

All the Colours of the Dark (Tutti i colori del buio)

Italy / Spain | 1972 | 94 minutes

Credits

Director	Luigi Bazzoni
Screenplay	Ernesto Gastaldi /Sauro Scavolini
Photography	Miguel Fernández Mila/Giancarlo Ferrando
Music	Bruno Nicolai

Cast

Richard Steele	George Hilton
Jane Harrison	Edwige Fenech
Mark Cogan	Ivan Rassimov
J.P. McBriar	Julián Ugarte

Following a traumatic car accident in which she lost her unborn child, Jane (Edwige Fenech) and has been plagued by exceptionally vivid – read cinematic – nightmares, invariably featuring a stalker with piercing blue eyes.

Jane's partner Richard (George Hilton) and sister Barbara (Susan Scott / Nieves Navarro) offer alternative therapies. Barbara favours a therapy and arranges for Jane to see Dr Burton (Jorge Rigaud). Richard, who was driving the car at the time of the accident and thus may have his own issues to contend with, dismisses the psychiatrist as a “quack” and offers Jane medication instead, with Barbara in turn countering by reminding him that he is only a sales representative for a pharmaceutical company and not in any way a qualified professional.

On her way home from a visit to Dr Burton, Jane encounters the blue eyed man of her nightmares in the street. Panicked, she bumps into her new next-door neighbour, Mary (Marina Malfatti) and is invited in for a calming cup of tea – a nice touch in terms in making the characters seem as English as the locales – and chat. Jane, however, is keen to get back to prepare Richard's dinner, but does agree to meet up with Mary the next morning.

Jane then receives a phone call from a lawyer, Clay (Luciano Pigozzi), who wishes to see her the following afternoon but fails to provide any other information. Then, glancing outside, Jane thinks she sees her stalker. Cautiously venturing into the stairwell, Jane finds herself locked out, with someone advancing. Thankfully – or suspiciously, depending on your perception of how events are proceeding thus far – Richard emerges from the elevator at just the right moment.

The following morning Jane confides in Mary, who proposed a third, decidedly more unorthodox solution, that Jane should visit a witches sabbat. Despite not knowing what one is nor what it will entail, beyond Mary's explanation that “it's a certain kind of black magic ritual,” Jane is by now desperate enough to try anything and thus agrees to rendezvous with Mary following her visit to the lawyers.

As it turns out, Jane doesn't get very far there anyway: the blue eyed man is there, waiting, and attacks her with an axe. This encounter and the ensuing chase does not, however, prevent Jane meeting Mary (albeit an hour late; “it's not like a cinema when one can walk in any time,” admonishes Mary in a neat little self-reflexive remark) and attending the sabbat thereafter. There is she is disturbed by the animal sacrifice, but nevertheless participates in drinking its blood and in the orgy that ensues as the cultists welcome their new member.

Seamlessly the action shifts back to home, with Jane and Richard in bed:

Darling, no more bad dreams.

Everything's back to normal, isn't it Jane?

Yes, but I feel strange, Richard. I don't feel real

It seems that Mary's cure has indeed worked – after a fashion. But with the neighbour soon thereafter admitting to her own motives for involving Jane with the cult; a book about black magic appearing among Richard's possessions, and an apparent conspiracy between Richard and the blue eyed man, it quickly becomes clear that things are about to get a whole lot worse before they get better.

In Brief

Giallo mainstays Edwige Fenech, George Hilton, Susan Scott / Nieves Navarro, Ivan Rassimov and Marina Malfatti star in this occult themed, Rosemary's Baby / Repulsion inspired giallo in which a neurotic London woman gets caught up in a satanic cult. Directed by the prolific Sergio Martino, the film also showcases the music of Morricone's frequent collaborator Bruno Nicolai.



All the Colours of the Dark



True, the old adage says that it is always darkest before the dawn, but in a context where the dark itself has colours – all of them – that might well be devoid of assurance...

Reuniting the main cast and crew of *The Strange Vice of Signora Wardh* and *Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key*, this 1972 giallo blends typical filone themes – a traumatic past event; conspiracy; female neurosis etc. – with more overtly supernatural horror themed *Rosemary's Baby* styled material, to good overall effect.

The screenplay, co-authored by Ernesto Gastaldi and Sauro Scavolini from a story by Santiago Moncada, provides a solid starting point, keeping the viewer guessing as to the nature of the conspiracy throughout and giving director Sergio Martino and his all-star ensemble enough to work with.

Martino handles the suspense and action sequences with typical aplomb, while the assorted nightmare scenes afford him and his team the chance to experiment with unusual angles, kaleidoscopic lenses and jarring edits. It may not be particularly subtle – there is little ambiguity in what the components of the nightmares mean, for instance, especially in comparison with something like Lucio Fulci's not too dissimilar *Lizard in a Woman's Skin* – but it is effective and appropriate in the context of Mikel Koven's “vernacular cinema”.

Hilton plays Richard with the right level of creepiness, not sufficient to make him an obvious villain, but enough to induce a degree of uncertainty; as when he and Scott are discussing Jane's condition and apportioning blame to one another. As was often the case, Rassimov has an inherently less interesting role, though never fails to impart the required aura of

menace to his appearances.

Of all the performers, however, this is Fenech's film. Though undoubtedly cast primarily on account of family connections as the then-partner of Sergio Martino's producer brother Luciano and for being a stunning beauty with a willingness to display her assets, her dramatic abilities really shine through as the increasingly paranoid and unstable Jane. Indeed, again one feels sorry for the actress and others like her in the Euro-cult world for never being recognised for anything other than their looks; personally I find her performance here more than equal to that of Mia Farrow in *Rosemary's Baby*. (Again, before we dismiss the film as simply ripping-off an – admittedly excellent – original, it is worth remembering that the filmmakers have, as with much filone cinema, introduced their own twists, in that Jane lost her baby before any worries about what it might turn out to be, *Rosemary's Baby* style, could ever arise.)

Elsewhere, Bruno Nicolai's score is another plus. Suggesting *Rosemary's Baby* early on via a lullaby theme, he elsewhere offers a winning combination of suspenseful and psychedelic themes, the latter again somewhat reminiscent of his work for Jess Franco at times. Whatever the mood to be set, he gets it; a seemingly incongruous lounge piece immediately after Jane's initial visit to the sabbat explicable in relation to Jane's momentarily lighter mood.

Not, however, that *All the Colours of the Dark* is an unqualified masterpiece.

For starters, the coven plot fails to really convince. Though Jane is presented as desperate, the ease with which she goes off to a sabbat with a neighbour she's only just met is too convenient, as is the timing of that sabbat the very next afternoon – no waiting until the stars are right for these cultists!

Martino also fails to play fair with the viewer on one important occasion. Whereas the second time viewer can notice the vital detail protagonist Marc Daly does not in Dario Argento's *Deep Red*, the director having sufficient confidence in his abilities to misdirect the first time viewer by sleight of hand, here a key signifier is simply concealed from our eyes. Then again, it is worth remembering that neither *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* nor *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* exactly plays a fair game – if Martino was not ahead of his rival cineaste at this time, he was not appreciably far behind either.

Another thing that hurts the film, albeit to a lesser extent, are the voices given some of the supporting characters, which come straight from the Dick Van Dyke / Eliza Doolittle school of Cockney elocation and thus serve to break the otherwise convincing sense of Londonicity – to pretentiously appropriate a concept from Roland Barthes – accomplished elsewhere.

Still, in the final analysis these are relatively minor issues in what otherwise emerges as an enjoyable, effective blend of giallo and horror that sees everyone concerned – Fenech above all – at or near the top of their respective games.

- Keith Brown

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The Giallo