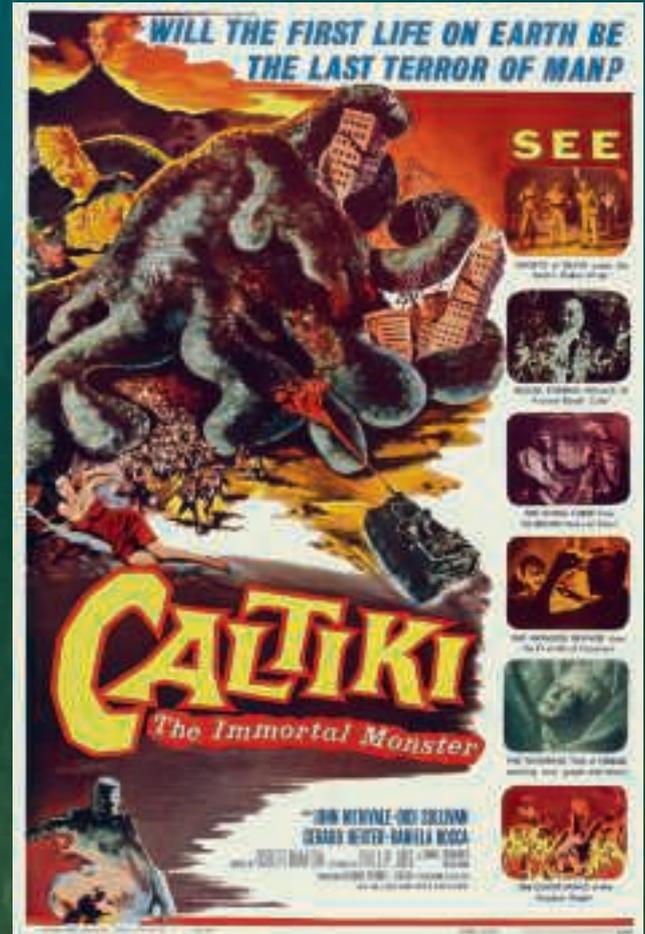




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# CALTIKI

## THE IMMORTAL MONSTER

*Caltiki il mostro immortale*  
1959

Screenplay by  
**Philip Just** (Filippo Sanjust)

From an old Mexican folk legend

With  
**John Merivale**  
**Didi Sullivan** (Didi Perego)  
**Gerard Haerter** (Gérard Herter)

**G. R. Stuart** (Giacomo Rossi Stuart)  
**Victor André** (Vittorio André)  
**Daniel Vargas** (Daniele Vargas)  
**Arthur Dominick** (Arturo Dominici)  
**Black Bernard** (Nerio Bernardi)  
**Rex Wood**

Solo Dancer  
**Gay Pearl** (Gail Pearl)

Choreography  
**P. Gozino** (Paolo Gozino)

And with  
**Daniela Rocca**

Directed by  
**Robert Hamton** (Riccardo Freda)  
and **Mario Bava** (uncredited)

A  
**Galatea S.p.A.**  
Film

Director of Photography  
Special Effects  
**Mario Bava**

Assistant Director  
**Edoardo Fiory** (Odoardo Fiory)

Editor  
**Mario Serandrei**

Scientific Consultant  
**Elle Bi**

Music  
**Roberto Nicolosi**





# GOTHIC MONSTROSITY, RADIOACTIVE TERROR

by Kat Ellinger

It is now frequently acknowledged that filmmaker Mario Bava had at least two co-directing stints prior to his breakthrough in his solo directorial debut: *Black Sunday* (*La maschera del demonio*, 1960). Notable for their display of what would later come to be known as Bavean trademarks, the earlier films were made in partnership with fellow master of Italian Gothic, Riccardo Freda. Freda and Bava had previously worked together on the film that is widely credited as the first Italian horror film with sound, *I Vampiri* (1957), which reworked the Báthory legend, and came out the same year Hammer's Gothic cycle kicked off with *The Curse of Frankenstein*. The follow-up *Caltiki the Immortal Monster* (*Caltiki il mostro immortale*, 1959) is a fascinating hybrid of science fiction and horror that encompasses elements of Gothic monstrosity and Mayan mythology, and which, under Bava's skilled hand, evokes a mystical atmosphere where science and a sense of the *fantastique* mesh effortlessly together. Even though the film lacks the Gothic castle ambience of Freda's *The Terror of Dr Hichcock* (*L'orribile segreto del Dr Hichcock*, 1962) and *The Ghost* (*Lo spretto*, 1963), or Bava's groundbreaking *Black Sunday* and *Black Sabbath* (*I tre volti della paura*, 1963), *Caltiki* aligns much more with the Italian Gothic movement than is first apparent, especially in the way in which the narrative revels in the idea of monstrosity, and how that connects so closely to elements belonging to the field of Gothic literature.

Despite being hugely prolific in the realm of horror in the wake of films like *I Vampiri* and *Black Sunday*, Italy's contribution to the genre was mostly absent for the first part of the 20th century. Under Mussolini, American films were banned in 1938, and horror banned outright, and therefore Italian audiences were sheltered from the pleasures of the US drive-in market which was thriving on post-war sci-fi terror, fuelled by Cold War fears and the invasion of the "other". Britain had a similar relationship with horror cinema in the post-war period, with no horrors being made during this time due to strict production codes. What is interesting is that following this, both Italy and Britain developed strong industries founded on Gothic horror, starting around the same time, with each country easing themselves in via the science fiction route. When you look at things in closer detail, it all makes perfect sense. Although the sci-fi mode is often regarded as being a million miles away from

creaky old Gothic, it is often forgotten that the seeds of the genre are to be found in Gothic literature, mad science, and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). In fact, Gothic, despite its association with period pieces (mainly due to classic horror film – Universal, Hammer Horror, Bava and Corman in particular), has continued to reinvent itself time and time again in contemporary settings, through work as diverse in context as Stephen King to Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979).

Speaking to Luigi Cozzi, Bava said of his film:

I directed most of *Caltiki* ... Riccardo Freda signed it "Robert Hampton" but left soon after the production had begun. It was a take-off on *Quatermass I* and the slime monster was just a ton of cow's entrails with a man (poor man!) hidden inside to make it move. It was summertime, so the big problem was to keep the flies away from it!<sup>1</sup>

Freda would seem to support this notion (although there seems to be some disagreement about how long he actually worked on the production), stating in Cozzi's *Il cinema dei mostri* (1987) that *Caltiki*

should be regarded as Bava's first film as a director ... It was about monsters, Medusas from space, and that's Bava's line of work; it's his genre. The film was born almost by accident to help Bava. You see, during that period, Mario was a director of photography, both for my films and those by Pietro Francisci. It was truly his work that made Francisci a success, because that director would sit on set and fall asleep ... I proposed that we make *Caltiki* together; he accepted. I abandoned the film a couple of days before it was finished.<sup>2</sup>

Bava already had a history with Science Fiction when he came to work on *Caltiki*, having worked on the first Italian science fiction film *The Day the Sky Exploded* (*La morte viene dallo spazio*, 1958, Paolo Heusch) a year prior to his collaboration with Freda. He would also go on to make his own science fiction epic *Planet of the Vampires* (*Terrore nello spazio*) in 1965, a film which also bears some relation to Gothic in its use of reanimating the undead, and conjuring a sense of the Gothic sublime on a planet shrouded in mist and shadows. In line with Freda's comment about *Caltiki* belonging to "Bava's line of work", the cinematographer-turned-director did have a tendency to Gothicise many of the other genres he worked in: for instance bringing a sense of the Gothic imagination into the previously

mentioned sci-fi setting of *Planet of the Vampires*; into the thriller *The Girl Who Knew Too Much* (*La ragazza che sapeva troppo*, 1963), the *peplum Hercules and the Haunted World* (*Ercole al centro della Terra*, 1961), or the comic book film *Danger: Diabolik* (*Diabolik*, 1968). *Caltiki* is no different to this formula, but does (as acknowledged by the director himself) take something of a cue from British forerunners, Hammer's *The Quatermass Xperiment* (1955) and *X the Unknown* (1956).

The original pressbook for *Caltiki* made the bold claim:

Visually, this picture has more shock value than any other picture of its metier seen in a decade. The effect of *Caltiki* growing like a sinister and mammoth yeast, its tentacles reaching out ahead, toppling buildings and consuming live humans, is something to numb the nervous system.

Of course, this had – at least in some part – been seen before, just three years earlier in *The Quatermass Xperiment*, a reworking of the hugely successful BBC dramatisation of Nigel Kneale's script. For the film, the creature is brought back to earth when an astronaut returns from space, somehow infected by alien matter. He eventually becomes a hideous plant-like mass ready to wreak havoc on civilisation. Hammer would quickly follow this with *X the Unknown*, where mud becomes a bloodthirsty killer fuelled by radioactive disturbance. In fact, *Caltiki* and the formless "monster" in *X the Unknown* do bear a striking resemblance – it is important to note Hammer's production precedes American indie hit *The Blob* (1958) by two years, although frequent comparisons are made between this particular feature and the Bava/Freda collaboration.

*Caltiki*'s connection to *X the Unknown* is further cemented by the idea that the threat comes from within the earth itself, not from another world like the original *Quatermass*. *Caltiki*, a Mayan goddess, is disturbed in her tomb by a group of adventurous scientists. The booming narrative voiceover sets the scene by telling how Mayans immigrated from the area in the year 607 AD in mysterious circumstances, concluding that Indian folklore warns that the disappearance was due to the Mayans wanting to "escape the wrath of a vengeful goddess – a goddess who hungers for blood." Audiences are quickly introduced to one of a group of explorers, seen stumbling back to camp. He is ranting about a "mummy", shouting the name "Caltiki" over and over, but is unable to explain what has happened to a missing crew member who accompanied him. On further exploration, the remaining team can find no trace of the missing man, but they do find a statue of the titular goddess in a pool filled cavern. The disturbance reawakens the angry spirit in the form of a black shapeless all-

<sup>1</sup> Cozzi, Luigi (1976) quoted in *Emmanations*. Photon, issue 26, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Cozzi, Luigi (1987) *Il cinema dei mostri*, p. 251.

consuming blob that quickly gobbles up part of the crew, inflicting nasty burns on another. *X the Unknown* takes a slightly different route, but is similar in the fact the source of terror emanates from part of the earth, as opposed to something alien, from outer space. In *X*, matter is mutated by radiation and consumes residents of a sleepy British village, as well as members of the army and a team of scientists who are attempting to control the situation. Both monsters are accompanied by a similar “radioactive” sound effect, both kill in a similar way by smothering their prey (which in turn aids them to grow in size, an aspect also seen in *Quatermass*). *X* and *Caltiki* also share the most graphic horror-related tropes. Particularly in the way humans are melted down to skeletons on contact with the monster. That said, *Caltiki* is far more outrageous in its rendering of violence: it is the only film of the three that actually shows blood.

Of course, having a mutated monster alone is not enough to stake a claim on Gothic. Many post-war sci-fi films (particularly those which project fear of the Atomic Age) use radiation as a main catalyst for terror. This is perhaps most notable in Japan, with the *Godzilla* cycle. However, there are many examples to be found Stateside with films like *Them!* (1954), *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957) or *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* (1958), where humans or animals are mutated by radioactive forces. The difference in *Caltiki* and *The Quatermass Xperiment* (and what makes these films essentially Gothic) is the link to Gothic monstrosity specifically, an aspect not found in *X the Unknown*. Monstrosity is an overriding factor that defines much of early Gothic literature. It is found in tales of moral corruption (Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* [1976]), in supernatural monstrosity (*Dracula* [1897]), and it dominates the arena of Mad Science, making literal monsters (*Frankenstein*) and those which draw from human psychology and moral quandaries (*Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* [1886]). There is something dark and malignant about this mode that goes beyond pure instinct. Gothic monstrosity is far more penetrating, far more terrifying, far more perverse.

*Caltiki* is a perfect example of Gothic monstrosity in action, not just in its connection to an ancient deity, human sacrifice and strange cults (something which Charles Mitchell<sup>3</sup> has proposed as being Lovecraftian in nature in his 2001 book *The Complete H.P. Lovecraft Filmography*). Mitchell made a number of interesting parallels in his text between *Caltiki* and Lovecraftian mythos, linking the script firmly to Lovecraft’s *The Call of Cthulhu* (1928). Mitchell highlights the similarity in name structure, the dormant status of the creature, its awakening, the cosmic elements in the legend, and the fact that *Caltiki* presents as a Cthulhu-type mass. But more than this, the true Gothic monstrosity comes in the fact that the monster can corrupt a man and penetrate his soul by touch. *Quatermass* uses this trope too, but leans toward the existential crisis format of *Frankenstein*, with Victor Caroon in many ways just as much a victim as those he consumes (the film even pays homage to

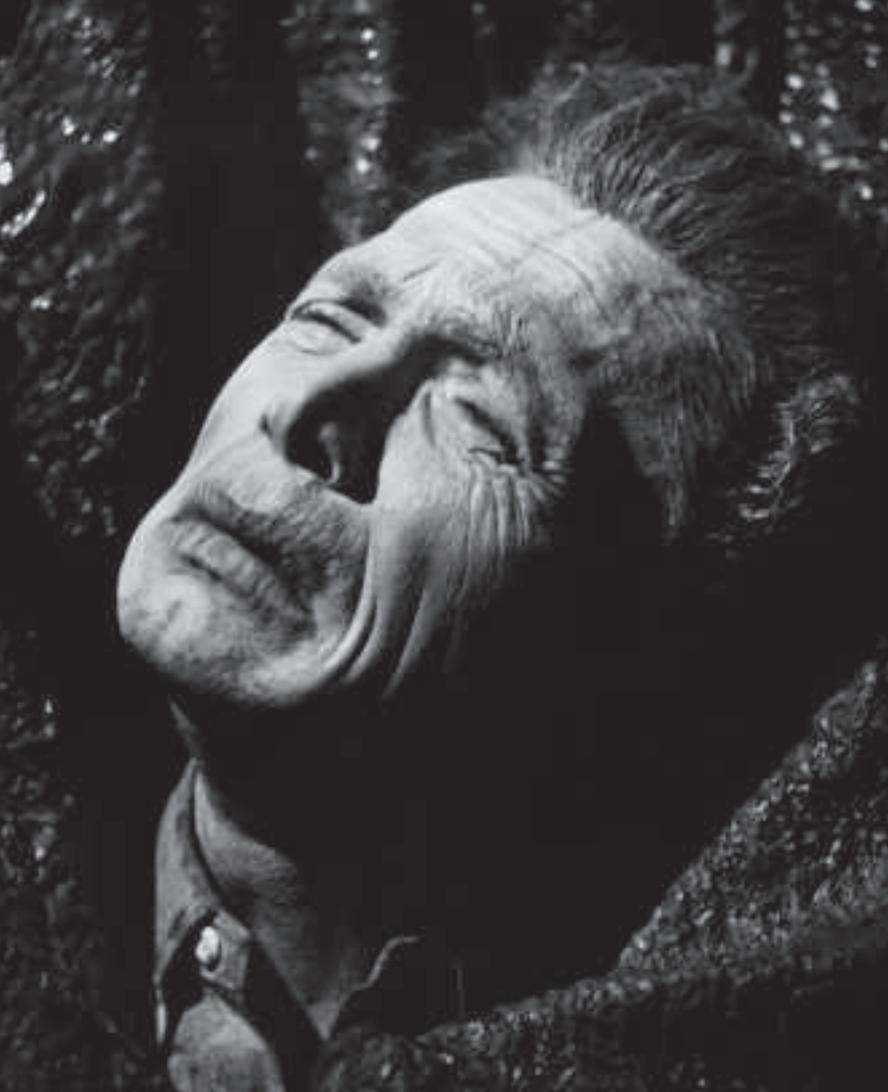
<sup>3</sup> Mitchell, Charles (2001) *The Complete HP Lovecraft Filmography*.

James Whale’s rendition of the tale with a short scene in which Caroon meets a little girl by the side of a river). *Caltiki* has Max Gunther (Gérard Herter), a character signified as ‘other’ in Gothic threat tradition. He is carved out as sinister before he even comes in contact with *Caltiki* by the way in which he capitalises on an argument he overhears between square-jawed hero Dr John Fielding (John Merivale) and his wife Ellen (Didi Perego), and in an attempt to lure Ellen into his bed – despite his girlfriend Linda (played by the sultry Daniele Rocca) begging him to leave her alone, and love only her. After Gunter is altered by the monster – an act that leaves him with hideous burns on his face, not dissimilar to *Quatermass*, although Caroon’s make-up is more zombie like as it evolves – his lust for Ellen turns into an obsession and then madness. This is where Bava brings matters into a purely Gothic realm. His climactic scenes capitalise on chiaroscuro lighting taken straight from German Expressionism (especially the extensive use of shadows) as Ellen, who is in every sense a Gothic heroine by this point, is trapped in a labyrinth-like house, pursued by a sexually-motivated attacker, and then later *Caltiki* itself.

Although maybe not considered purely Gothic, or purely horror or even purely Bava’s, *Caltiki the Immortal Monster* does exhibit some of the dark magic the director would use to Gothicise many other genres as his career developed. The film has been unfairly neglected in the past, written off for the ways in which it is seen to mix too many ingredients into its complex narrative, and the ways in which it strays from science fiction formula. Yet despite this, the film is ripe for reappraisal, and should be reconsidered as a vital piece in Bava’s journey to auteur status. Brimming with Gothic monstrosity and Lovecraftian mythos, littered with graphic horror tropes, the essence of sexual violence and whispers of ritualistic sacrifice, *Caltiki* is every bit as outrageous and perverse as many of the better known Italian genre films of the era and deserves to be celebrated as such.

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# DECONSTRUCTING CALTIKI

by Roberto Curti

For his second Fantastic-themed film after *I vampiri* (1957), Riccardo Freda hid for the first time under an English pseudonym which he would use again on several occasions: Robert Hampton (misspelled "Hamton" in the credits). It was an inevitable move on his part after the disappointing financial results of *I vampiri*, and the realization that Italian audiences were not yet used to the notion of horror movies being produced in their own country. In the two years following *I vampiri*, though, many things had changed, and the release of Terence Fisher's *Dracula* (1958) unleashed an appetite for the horror genre which was unthinkable just a few years earlier. Still, for the umpteenth time in his career, Freda moved on to almost uncharted territory: science fiction.

1952 had marked the birth of the first Italian science fiction magazines, such as *Scienza fantastica*, and the novel series *Urania* (the latter still published to this day); a second wave of mags and novel series (*Galassia*, *Cosmo*, *Galaxy*) turned up in newsstands between 1956 and 1958: it was the beginning of the Italian Golden Age of science fiction. Young writers cut their teeth on sci-fi novels and short stories, published under Anglo-Saxon pseudonyms, and in 1959 the prestigious publishing house Einaudi released the successful short story anthology *Le meraviglie del possibile*, edited by Carlo Fruttero and Franco Lucentini.

Still, by the late 1950s, science fiction was kind of a novelty for Italian cinema. In the previous decades there had been a very small number of films only vaguely related to the topic, such as Sergio Corbucci's comedy *Baracca e burattini* (1954). Then, in 1958, two movies directly connected to the genre were released: Steno's *Totò nella luna*, a parody starring the Neapolitan comedian Totò which spoofed such works as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956, Don Siegel), and *The Day the Sky Exploded* (*La morte viene dallo spazio*, 1958, Paolo Heusch), co-produced by the then-declining Lux Film, Italy's first attempt at an out-and-out science fiction flick. The latter, however, consisted to a large extent of newsreels and stock footage, actually assembled by the director of photography Mario Bava around a threadbare plot.

Compared with Heusch's film, *Caltiki il mostro immortale* displayed a very different approach to the subject. Instead of the early 1950s US space operas, two more specific models could be detected for Freda's work. The first was Hammer Films' horror-tinged *The*

*Quatermass Xperiment* (1955). For one thing, the character of Max (G rard Herter), who is infected by a deadly blob, goes crazy and escapes from the hospital, is traceable to the astronaut played by Richard Wordsworth in Val Guest's film, released in Italy to reasonable success in June 1956 as *L'astronave atomica del dottor Quatermass*; interestingly, *Quatermass 2* was distributed in June 1957, a couple of months after *I vampiri*, with the title *I vampiri dello spazio* – a sign that times were almost ready for a revival of the horror genre. On the other hand, the concept of Caltiki as a shapeless, ever-growing unicellular creature was more akin to the titular organism of *The Blob* (1958, Irvin S. Yeaworth Jr). On top of that, whereas *The Day the Sky Exploded* was essentially a camera piece of sorts, Freda's film was action-packed from start to finish, with very little scientific mumbo-jumbo, and relied heavily on special effects – a field that was taking its first steps after the rise of the new wave of the *peplum*, as expert sculptors, painters and technicians were developing their skills in a different trajectory.

*Caltiki* was produced by Nello Santi for Galatea Film; the company was willing to explore new paths after the box-office success of *Hercules (Le fatiche di Ercole)*, 1958, Pietro Francisci), and as such *Caltiki* was conceived for the foreign markets. Although it was neither mentioned in the credits nor in the ministerial papers, most sources list the participation of the company Climax Films (or Climax Pictures), whose nationality is dubious: some sources claim it was an American company, whereas others list it as French. Being an average budget picture, it had no big stars: the Canadian-born John Merivale (seen in *A Night to Remember*, 1958) was not a box-office name, whereas the debuting Didi Perego would gain notoriety only after her role in Gillo Pontecorvo's *Kap * (1960), which won her a Silver Ribbon Award. Similarly, Daniela Rocca – Santi's mistress at the time – was only starting her way to popularity, appearing in a series of *peplum* flicks and, most importantly, in Pietro Germi's *Divorce – Italian Style (Divorzio all'italiana)*, 1961). The German-born G rard Herter was Freda's hallway neighbour: his innate aristocratic air impressed the director so much that he asked him to play a role in his previous film, *The White Warrior (Agi Murad – Il diavolo bianco)*, 1959). It was the beginning of a marginal film career: Herter played the despicable Austrian officer in Mario Monicelli's masterpiece *La grande guerra* (1959) and appeared in a number of genre films during the following decade. His last role was in Luchino Visconti's *Ludwig* (1973).

For the second time in a row after *The White Warrior*, Freda employed his friend Mario Bava as the director of photography. Bava also took care of the special effects: a now-legendary anecdote has that he fabricated the monster by using beef tripe bought from a nearby abattoir, which was manoeuvred from beneath by a crew member. Even though there was more than just butcher's tripe used in the film, it was one of the earliest examples of homemade special effects to be found in Italian horror cinema: in the following years,

the resort to butcher shops would be a rather common occurrence for special effects technicians. In addition to that, Bava also had a field day with miniatures: he recreated a replica of the protagonist's home (by using a dollhouse!) for the scene where the now-gigantic Caltiki wreaks havoc inside it, and concocted the film's climax, which included toy tanks and the like.

When asked about *Caltiki*, Freda pointed out that he did not really consider the movie to be his own, and not just because he did not care about science fiction. In a 1971 interview with Luigi Cozzi, the director claimed that he took on the project simply because he wanted to push Bava towards directing, as he was sick and tired of seeing his friend being continually exploited by other, untalented filmmakers, for whom the Sanremese director of photography did uncredited directing work. "I did shoot it, yes, but it's Bava's type of film," he concluded: "I don't enclose it in my body of work. The only thing I remember with pleasure about it are the statues that decorated the sets: I sculpted them myself."<sup>4</sup>

On other occasions, Freda himself offered even more drastic recollections. He told  ric Poindron: "After a week I told the whole world to go *ad patres* [author's note: i.e. to hell]. I collaborated on the scenario and the decorations, that's all,"<sup>5</sup> thus implying that Bava's involvement was much bigger. According to Bava's biographer Tim Lucas, after Freda's walk-off "there remained two or three weeks of filming devoted entirely to special effects, which in this case amounted to over 100 individual effects shots for the 76-minute production."<sup>6</sup> As Lucas points out, there seems to be a bit of confusion regarding the film's chronology: Bava recalled working on some special effects during summertime, whereas in the climax John Merivale's breath is visible, likely the sign of a chilly winter night. This might indicate a halt in the production, from early to mid-1959.

This version is corroborated by scriptwriter Massimo De Rita, who at that time was working for Galatea as unit manager. De Rita, who spent quite some time on the film's set, claimed that

at 90% Bava was also the director of *Caltiki*, Freda was away, he didn't know anything about what Bava was contriving. It was Bava who told the actors what to do, it was he who shot all the connecting shots with the monster; and since the movie was the monster, Bava shot over 50% of the scenes featuring actors; he shot all the death scenes: he knew how he would put together the special effects and the acting bits.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Cozzi, Luigi, "L'orribile segreto del dottor Hampton", *Horror* No. 15, April 1971.

<sup>5</sup> Poindron,  ric (1994) *Riccardo Freda: Un pirate   la camera*, p. 279.

<sup>6</sup> Lucas, Tim (2007) *Mario Bava: All the Colors of the Dark*, p. 257.

<sup>7</sup> Various authors, "Genealogia del delitto: Il cinema di Mario & Lamberto Bava", *Nocturno Dossier* #24, July 2004, p. 25.

In an interview with Italian film historian Simone Venturini, De Rita even speaks of *Caltiki* as Bava's

first film ... it was lots of fun, we kept shooting special effects for one month, with tripe, a disgusting thing, we had to replace it every six hours, every morning we had a supplier delivering fresh tripe, never has so much tripe been consumed in Rome ... and then the miniatures, the special effects. And so we convinced Santi to entrust him with more dignified films, such as *Black Sunday*.<sup>8</sup>

Bava's changed role during shooting is further proved by the ministerial papers: the final balance assigns a lesser sum to Freda than initially budgeted (5 million lire instead of 6) whereas his d.o.p. was ultimately paid 6.245 million lire instead of 3 million. Eugenio Bava was apparently involved in the making too, since he was paid 500,000 lire for "various expenses"; actually, some special effects scenes were shot in his house. Similarly, said papers make clear Bava's role in the conception of the story, as he is credited as scenarist while Freda appears as co-scriptwriter together with Filippo Sanjust, whose name is the only one that appears in the credits.

The scenes involving special effects bear Bava's mark distinctly. The impressive credit sequence features an ingenious mixture of glass mattes depicting a Mayan landscape, and notable use of depth-of-field; moreover, the depiction of an erupting volcano, accomplished through a "water tank" effect, is much more spectacular and suggestive than the one seen in the final sequence of *The Last Days of Pompeii* (*Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei*, 1959, Mario Bonnard), to which Bava only marginally contributed. Then, the moment when the last survivor of the expedition, Nieto, appears behind a mound of rocks at the film's beginning is a striking anticipation of Javutich's resurrection in *Black Sunday* (*La maschera del demonio*, 1960; interestingly, both roles are played by the same actor, Arturo Dominici). Similarly, the descent into Caltiki's subterranean cave predates the sequence where Kruvajan and Gorobec discover Asa's grave. On top of that, as noted by Bava scholar Alberto Pezzotta, the use of the zoom (still called "Pan-Cinor") is pioneering in Italian cinema, and anticipates Roberto Rossellini's *Escape by Night* (*Era notte a Roma*, 1960).<sup>9</sup>

The reliance on gruesome details predates both directors' future works, and displays their confidence in the use of gore. During the monster's first attack, for instance, an expedition member named Bob (Daniele Vargas) is turned into a skeleton, and soon after we are treated to the gruesome sight of Max's arm being reduced to little more than bare bones,

with tendons exposed. As in *I vampiri*, the intention was to come up with a much gorier product than the foreign competitors of the period, and resulted in a V.M.16 rating in Italy.

Still, despite the director's scarce interest in the project, there are a number of elements in *Caltiki* that hint at Freda's sensibility and attitude towards moviemaking. The opening scenes, featuring an eerie Mexican setting recreated in the studio by way of *maquettes*, optical tricks and cardboard painted sets, display his taste for the exotic, highlighted in the extended tribal dance scene – choreographed by Paolo Gozzino – which Bob unwisely captures with his camera, causing the natives' wrath (like Oliver the butler [John Richardson] in Freda's swan song *Murder Obsession*, 1981, they believe that pictures might steal one's soul). What is more, the mélange of sci-fi and the supernatural in the script is in tune with Freda's own fascination with the occult, and allows the science fiction angle to be read in an offbeat way. Take, for instance, the references to the Mayan prophecies which predated, and foretold in cryptic oracle language, the same events which in the present day are the competence of scientists, like the passing of the comet which unleashes Caltiki's destructive power by raising the level of radioactivity on Earth. The result exudes uncanny similarities to H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu cycle as well as to the fascinating anthropological speculations of Nigel Kneale's TV serial *Quatermass and the Pit* (1958, unaired in Italy).

Freda and/or Bava came up with a number of interesting visual tricks, sometimes employing an effective use of depth-of-field. When Nieto turns up in the expedition camp, we first see him as a tiny little silhouette in the distance, before he suddenly shows up right before the camera; his shadow projected over the painted landscape in the background underlines the set's fakeness with an almost surreal effect. The scenes inside the cave with the pond of water where Caltiki hides are truly remarkable, and the sequence in which Bob immerses himself in the pool and discovers human remains on its bottom can be considered an early influence on the celebrated pool scene in Dario Argento's *Inferno* (1980). Another striking moment, inspired by *The Quatermass Xperiment's* silent filmed recording of the astronauts' unfortunate voyage, is the 8mm footage depicting Nieto and Ulmer's expedition found in Caltiki's cave, where the use of out-of-focus, hand-held shots surprisingly predates Ruggero Deodato's *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980) and the whole found-footage thread.

*Caltiki* was distributed in Italy in August 1959, by Lux Film, and performed rather poorly, grossing a little over 94 million lire. However, it found its way abroad: it was released theatrically in the US in September 1960, by Allied Artists, as *Caltiki the Immortal Monster*, and in the United Kingdom in 1962. It marked the last time Freda and Bava collaborated officially on a film project, not out of personal animosity but because of the latter's

8 Venturini, Simone, *Galatea S.p.A. (1952–1965): Storia di una casa di produzione cinematografica*, p. 205.

9 Pezzotta, Alberto (2013), *Mario Bava*, p. 31.

directorial career, which started the following year with *Black Sunday*. Nevertheless, Bava would occasionally show up on the set and help his friend out on uncredited duties, such as during the shooting of *The Seventh Sword* (*Le sette spade del vendicatore*, 1962). Freda's judgment of Bava as a filmmaker would always be complimentary: "He was a real artist in his experiments, even though his films are not always up to his talent. He loved cinematic adventure at a time where in Italy the directors of photography were content to apply the current dogmas."<sup>10</sup> Still, the two directors' approach towards the Gothic would show their sensibly different ways of conceiving the genre as well as the essence of the Fantastic itself.

Roberto Curti is the author of *Italian Crime Filmography 1968-1980* and *Italian Gothic Horror Films 1959-1969* as well as other books and essays on Italian cinema. He lives in Genoa, Italy.

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<sup>10</sup> Poindron, *Riccardo Freda*, p. 280.







# CALTIKI, MORE OR LESS

by Tim Lucas

For this release of *Caltiki the Immortal Monster*, Arrow Video has made the remarkable decision to present the film in its original 1.66:1 theatrical aspect ratio and also in the original open-aperture ratio of the best surviving element, a 35mm duplicate negative preserved at L'Immagine Ritrovata in Bologna, Italy.

It is by no means unprecedented for a film to be presented on home video in optional matted and unmatted formats, but Arrow's reasons for doing so are unique.

When James White, Arrow's Head of Restorations and Technical Services, was first informed of the *Caltiki* materials at L'Immagine Ritrovata, he was told the element had a screen ratio of 1.33:1. This led him to contact me, because the information was at odds with the 1.66:1 ratio I had specified for the film in my book about the film's cinematographer, special effects designer and *de facto* director, *Mario Bava – All the Colors of the Dark*. Naturally, I was immediately concerned that I had made an error; what I had listed was, in fact, a best guess based on what was a standard theatrical ratio even for films lensed at open aperture. James asked if I could take a look at the material and tell him if I saw anything that might challenge his preference to release the film unmatted – the better to appreciate the full field of Bava's special effects.

I wanted to see the duplicate negative myself for different reasons. As I told disc producer Michael Mackenzie, I had never seen a copy of *Caltiki* that wasn't overly dark and lacking in visual detail. Not even the recent (2012) Italian DVD from NoShame Releasing, which utilised an Italian source, had shown any improvement in this area, leading me to wonder if Bava hadn't deliberately kept things dark to conceal how the puppetry of the heaps of tripe that were Caltiki was accomplished.

Even in its raw form, before the magic of digital restoration was brought to bear on it, the dupe negative proved bright and beautiful. However, it also contained another surprise

of (I think) equal importance. Though the dupe neg did expose the full frame, I couldn't help noticing that it contained an abundance of footage that had been hard-matted in the camera *to enforce* a theatrical aspect ratio of 1.66:1. So the speculation of my book proved well-founded, but it didn't quite explain why the image would alternately appear matted or unmatted, seemingly without rhyme or reason.

This demanded closer attention.

I had learned, while researching my book, that Bava began hard-matting his films when he began working in the so-called "SuperPanoramico" ratio of 1.85:1, around the time of *Planet of the Vampires* (*Terrore nello spazio*, 1965). This helped him to exert total control over their intended composition when they were shown in theatres. However, in the case of *Caltiki*, the special effects shots preserved on the dupe negative are *unmatted*.

As we know, *Caltiki's* original director, Riccardo Freda (working under the pseudonym Robert Hamton), abandoned the picture in the midst of principal photography, leaving the balance of the schedule in Bava's capable hands. In later interviews, he more or less admitted this had been his intention all along, to trick his talented friend into becoming a director. This known fact offers us one possible explanation for the bicentric framing of the negative: it may have served as an editorial guide as to who shot what.

Close study of the dupe neg shows that the matted content consists entirely of master shots and cutaways that were shot on studio sets with actors – exactly the sort of thing Freda would have addressed in the early stages of production. Since Freda left the film at some point (according to one interview, about two weeks before the end of principal photography), Bava would have taken over as director and likely continued shooting with the hard matting in place. That said, we know that Bava was in charge of the special effects filming, and the dupe neg presents nearly all of the effects shots *without* matting. (The only exceptions are the exterior shots featuring glass matte effects, such as the opening panorama of the Mayan totems, which were shot during production with the occasional interplay of actors – as in the later shot when Nieto [Arturo Dominicci] is shown passing through this same area.) Because the effects scenes are otherwise unmatted, it seems reasonable to believe that Bava was responsible for all of the unmatted content, which extends to a bit more than just the special effects shots.

For example, during the scenes in the underground cavern where Bob (Daniele Vargas) first catches sight of *Caltiki* while scuba diving, the matte bars come and go. They are absent during the underwater shots, then present during the cave interiors showing the lake itself, and absent again during the shots obviously filmed in the actual cavern location.

This information helps to expose the fact that the shots featuring the lake were filmed on a soundstage at Titanus-Appia Studios (formerly Scalera Film) and cleverly matched to the location site with Bava's mastery of background projections and split-screen photography. Thus, the fluctuating matte bars are showing us what was shot in studio and what was added later, most likely by Bava himself.

In the laboratory scenes featuring Professor Rodriguez (Vittorio André), the dupe negative reveals that all of the actor's close-ups are unmatted. Ditto the inserted shots of hands picking up the scattered photographs of the comet Arsinòë. Here the matte bars suggest that whoever directed this scene (Freda or Bava) failed to obtain the necessary coverage for the scene to play well. Such a result would be both in keeping with Freda's preference for sustained, frieze-like master shots and also with a fledgling director still learning the ropes.

It would fall within the purview of the film's editor – in this case, Mario Serandrei (*Obsession*, *Fabiola*, and numerous earlier projects for both Bava and Freda) – to point out to his director what was still needed for a troublesome scene to cut together properly, and reshoots would be scheduled. This would also support the conjecture that Bava was responsible for the unmatted insert showing Fielding (John Merivale) is arrested by the Mexican police for speeding to his wife's rescue, the scene in the sheriff's office is matted for the master shot at the scene's beginning and end, but is interrupted by a closer, unmatted two-shot when Fielding produces his identity papers. This insert is also remarkable for a noticeably richer adjustment of the lighting, proving it filmed at a different time.

During the film's fiery climax, almost entirely unmatted, Fielding's rescue of his wife Elena (Didi Perego) and daughter from an upstairs window is shown full-frame, suggesting another post-production patch filmed on a soundstage. The only matted material in this sequence is a limited number of genuine night exteriors featuring the acting leads and some shots of stuntmen wielding flame throwers.

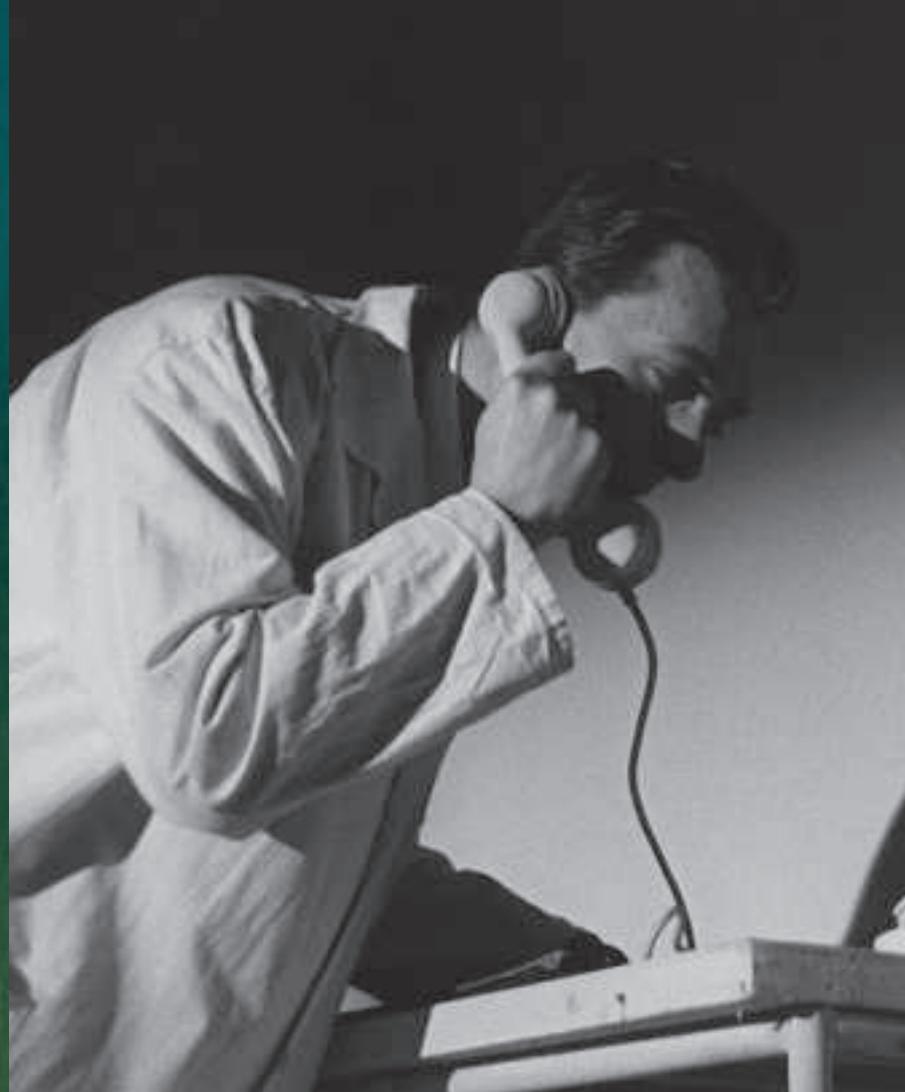
As James White cautioned me, because this element is a copy of the original camera negative, there is every chance that these mattes are anomalies of the copy – but, after subjecting the birthmarks of this element to every rational argument I can think of, I feel there is simply too much logic behind their placement for them to be random or accidental.

Fortunately, *Caltiki* isn't a very long film so it doesn't pose too much of a data-storage problem to make both versions available, along with everything else, on a single Blu-ray Disc. We realize that most people want only to be entertained, and the 1.66:1 version provides exactly what the makers of this film wanted us to see – the mattes imposed on the full-aperture version prove this. The unmatted version is more for the connoisseur, the

armchair historian. At the very least, it will treat you to a more generous view of Bava's remarkable special effects than has ever been granted before. But *Caltiki* is rarely discussed without its mixed parentage also being discussed, and this intriguing "look behind the curtain", as it were, lays bare the hammered nails of the film's carpentry. I believe it stands to enrich our appreciation of how much Mario Bava did to make this orphaned project the cult favourite that it is.

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Tim Lucas is the author of the Saturn Award-winning *Mario Bava – All the Colors of the Dark*, available from [www.videowatchdog.com](http://www.videowatchdog.com).





## ABOUT THE RESTORATION

*Caltiki the Immortal Monster* (*Caltiki il mostro immortale*) was restored by Arrow Films and is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.66:1 with mono sound.

All restoration work was carried out at L'Immagine Ritrovata, Bologna. As the original camera negative for this film has been lost, an original 35mm combined dupe negative was deemed to be the best known element in existence. This material was scanned in 2K resolution on a pin-registered Arriscan with a wetgate and was graded on Digital Vision's Nucoda Film Master.

Thousands of instances of dirt, debris and scratches were removed through a combination of digital restoration tools. Overall image stability and instances of density fluctuation were also improved.

The original Italian mono soundtrack was transferred from the dupe negative using the Sondor OMA/E with COSP Xi2K technology to minimise optical noise and produce the highest quality results possible. There are times in which audio synchronisation will appear slightly loose against the picture, due to the fact that the soundtracks were recorded entirely in post-production. This is correct and as per the film's original theatrical release.

Restoration Supervised by James White, Arrow Films  
Restoration Services: L'Immagine Ritrovata, Bologna

Original film and audio elements and reference materials made available for these restorations by Intramovies.

Special Thanks: Gilles Barberis, Valeria Bigongiali, Julia Mettenleiter, Alessia Navantieri, Caterina Palpaceli, Davide Pozzi, Elena Tammaccaro, Giandomenico Zappa / L'Immagine Ritrovata

Paola Montavani / Intramovies

l'immagine  
ritrovata  
film restoration  
& conservation



## FURTHER VIEWING

The visual and technical artistry of *Caltiki* cinematographer, effects artist and co-director Mario Bava is represented in a range of titles available now from Arrow Video, including **5 DOLLS FOR AN AUGUST MOON, BLOOD AND BLACK LACE** and **THE GIRL WHO KNEW TOO MUCH**.

## PRODUCTION CREDITS

**Disc and Booklet Produced by** Michael Mackenzie  
**Executive Producers** Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni  
**Technical Producer** James White  
**Production Assistant** Liane Cunje  
**QC Manager** Nora Mehenni  
**Authoring** David Mackenzie  
**Subtitling** The Engine House  
**Artist** Graham Humphreys  
**Design** Obviously Creative

## SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Ewan Cant, Roberto Curti, Michele De Angelis, Kat Ellinger, Steve Fenton, Troy Howarth, Graham Humphreys, Peter Jilmstad, Stephen Jones, Sigrid Larsen, Tim Lucas, Kim Newman, Anthony Nield, Jon Robertson

*Caltiki* photocomic kindly provided by Uwe Huber



AV086 / FCD1452