

Modulator

If you hear the sound, it is too late.

Intrigued by a found covert listening device, Guy and Enola set out to solve a mystery. Strange wiring, hidden recordings, a boy witness, and an eerie modulation noise are clues to past murders, but time is running short as an escaped lunatic is also on the loose. Will they uncover the secrets of the past, or will they become the next victims?

A new giallo in digital and print.

Excerpt from Modulator:

Hideaway

Autumn 1977

High above the Shenandoah Valley, an ominous wind blew through the woods that surrounded a log and stone cabin built into the side of a mountain. Only a lone, gravel drive led to its upper half and an L-shaped deck, while the bottom had the feel of an exposed cellar under the night sky. Facing the valley and unseen peaks, the cabin was built by bootleggers as a hideaway and had become a hideaway again. Isolated, it stood alone, bracing against a coming storm. Light danced in one of its windows on high.

Eva Rossi, clad only in a negligee—seductive yet vulnerable—left the window. Candle in hand, she walked to her antique dressing table, trading the candle for a brush. Light flickered at her reflection in the mirror.

Why have I ended up in this place? Carlo promised so much more: jewels, parties, high society, but all I got is this. I am a tenuta signora (a kept lady), sitting in the dark in this Dio abbandonato (God forsaken) place.

Eva brushed hard at a tangle in her hair, emphasizing her displeasure. The wind howled and the isolated cabin creaked. Eva shivered and stood, setting her brush aside.

Eva spoke in Italian, “Hai trovato la scatola luminosa?”

No reply came from the darkness. Carlo was supposed to be fixing the lights. Something was wrong. More than the place, it had to be about her lover’s business. Eva hated herself for being drawn to gregarious men—men like Carlo Durante—who held power. More so, she hated the attachment of a child she had to this man. Now there was no easy escape.

Eva tread barefoot across the wooden floor, crossing a fireplace that was down to embers. The spacious living room seemed empty, yet it was deceiving in its hollowness. A shadow crossed, and Eva jumped.

“Who’s there?” Eva held the candle out like a torch, revealing little.

A pitter patter of feet crossed her soundscape. Eva stepped forward slowly, her eyes on a closed door. She reached out to turn the knob, opening the door to the yawning maw of a pitch black staircase. The candle gave little light, and the descent was unnerving. Steps creaked under each of her delicate footfalls as she entered the bottom darkness to notice another door, open just a crack.

“Non sta dormendo,” Eva said in a low voice to comfort herself. *The boy never sleeps.*

The electric lights returned in a flash of white that faded to a dim view of the lower floor of the cabin’s interior. Eva turned away from the slightly open door and walked deeper into the half-light of a large rustic room. Wax dripped and burned her hand. Rashly, she blew the candle out and set it down on an end table.

“Carlo, you are scaring me,” Eva said, feeling out of sorts.

An audible click sounded off, leading into a high-frequency noise. The modulation of its feedback spiral slowly rose in pitch.

Eva’s eyes widened as she looked around in rising terror. “Who’s there?”

A fallen lamp, on the far side of the room, began flashing, creating a strobing pattern in time to the crescendo of noise.

Eva tread with caution. Unnoticed, a different door slowly opened behind her. The intermittent light highlighted a pair of sprawled legs on the floor, while each of Eva’s steps revealed more of a body hidden behind a shadowy divan.

“Dio Mio! Carlo!” Eva put up a hand to cover her mouth as Carlo Durante’s bloody face came in and out of view. A gash parted his rough and handsome bronze features. Accusing eyes stared into the distance.

A shadow spoke, in a dark voice, over the noise, “Deceiver... you knew, Eva, and you did nothing.”

Eva breathed in deeply as she frantically turned around to see no one.

The modulation noise amped up another level, and the shadow revealed itself to her.

“It can’t be you,” Eva said in shock. She recognized the face but could not place it exactly. *È un capo, un sicario, o aspetta... un agente?* The who came to her and a fresh shock washed over her in a cold wave.

Magnetic tape spun inside the handheld tape deck. The modulation valleyed and peaked while Eva stepped away, blood near her bare feet.

Almost sad, the shadow said, “No time for mercy.”

“It’s not my fault. No! Non lo dirò. I’ll leave,” Eva begged.

A black gloved hand tightened its grip in the leather strap of a ski pole

while a second one flicked a lever on the pole’s side with a pneumatic click.

Light reflected close on Eva’s eyes from the flash of a blade. “Deceiver,” the shadow hissed.

“No!” Eva held up an arm to block. The moment flashed, in her mind,

to a final coherent thought. *Dov’è il bambino?*

The pole’s reach was far, and its blade sliced deep into her palm. The

modulation looped to a higher pitch. Blood flowed freely. Another jagged swipe crisscrossed Eva’s face, her scream caught in a torn, split lip. She turned to flee and slipped in Carlo’s pooled blood and fell hard. No words came as her body shook from the frenzy of the attack—one that ended in a straight puncture of her heart. An out of focus face stared down as Eva’s vision was a blur, and the only feature clear in her dying moments was one icy blue eye.

A black gloved finger hit the stop button on the portable tape deck, changing the high-pitched modulation sound into an eerie silence.

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