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Desecration

1999 | MOVIE

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Reviewed by **Maitland McDonagh**

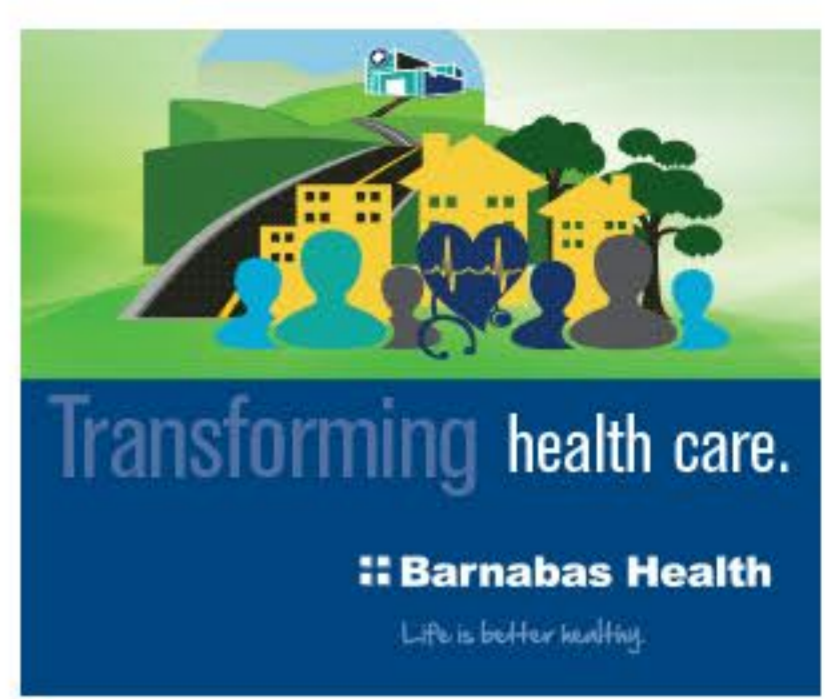
Rating: ★★★★★

A wildly ambitious first feature whose lush visuals belie the fact that it was shot on 16mm for a mere \$150,000. Fifteen-year-old Bobby Rullo (Danny Lopes) got off to a rough start in life. As a four-year-old he saw his abusive mother (Christie Sanford) die of an asthma attack, and has been raised by his distant father (Salvatore Paul Piro) and ailing Grandma Matilda (Irma St. Paule). Now a student at a forbidding Catholic school, Danny is accidentally responsible for the death of a nun (also Sanford): The radio controls on a model plane Danny is flying on the school grounds go dead, and the toy plunges to earth, fatally striking the victim on its way down. Not only is Danny, a good Italian Catholic boy, thoroughly traumatized, but the nun's death seems to have opened the very gates of Hell, letting loose spectral clowns, nuns and God knows what else. Or are Danny's nightmarish visions simply manifestations of his guilt and the long-repressed trauma occasioned by his late mother's mistreatment? Only Grandma Matilda seems to have any idea what's going on, but she's powerless to help Bobby. Paterson, NJ-born writer-director Dante Tomaselli first made *Desecration* as a short film, then expanded the idea into this lavishly imagined feature, which was completed while he was still in his 20s. An enormously promising debut, it's clearly more influenced by the more baroque excesses of European — especially Italian — exploitation filmmaking than by the American variety, which favors straightforward narrative and cheaply efficient art direction. Tomaselli's film is sometimes genuinely nightmarish — bloody nuns, killer clowns and a foggy graveyard; what a combination! — and always visually striking, not to mention genuinely creepy. If the narrative errs on the side of being convoluted, at least it's never stupid or clichéd — originality really does count, a lesson lost on many genre filmmakers but which Tomaselli clearly took to heart. Hollywood production designer Alfred Sole, who's thanked in the film's credits, directed and co-wrote the minor horror classic *ALICE, SWEET ALICE* (1978); he's Tomaselli's cousin, and Tomaselli's father, who owned a bridal store, provided *ALICE, SWEET ALICE*'s communion dresses.

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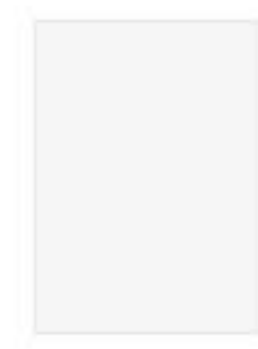

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Cast & Crew

-  **IRMA ST. PAULE**
Grandma Matilda
-  **CHRISTIE SANFORD**
Mary/Sister Madeline
-  **DANNY LOPES**
Bobby Rullo
-  **SALVATORE PAUL PIRO**
Mr. Rullo
-  Brother Nicholas
-  Father O'Leary

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