

## Film Criticism

### *Danger: Diabolik!*

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This image should be enough to inform the reader that a plot synopsis would simply not do. Mario Bava's masterpiece translation of a wildly popular Italian comic book goes beyond the camp of the 1960's *Batman* and exceeds the static eroticism of the later *Barbarella* (where this star, John Phillip Law plays Pygar the blind angel).

The sweep of these arched eyebrows describe the arc of the plot driven episodes of this anti-hero fighting both the cops and the robbers. The story line

whipsaws between both camps as they seek to ensnare the hooded threat. Diabolik is not a law unto himself, he has no concept of law at all. When the government attempts to put a price on his head, he destroys the institutions of government by blowing up their revenue offices. His love and partner, Eva, needs only to express a wish for some fist sized emerald or a ruby necklace to inspire him to create a masterpiece of crime. He clearly enjoys not only the chase, but being chased. The feats of the director, Mario Bava, are legendary in this inspired film. When Dino De Laurentiis gave him a budget of \$3 Million, Bava barely spent more than 10%. His economy came from years of model design and techniques of combining painted masks of sets that even \$30 Million couldn't buy. The results are a lush Technicolor dreamset of the imagination. The earth opens up to reveal elevators for cars; foundries explode molten gold; buildings topple; bridges collapse beneath express trains; Diabolik evades a cordon of armed guards to climb only what could be described as the sheer wall of an ancient castle's turret.

There is nothing to redeem this movie except to observe how faithful it is to the original source, a comic book. This seems to be a veiled expression of contempt, and yet every frame of the movie acknowledges the style and format of the comic book as an expression of art. It can be dismissed as camp, and yet it never mocks itself, a principle commodity of camp. *Danger: Diabolik!* certainly presses the envelope of style and of a style that is the hallmark of the mid-60s. Fortunately it never calcifies to becoming a simple museum display.