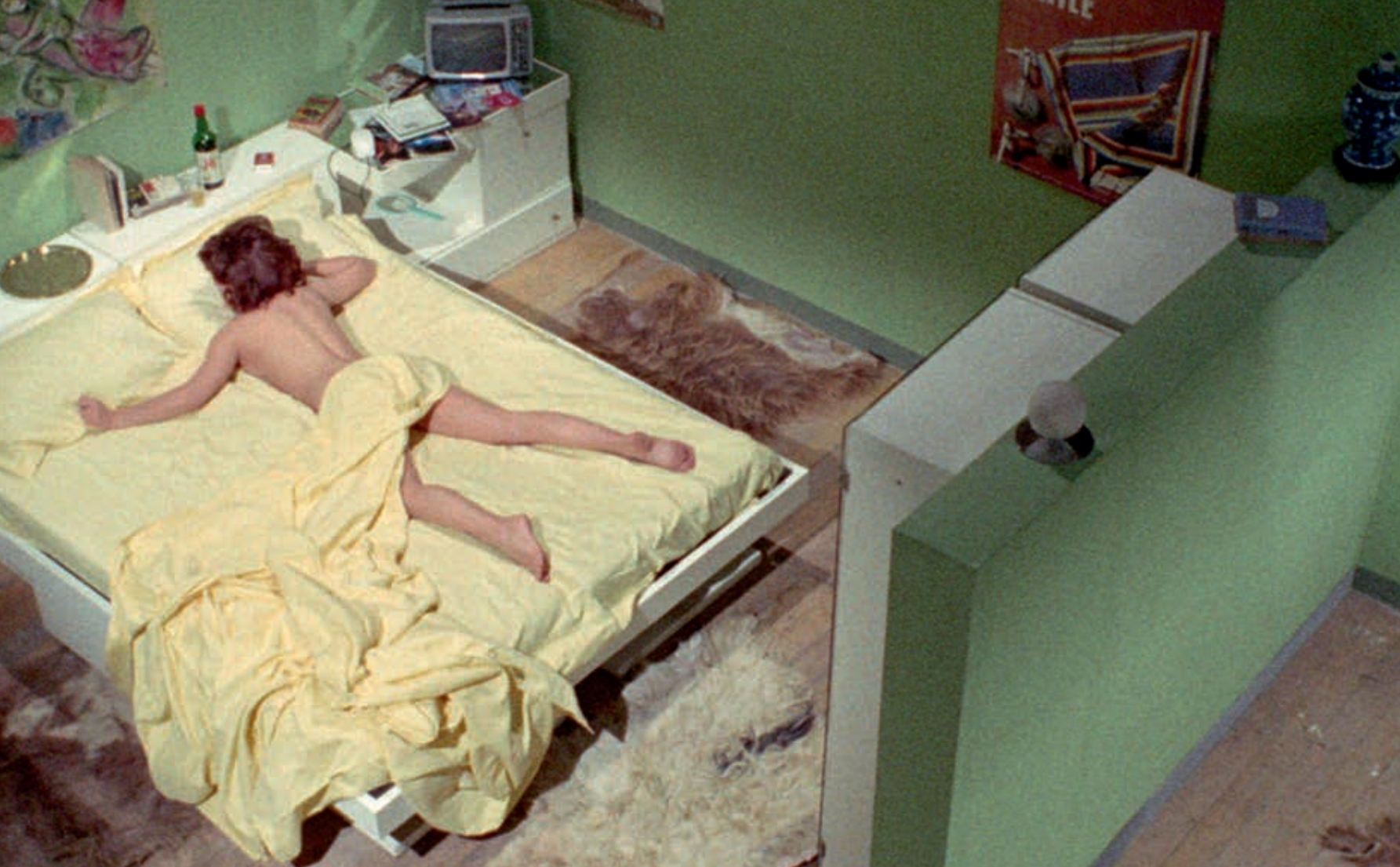
The brief references to social issues of the time are not the only aspect of *Scorpion's Tail* that feel reflective of the time period in which the film takes place. There's a heavy focus in the film on 1970s jet set culture – a common component of the *giallo* but

demonstrated to a higher degree in *Scorpion's Tail* than in most. The film divides its screen time between London and Athens whilst referencing Tokyo as a key offscreen location. Air travel is frequently referenced and depicted throughout the film and one character is a flight attendant by profession. The different nationalities of the film's characters also help to heighten the film's international feel and add to the almost transient nature of the world, where individuals are constantly moving from one location to another. Cinematographer Emilio Foriscot and camera operator Giancarlo Ferrando beautifully photograph the film's locations and the stylistic differences between London and Athens. The scenes shot in Athens in particular embody the travelogue style aspect of the *giallo* and give the film a distinct, memorable feel.

The beautiful depiction of Athens offers a stark contrast to the violence on display throughout *Scorpion's Tail*. Martino regards the film as the most Grand Guignol of his *gialli*, which is apparent in its numerous murder set-pieces. In these artfully violent sequences, Martino displays an artistry and talent for constructing suspenseful scenes on par with the work of Dario Argento and Mario Bava. The double murder that takes place in Lara Florakis' apartment building is a masterclass in suspense and showcases Martino's talent for misdirecting his audience. The shocking demise of Florakis and Sharif is punctuated with a number of striking visuals, from the quick flash of a one-eyed doll to the crouching wetsuit-clad figure of the killer behind a wall. Another gruesome murder that takes place in the film involving a bottle draws comparison with the macabre work of Lucio Fulci, whereas the autopsy photos of Florakis' body feel strikingly realistic considering the film's age. The film's climatic scenes in the Greek isles end in a grizzly sun-drenched shoot-out, creating one of the more memorable endings in a *giallo* and highlighting the contrast between its cinematic travelogue-style locations and the genre's predilection for violence.

Martino successfully plays with the conventions of the genre, creating a *giallo* that subverts audience expectation by drawing on the works of Alfred Hitchcock whilst utilising traditional genre tropes to create a layered thriller that expertly manipulates and misdirects the audience. A more typical example of a *giallo* in comparison to Martino's other entries in the genre, *The Case of the Scorpion's Tail* is still a worthy and significant contribution to the Italian thrillers of the 1970s, encapsulating the essence of the *giallo* whilst expanding on its established conventions.

Rachael Nisbet is an Edinburgh-based writer specialising in Italian genre cinema, with a slant towards style and *gialli*. She maintains a blog at <http://hypnoticcescendos.blogspot.com>.







## OUT OF THE SHADOWS: THE FILM MUSIC OF BRUNO NICOLAI

by Howard Hughes

Italian composer, conductor, arranger and instrumentalist Bruno Nicolai is best remembered for his long and productive association with composer Ennio Morricone. But in the late 1960s, Nicolai emerged from the shadow of his mentor and collaborator to flourish as an accomplished composer in his own right, with a distinctive style and repertoire. He worked on a diverse array of projects, collaborating regularly with such directors as Alberto De Martino and Jesus Franco, and composing themes for projects ranging from *The Christmas That Almost Wasn't* (1966), *Count Dracula* (1970) and *The Case of the Scorpion's Tail* (1971), to *The Fighting Fist of Shanghai Joe* (1973), *And Then There Were None* (1974) and *Caligula* (1979).

Nicolai, who was born in Rome in 1926, studied piano and composition at the Santa Cecilia Conservatory in Rome. It was there that he became friends with Ennio Morricone, with whom he later developed a fruitful collaborative relationship. An early credit for Nicolai was the harpsichord soloist on Mario Nascimbene's soundtrack to *Girl with a Suitcase* (1961 – starring Claudia Cardinale), and Nicolai's distinctive keyboard work on piano, harpsichord and organ can be heard on many soundtracks of the era. As his star rose in the 1960s, Morricone became one of the most in-demand and productive film composers in Italy. Nicolai became Morricone's regular conductor, directing the orchestra in the recording studio. It is highly doubtful that Morricone's output, particularly in the late 1960s and early 1970s, would have been as prolific without Nicolai's input. Through his association with Morricone, Nicolai conducted some of the most memorable spaghetti western scores, including *For a Few Dollars More* (1965), *The Hills Run Red* (1966), *The Big Gundown* (1967), *Death Rides a Horse* (1967), *Face to Face* (1967) and *The Big Silence* (1968).

Nicolai also worked with Morricone as conductor on such films as *Wake Up and Kill* (1966), *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), *The Rover* (1967), *Grand Slam* (1967) and *The Sicilian Clan* (1969), which led to them being co-credited as composers on the scores to *Operation Kid Brother* (1967 – aka *OK Connery*), *The Dirty Heroes* (1967), *A Professional Gun* (1968 – aka *The Mercenary*) and *Bandits of Rome* (1968 – aka *The Violent Four*). In a rare case, the spaghetti western *Gentleman Killer* (1967) saw Nicolai as composer, with Morricone his

conductor. Nicolai also conducted scores for other composers, notably Carlo Rustichelli's compositions for *Man, Price and Vengeance* (1967), *One Dollar Too Many* (1968), *The Ruthless Four* (1968), *God Forgives... I Don't* (1967) and *Ace High* (1968 – aka *Revenge at El Paso*).

## Going Solo

In the mid-1960s, Nicolai began composing his own scores, mostly for genre productions. Early solo triumphs included the spaghetti westerns *\$100,000 for Ringo* (1965) and *Django Shoots First* (1966), both of which proved Nicolai had a style distinct from Morricone. The 'Ringo' film had a catchy theme song, 'Ringo Came to Fight', sung by Bobby Solo, while the 'Django' movie features the dramatic title song 'Dance of Danger (Bolero)' sung by Dino. Nicolai's score to the prestigious western *Run, Man, Run* (1968), Sergio Sollima's follow-up to *The Big Gundown*, heralded Nicolai as a rival to Morricone – though some sources claim Morricone contributed to the compositions uncredited. With such a close working relationship between the men, it's often difficult to see where one's contribution ends and the other's begins. *Run, Man, Run's* title song, 'Espanto En El Corazon', is notable for being performed by the film's star, Tomas Milian. As well as the westerns, there were memorable songs galore in director-star Rossano Brazzi's Dickensian musical extravaganza *The Christmas That Almost Wasn't* (1966), for which Nicolai provided the jovial incidental music. Phineas T. Prune (Brazzi), a Scroogian multi-zillionaire, owns the North Pole and is about to foreclose on Santa's rent on Christmas Eve, leaving him unable to deliver children's toys and cancelling Christmas. The title song, 'The Christmas That Almost Wasn't', sung by Glenn Yarborough, will be embedded in your brain for weeks.

Nicolai scored particularly well in the Eurospy genre that flourished in the wake of the James Bond films. Nicolai provided a suitably swinging soundtrack to some of the better Eurospy offerings, including *Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang* (1966) and *Special Mission Lady Chaplin* (1966). The song 'Lady Chaplin' again featured Bobby Solo, whose laidback, resonant baritone served the tune's lounge-style lethargy perfectly. Nicolai's music benefits from the prominence of female soprano soloist Edda Dell'Orso and also Alessandro Alessandroni's choral group I Cantori Moderni. They're used to excellent effect on the score to *Fenomenal and the Treasure of Tutankamen* (1968), which detailed the adventures of a black-clad crimefighter, as he tried to locate an ornate, valuable mask. Shot on location in Paris and Tunis, this was actually the work of future *Cannibal Holocaust* director Ruggero Deodato under the memorable pseudonym 'Roger Rockfeller'. Nicolai's vocal-heavy jazz score reworks the chanted melody to Morricone's *Navajo Joe* (1966), using the word 'Fenomenal'.

Nicolai worked with director Alberto De Martino on numerous occasions, in numerous genres. De Martino's *The Spy with Ten Faces* (1966) featured Paul Hubschmid as grumpy spy Agent Upperseven, who is armed with an array of disguises and a deadly ebony cane. Eagled-eyed, suave and brutal, no one stands in his way as he globetrots between Copenhagen, London, Basel, Johannesburg, Ghana and Rome. The baddies were Kobras (Nando Gazzolo) and Santos (Guido Lollobrigida), while Karin Dor, Rosalba Neri and Vivi Bach waylaid or aided the hero. Neri also showed up in *Lucky the Inscrutable* (1967), for which Nicolai composed the very jokey score (title song lyric: 'Lucky! Bam Bam!'). Secret agent Lucky (Ray Danton) parachutes into Albania (looking very like Spain) to destroy a counterfeiting factory on behalf of Archangel, a secret sect of financiers. A breakneck-paced, comic book, pop-art dash, this was Nicolai's first assignment for Jesus 'Jess' Franco.

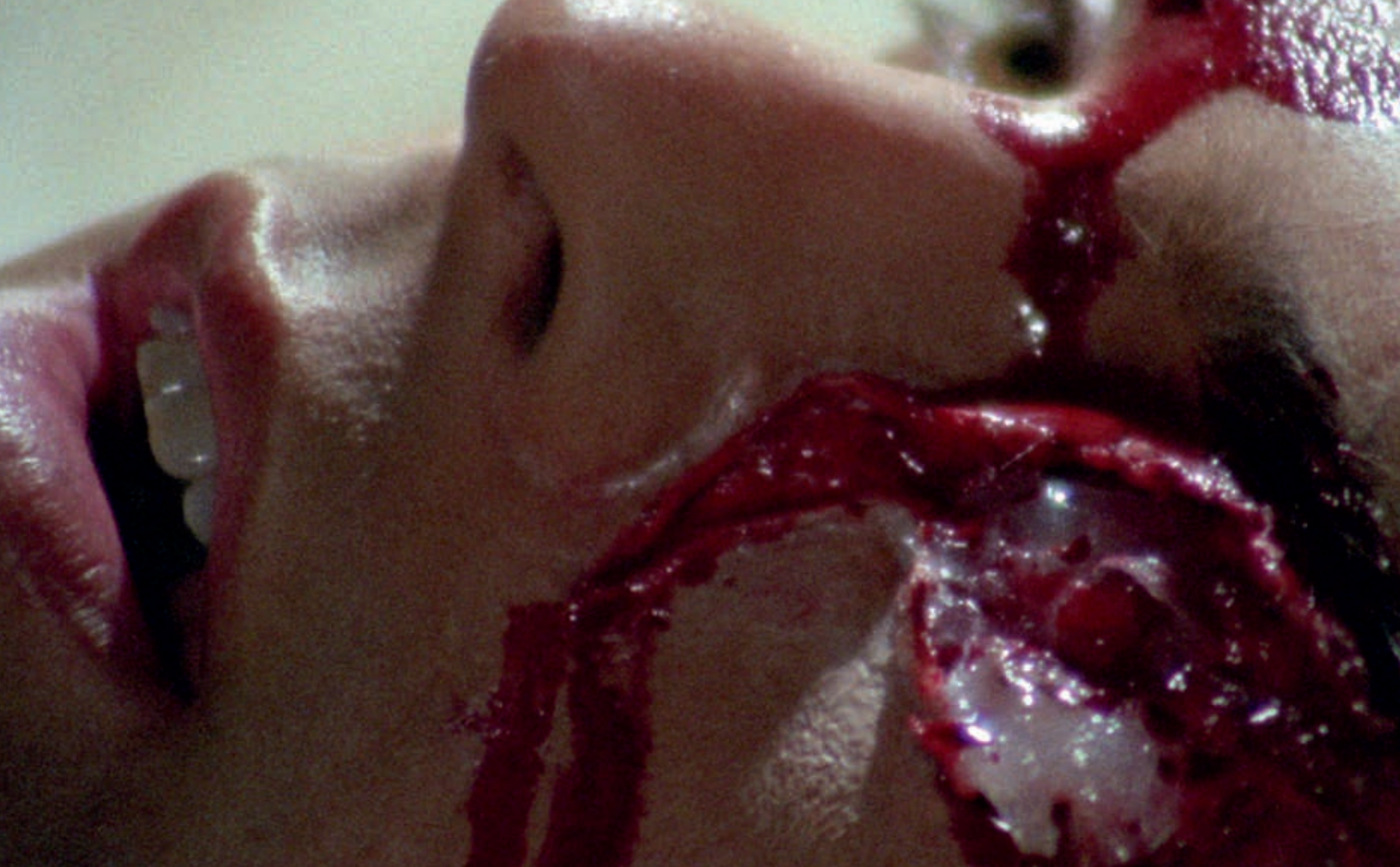
## Cult Cinema

Nicolai's score for Nathan Juran's western *Land Raiders* (1969) marked a new direction for Nicolai, as he honed his style. Despite Telly Savalas and George Maharis making unconvincing brothers, this is an action-packed shot-in-Spain western featuring landgrabs, scalplings and an imminent Indian war. The main theme includes flutes, Edda Dell'Orso's voice, harmonica, strings, oboe and brass, and the first time Nicolai deployed the frantic electric guitar riffs that became his trademark.

He followed this with two 'Sartana' westerns for Giuliano Carnimeo which are the best entries in the series, partly due to Nicolai's skill. His compositions for *Have a Good Funeral, Amigo... Sartana Will Pay* (1970) are one some of his most confident, distinctive cues, with a root melody carried over from *Land Raiders*. In his search for revenge on behalf of a murdered gold prospector, Gianni Garko's hero is up against a host of villains, including Chinese casino owner Lee Tse Tung (played by Taiwanese actor George Wang). Nicolai weaves in 'oriental' musical themes for Tung, while Sartana has owl-hoot flutes, electric guitar themes and trumpet flourishes. The even-better sequel, *Light the Fuse... Sartana is Coming* (1971) added a twanging maranzano to Sartana's theme. Sartana again finds himself solving sophisticated urban crimes, such as embezzlement and counterfeiting, but the finale is good old-fashioned action, as the hero takes on General Monk's renegade army with a customised church organ equipped with cannons and machine-guns.

Nicolai worked again with Carnimeo on the interesting *They Call Him Cemetery* (1971 – aka *A Bullet for the Stranger*), where Garko appeared as Ace, a stylish pistolero who is Sartana in all but name. Nicolai's score is another memorable backdrop, especially his





magnificently menacing entrance music for Ace's main competition, professional gun Duke (William Berger). The title sequence, as an overland passenger coach thunders through the landscape, is accompanied by a marvellously raucous riding theme, featuring wildly descending whistles, bells, trumpets and a barking male chorus.

Nicolai's music was reused for other films, the most obvious example being Mario Caiano's gimmicky kung-fu western *The Fighting Fist of Shanghai Joe* (1973). Chen Lee starred as Chin Ho, a Chinese immigrant trying to become a cowboy in Texas, who encounters racism and exploitation. The score is mostly Nicolai's tracks from *Have a Good Funeral... Sartana Will Pay*, which works even better here. In fact, so apt and closely associated is Nicolai's score with *Shanghai Joe* that it has been issued as a standalone CD, with original cues (notably 'La partenza' and 'Sfida') alongside existing *Sartana* tracks (retitled 'Il mio nome' and 'Richiami d'amore').

Nicolai also wrote for a host of other westerns, including a wonderful score to Aldo Florio's hard-hitting *Dead Men Ride* (1971) starring Fabio Testi, in which a pair of prisoners' shackles holds a terrible secret. Nicolai's western masterpiece is his score to Gianfranco Parolini's *Adiós, Sabata* (1970), which was released in the UK as *The Bounty Hunters*. In the original Italian version, Yul Brynner starred as Indio Black, a soldier of fortune, but he was redubbed as Sabata internationally. Set in 1867 during Emperor Maximilian's foray into Mexico, *Adiós, Sabata* was partly shot in Almería. The opening duel at the 'Texas Bounty Hunters Agency' has Sabata facing the Murdock brothers, who arrive at the showdown with a coffin for Sabata. Sabata has a distinctive echoing flute as his entrance music, which develops into the film's main title theme, with whistles and acoustic guitar augmented with electric guitar, chorus, strings and trumpet.

Nicolai scored two Italian 'macaroni combat' war movies, Leon Klimovsky's *Seven into Hell* (1968 – aka *Commando Attack*) and Mino Loy's *The Desert Battle* (1969). *Seven into Hell* saw a squad of jailbirds dropped by sub off the coast of pre-D-Day Normandy, to destroy the Mont Rouge observatory's radio transmitter, which is cunningly disguised as a tree. Michael Rennie led the operation and the final attack on a castle is a recreation of the climax of *The Dirty Dozen*, with the commandos stealing a halftrack. *The Desert Battle* had a multinational battle of wits between a group of British mine-layers (played by Argentine George Hilton, American Frank Wolff, Italians Rik Battaglia, Goffredo Unger, Fabrizio Moroni) and their two German captives (Frenchman Robert Hossein and Italian Ivano Staccioli) during the North African campaign. Their tortuous desert trek (shot in Libya) examines their uneasy alliances. Nicolai's powerful, stirring military anthem, with guitars and sweeping strings, also turned up in Jess Franco's Alicante-shot women-in-prison movie *Lovers of Devil's Island* (1973).

Much of Nicolai's output leant towards B-movies, including such bawdy fare as Ruggero Deodato's picturesque costume romp *Zenabel* (1969). Peasant girl Zenabel (Lucretia Love) discovers that she's of noble heritage and sets out to overthrow an evil baron (John Ireland) with her band of female bandits. There's gratuitous nudity from the outset – the title sequence depicts beautiful young maidens disrobing with abandon and splashing around in a waterfall, which is cut to Nicolai's lovely main theme 'C'era una volta'. Morricone conducted the stately strings, acoustic guitar, chorus and a soaring Edda Dell'Orso soprano. These lushly romantic themes reappeared in another out-of-costume adventure, Mariano Laurenti's *Ubalda, All Naked and Warm* (1972), which was a great success in Italy and helped popularise 'commedia sexy all'italiana'. This earthy Medieval sex comedy featured a playful score from Nicolai, with a theme featuring twangling maranzano and flute, as bumbling knight Olimpio (Pippo Franco) arrives back from war with the key to his nymphomaniac wife's chastity belt, only to find out that someone has picked the lock. Edwige Fenech was Lady Ubalda, the miller's wife and the object of Olimpio's new fantasies. Nicolai scored Fenech's *The Inconsolable Widow thanks all those who Consoled Her* (1973), with Fenech as a recently-widowed young wife who undertakes a wholly dubious scheme (engineered by her mother) to inherit everything by providing an 'heir' to the fortune, even though she is not yet pregnant. Undercover as 'Paul Clemente', Nicolai also composed some of the music for Tinto Brass's erotic epic *Caligula* (1979). Shot on grand sets at DEAR Studios, it starred Malcolm McDowell, Teresa Ann Savoy, John Gielgud, Peter O'Toole and Helen Mirren. Nicolai's music is used alongside musical excerpts from Aram Khachaturian (an adagio from the ballet *Spartacus*, which is best known as the theme to TV's *The Onedin Line*) and Sergei Prokofiev (the booming 'Montagues and Capulets' from *Romeo and Juliet*).

## All the Black Notes

Nicolai's work with Jesus Franco is among his most memorable. His classy score to *99 Women* (1969) lifts the exploitation material considerably, as three women (Luciana Paluzzi, Maria Rohm and Elisa Montes) arrive at a dreaded women's prison run by sadistic superintendent Thelma Diaz (Mercedes McCambridge). Produced by Harry Alan Towers, it stars his wife Rohm as inmate 'Number 99', who is befriended by vampish Number 76 (Rosalba Neri) – their love scenes are scored by Nicolai's delicate 'love theme' on flute or saxophone. A bleak film to say the least, it begins with a bluesy pop number called 'The Day I Was Born', sung by Barbara McNair (who acted in Franco's 1969 film *Venus in Furs*).



Nicolai composed lushly romantic scores for two big-budget Franco offerings, which spanned horror and costume drama. *Marquis de Sade's Justine* (1969) cast Klaus Kinski as the marquis and Romina Power as his put-upon protagonist Justine. *The Bloody Judge* (1970) was Franco's look at witch trials and the quelling of the Monmouth Rebellion of 1685, starring Christopher Lee as Hanging Judge Jeffreys. It's notable for explicit torture and sex scenes in the film's 108-minute uncut version, though the 89-minute edit is more accessible to the average filmgoer. Nicolai's richly romantic violin theme is memorable amid the debauchery. Lee also appeared in Franco's lurid *De Sade 70* (1970 – aka *Eugenie and her Journey into Perversion/Marquis de Sade's 'Philosophy in the Boudoir'*), which Nicolai scored in experimental style, with sitars, jazz, religious music and vocals by Edda Dell'Orso. Eugenie (Marie Liljedahl) is coerced and corrupted by members of a sect, smokes a 'Turkish cigarette' and ends up being sexually and physically abused by disciples of de Sade. Nicolai's score to Franco's *Eugenie de Sade* aka *Eugenie Sex Happening* (1973) extensively features Edda Dell'Orso's voice. Nicolai also scored Franco's fabulously titled *Nightmares come at Night* (1972) – always the best time for nightmares to occur – and *A Virgin Among the Living Dead* (1973). These haunting Nicolai scores are thematically close to his album of library music, *Tempo sospeso* (Suspended Time), released in 1975. One of Nicolai's greatest collections, the LP mixes rock, religious, folk and experimental music.

Perhaps Nicolai's most famous horror score is for Franco's *Count Dracula* (1970). Christopher Lee played the count as an aged, moustachioed Magyar. Despite the near-perfect exploitation movie cast – Klaus Kinski, Herbert Lom, Paul Muller, Maria Rohm, Soledad Miranda – this film is forever remembered for its highly unconvincing rubber bats and a scene where stuffed mammals, birds and fish 'attack' the heroes. Nicolai's twanging, ominous ascending three-note cimbalom hook is used superbly (it originally appeared on Nicolai's soundtrack to the 1969 Italian mystery TV series *Geminus*), while an organ fugue accompanies the bleak Castle Dracula and the finale, as Dracula's coffin burns. Nicolai's score was used again in Franco's sequel *Dracula, Prisoner of Frankenstein* (1972), where arguably it worked even better. Dr Jonathan Seward (Alberto Dalbes) is the nemesis of Dr Rainer von Frankenstein (Dennis Price). In his castle, Frankenstein has a Karloff-like monster and Franco's beloved Morpho (Luis Barboo) as his assistant, where he revives Dracula from a dormant bat. Howard Vernon made a feral Count Dracula, while it's difficult to criticise a film that's so lively, so atmospheric and so weird: it manages to include a castle, howling wolves, chanting, gypsies, mist, Frankenstein's monster and Count Dracula, plus an acrobatic werewolf shows up for the finale.

Nicolai made a significant contribution to the *giallo* genre, working with director Sergio Martino on a trio of *gialli*, including *The Case of the Scorpion's Tail* (1971). The memorable title sequence, simple but effective, has a roving cameraman catching 'Evelyn Stewart'

Ida Galli and her red broad-brimmed hat wandering the streets and parks of London, accompanied by Nicolai's repetitive, jagged guitar riff, bass guitar and ominous growls of feedback. Martino's superior *giallo* incorporates great-looking Greek exteriors, Hitchcockian thrills, Argento-like POV blades in the dark, Bavaesque colour schemes, *Blow-up*'s photo enlargements, *Peeping Tom*'s voyeurism, glossy sex scenes and bloody gore, before taking to the water for the finale off the island of Lemnos. Nicolai's score is very good, from the wonderfully airy, waltz-time strings and piano theme 'Foglie Rosse' (Red Leaves) and its serene arrangement as 'Vento d'autunno' (Autumn Wind), to the incidental cues, which are avant-garde flourishes of discordant echoes, fuzzy Alessandrini guitars, trills, squalls, bangs and twangs.

Martino's unusual *giallo* *Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key* (1972) owed much to Poe's *The Black Cat*. Oliviero Rubini (Luigi Pistilli), an adulterous novelist, is tolerated by his wife Irina (Anita Strindberg). His lover is found murdered and Oliviero is the chief suspect. Fenech, as Oliviero's niece, is used more tastefully than in many of her other *gialli* and Nicolai's upmarket score includes lush, romantic harpsicord and oboe themes. Martino's *All the Colours of the Dark* (1972) also starred Fenech, in a sleazy mix of sects and violence. The lyrical title sequence – night falling on a gloomy lake – is followed by the biggest 'what the hell?' moment in *gialli*, as deeply traumatised Jane (Fenech) endures some truly freakish visions. Jane's lover Richard (George Hilton) and her sister Barbara (Nieves Navarro, in her 'Susan Scott' period) try to help her, but Jane's convinced she's being stalked by her mother's killer (Ivan Rassimov), while a seductive neighbour (Marina Malfatti) suggests Satanic 'black magic' rituals as the cure to her trauma. Nicolai's music is by-the-numbers, despite the appearance of Edda Dell'Orso and strange chanting for the rituals. London locations include Holland Park Tube station, flats in Kenilworth Court, Putney, and you can still have a drink in the Thames-side pub, The Anchor, as Fenech and Hilton do in the film.

A *giallo* with gothic shadings, Emilio P. Miraglia's *The Night Evelyn Came Out of the Grave* (1971) showcased Anthony Steffen's depraved Lord Alan Cunningham, while Nicolai's score foregrounds a lilting Euro-pop theme incorporating trumpet, harpsicord and Edda Dell'Orso's vocal. As is often the case in *gialli*, flashbacks reveal Alan's trauma, a naked woodland tryst that ends in murder (scored by a Nicolai theme with Dell'Orso). Nicolai worked with Miraglia again on the German-set *giallo* *The Red Queen Kills Seven Times* (1972), which featured two warring sisters, a mysterious disappearance and the murderous legend of the cloaked 'Red Queen'. Nicolai also composed for archetypal *gialli* such as Giuliano Carnimeo's *The Case of the Bloody Iris* (1972), which starred Fenech as Jennifer Lansbury, an imperilled Turin apartment resident. The strange goings-on are accompanied by a very Morricone-ish score from Nicolai, with melodious main themes and threatening

strings. Nicolai scored Romano Scavolini's *A White Dress for Marialé* (1972), where again someone is traumatised by witnessing a woodland tryst that culminates in murder. The gothic palace setting (actually the Palazzo Borghese, Rome) includes sequences that recall the candlelit castle scenes of Fellini's *La dolce vita* (1960). Nicolai's music again incorporates Dell'Orso's vocal and Morricone-esque stylings. Nicolai also scored Umberto Lenzi's *Eyeball* (1975 – aka *The Secret Killer*), which is that most unusual of outings, the 'Barcelona package tour *giallo*'. It starred John Richardson, Martine Brochard and the usual archetypes being stalked by a killer wearing a red plastic showerproof cape. Nicolai's score is often much lighter than the eyeball stabbing action it accompanies, though it suits the stunning shots of sunny Barcelona.

Nicolai worked with Fernando Merighi on *The French Sex Murders* (1972), which starred *La dolce vita*'s Anita Ekberg as Madam Colette, who runs a Parisian bordello. When prostitute Francine (Barbara Bouchet) is murdered, her client Antoine (Peter Martell) is wrongly sentenced for her murder, but is decapitated, ironically, when he escapes on a motorbike en route to the guillotine. The most entertaining aspect of the film is Inspector Fontaine, as played by Robert Sacchi, a professional Humphrey Bogart impersonator, which brings to mind a *giallo* crossed with Woody Allen's *Play it Again, Sam* (1972). Overwrought and lurid, this plays like a Jess Franco movie, especially given the presence of Franco regular Howard Vernon as eyeball-eviscerator Professor Waldemar. Nicolai's theme song, 'Viens avec moi' ('Come with Me'), was sung by Angiolina Quintero, while incidental cues deploy Dell'Orso vocals. This and many of Nicolai's other scores were published by Gemelli, Nicolai's own record label, which is still run by the Nicolai family. His musical legacy, now preserved on digital and analogue, is another aspect of the glory days of Italian cinema that is still alive and well, long after the era has passed. He's a composer whose work has enjoyed longevity, both for its listenability and via the cult surrounding 1960s and '70s Italian composers. Among his musical peers, Nicolai's considerable canon is as impressive as anyone's.

Thanks to soundtrack specialist Lionel Woodman of Hillside CD and Tom Betts of *Westerns... All'Italiana!*

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Howard Hughes is the author of a range of film books, including *Cinema Italiano: The Complete Guide from Classics to Cult* and *The Kamera Guide to Spaghetti Westerns*.









PICTURE  
**POST**  
MONDAY 15 APRIL 1957

ANITA EDBERG  
One of Halsman's Beauties  
*See inside*

**4**<sup>D</sup> HULTON'S  
NATIONAL  
ON SALE  
FRIDAY  
APR. 12  
WEEKLY

## ANITA STRINDBERG: ELUSIVE ICON OF THE *GIALLO*

by Peter Jilmstad

Even before Anita Strindberg's first film had premiered, she seemed destined for stardom. A feature in *Life* magazine had led to a career as a TV hostess and shortly after, she was cast in her first starring role in her native Sweden. Press from all over Europe compared her to Grace Kelly and Romy Schneider and a major Hollywood studio offered her a multi-picture deal. So just how did the statuesque Swede with the chiselled looks end up becoming an icon of Italian genre cinema?

Anita Strindberg was born Karin Anita Margareta Edberg on June 19, 1937. She grew up an only child on Södermalm in Stockholm, Sweden. In 1956, at age 19, she was chosen as a candidate for a *Life* Magazine feature called "Beauty abroad" where a multitude of women from all over the globe were featured. The article led to a great deal of media attention and Anita received offers from Hollywood and even fan mail from Billy Wilder.

Her first film appearance was a walk-on part in *Blonde in Bondage* which, in spite of its lewd title, was a Swedish noir thriller shot in 1956. Following her appearance as a hostess on a successful game show on Swedish TV, she was cast in the upcoming comedy *Den Sköna Susanna* (*The Beautiful Susanna*), which was based on the tale of Shoshana in the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament. During the film's production, Anita was offered a multi-picture deal with Columbia Pictures, which was turned down due to her parents' reluctance to let their still teenage daughter fly off to Hollywood. Unfortunately for Anita, the film was shelved for over two years and when finally released in 1959 (as *Sköna Susanna och Gubbarna*), it received poor reviews and had an extremely limited run in theatres. By that time, Anita was married and had a daughter, Louise. The marriage did not last and Anita spent the next few years in Stockholm, Barcelona and on Mallorca working as a model, photographer and running her own modelling agency. Ready for a new challenge, Anita moved to Italy to set up a design firm in Milan where she remained until she had a falling out with her business partner and accepted an offer to come to Rome and act.





Anita's first and only Italian appearance as Anita Edberg was a small role as a murder victim in Massimo Franciosa's 1970 drama *That Clear October Night*, where her character was killed off by genre stalwart Venantino Venantini. Her agent decided that the similarities between Anita's surname and the more famous Ekberg would be more of a hindrance than a help to her career and her surname was changed to Strindberg, after the Swedish author and playwright August Strindberg.

Anita's first big break in Italy came when she was offered a role in Lucio Fulci's *A Lizard in a Woman's Skin* (1971). The role was originally meant for Ida Galli, better known as Evelyn Stewart, but today it is difficult to imagine anybody other than Anita playing the striking and sexually confident Julia Durer.

Not long after her key performance in Fulci's film, Anita was offered her first starring role as the feisty journalist Cléo Dupont in Sergio Martino's *The Case of the Scorpion's Tail*, which was shot in the spring of 1971. The film ended up being one of the better performing *gialli* of the year and several other roles in the thriller genre followed during the early 1970s. She starred in four films in quick succession: Tulio Demicheli's lacklustre *The Two Faces of Fear* with George Hilton, Aldo Lado's *Who Saw Her Die?* where she played the grief-stricken mother Elizabeth Serpieri alongside George Lazenby, the Haiti-set *Tropic of Cancer* and lastly a reunion with Sergio Martino in his Edgar Allen Poe-inspired *Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key*.

1973 saw her taking leads in Italy's first 'women in prison' film, *Women in Cell Block 7*, and in Giorgio Bontempi's underrated drama *The African Deal*.

However, by the mid-1970s the *giallo's* popularity was starting to wane as it was overtaken by hard-hitting police thrillers and sex comedies *all'italiana*, which meant far less interesting and challenging roles for women. Anita, nearing 40 at the time, now found herself no longer cast as the love interest of the young leads, but of their fathers instead. However, she kept busy working and appeared in several films in different genres (*poliziotteschi*, *gialli*, drama, horror and comedies) between 1974 and 1976 before heading to the prestigious Actor's Studio in New York to hone her craft.

On her return to Italy, she was cast as Countess Katia in the RAI TV drama *L'eredità della priora*, which caused a certain amount of uproar when screened in 1980 since Anita was one of the first people to appear nude on Italian television.







Her last major role was as the monstrous mother Glenda in Riccardo Freda's final film *Murder Obsession*, but she also made a final brief film appearance alongside Franco Nero and Anthony Quinn in Peter Zinner's *The Salamander* in 1980. Anita met her second husband and, like so many actresses of the time, she abandoned her career for married life. Apart from a small role in a TV episode in the late 1980s, she left the industry altogether to retire in France where she still lives.

Sadly, few of the roles Anita was offered allowed her to really show her range, but when she was given the chance, she always asserted what a talented actress she was. Now in her 80s, Anita can look back on a rich and diverse legacy. To this day, she remains virtually unknown in Sweden, but a worldwide audience continues to enjoy her films and she will always be remembered as one of the high queens of the *giallo*.

Peter Jimstad is the author of the upcoming book, *The Other Anita – The Life and films of Anita Strindberg*.

## ABOUT THE RESTORATION

*The Case of the Scorpion's Tail/La coda dello scorpione* is presented in its original aspect ratio of 2.35:1 with Italian and English mono audio.

The original 2-perf 35mm camera negative was scanned in 2K resolution at EuroLab. The film was graded on Digital Vision's Nucoda Film Master and restored at R3Store Studios. 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 at Deluxe Media, Los Angeles. 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.

All original materials used in this restoration were accessed from Variety Communications, Italy.

Restoration supervised by James White, Arrow Films

R3Store Studios:

Gerry Gedge, Jo Griffin, Andrew O'Hagan, Rich Watson, Jenny Collins

Deluxe Media: Jordan Perry

Eurolab: Laura Indiveri

Variety Communications: Elisabetta Volpe

## PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **Michael Mackenzie**  
Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**  
Technical Producer **James White**  
QC Manager **Nora Mehenni**  
Production Coordinator **Liane Cunje**  
Feature Encoding **Fidelity in Motion / David Mackenzie**  
Blu-ray Mastering and Subtitling **The Engine House**  
Artist **Chris Malbon**  
Design **Obviously Creative**

## SPECIAL THANKS

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