Call him the maestro of the long-winded title, call him a genre chameleon, call him overambitious—just don’t call him a hack. Sergio Martino is a *painter*, not a butcher. And should you thumb through his portfolio of filmic *giallo* canvases for evidence, you’ll find some works more rambling and some more obscure, but none underline the essence of his sanguinary chic like TORSO, which has made its U.S. Blu-ray debut via Blue Underground.

Of course, the director himself would be the first to tell you such claims are subjective. TORSO was originally titled ROSSO COME L’AMORE, COME IL NERO TERROR (RED LIKE LOVE, BLACK LIKE TERROR), then I CORPI PRESENTANO TRACCE DI VIOLANZA CARNALE (THE BODIES SHOW SIGNS OF CARNAL VIOLENCE), before the inevitable sawing down to that solitary moniker. That transformative process reminds us that for all its highbrow pretensions, blood, guts and sluts are indeed Martino’s bread and butter. That’s not to say, though, that he doesn’t sell them without any true passion or drama.

Perhaps the most endearing thing about Martino’s sleaze gem is that for all of producer Carlo Ponti’s imposed limitations and fixation on international commercial appeal, TORSO retains a distinct, singular vision amidst its cookie-cutter stalk-and-slash brethren. Following American

exchange student Jane (Suzy Kendall) and her mixed bag of sexy, multiracial coed girlfriends as they navigate the ins and outs of Perugia, TORSO delivers an equally mixed bag of messy but rewarding narrative. There’s the director’s tongue-in-cheek argument for the aesthetics of violence; the looming, if not cartoonish, threat of rape, making for stark, creepy sex comedy; moody backwoods atmospherics; the ski-masked psychosexual assassin; prolonged lesbian foreplay; and candy-apple gore from head to toe (and not necessarily in that order). Martino’s penchant for the red stuff is trumped only by his love for red herrings, which are dropped more frequently as plot diversions than the shamelessly lowered panties. Note also the staying power of another article of clothing; the film leaves its fingerprint on *giallo* history not by way of black glove, but via one invertible two-tone scarf.

Somewhere between our killer’s photographic impulses during the silky opening sequence and his stuffing of limbs into burlap sacks toward the deafeningly silent climax, the word “preservation” assumes more meanings than that of TORSO’s disc revival alone. Still, there’s much fine restorative work on the new disc, no small part of which is the DTS-HD MA soundtrack, enhancing every swanky riff of Guido and Maurizio De Angelis’ score while maintaining crisp dialogue in both its English (also available on DVD) and Italian versions. Blue Underground’s 1.66:1 transfer kills any and all of the grain of TORSO’s previous presentations and pops its saturated palette, allotting equally pivotal supporting roles to a 1300 Mini Cooper or a Massey Ferguson tractor as to the rest of the film’s (temporarily) living, breathing cast.

Martino, interviewed in the “Murders in Perugia” featurette, looks back on the occasion of its release with relative fondness, but not without his share of regrets. The film’s now-iconic saw, for instance, grinding through Jane’s friends’ flesh and bone as she looks on in terror, is revealed to have been intended for offscreen use, as a more implicit suggestion of the killer’s unspeakable deeds. Martino recalls Ponti’s insistence on the graphic mayhem—like the film’s title makeover—as a succumbing to more widely accessible Euroslasher trends set forth by Dario Argento rather than a proper adherence to artistic license. Conversely, Eli Roth, in his gushing introduction, alleges Martino to share his belief that this is his definitive work.

And what to make of the film’s curious turn by Luciano De Ambrosis, warning the students of the predator in their midst, as one “Inspector Martino”? Is this chance? Necessity? While Inspector Martino explains, “What you see on the screen is not a work of abstract art,” what director Martino shows us is that it *is*.

MOVIE:

BLU-RAY PACKAGE: