

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Summer 1587. Triora; a wealthy borough on the border of France and Italy, a defence stronghold for the area. Two years of failed harvest have left the villagers hungry and irritable, and the council of elders convinced that a bunch of women are responsible. Housewives, healers and midwives have practiced their skills in these mountains for centuries, even openly calling themselves witches, but now they are accused of convening with the Devil and putting their community in danger. Criminal charges are brought against them and the Inquisition sends its emissaries from Albenga, the local diocese, to investigate. Whilst the accused are a bunch of penniless women nobody complains but when the wealthy are implicated, the land-owners in the council of elders, unwilling to see their wives, mothers and sisters accused, stop the trials. In January 1588, the inquisitors quit Triora, leaving tens of women still imprisoned. The village begs the government in Genova to step in. Genova sends a special commissioner - Giulio Scribani - to investigate. Scribani is a fanatic, obsessed with eradicating the Devil and makes it his personal mission to cleanse Triora. He sends the imprisoned to Genova and enlarges his rounds of accusation, torture and confession, though Genova itself has doubts, finding the accusations too numerous to be true. Officials sent to check on Scribani confirm his excesses, but wash their hands of the women, claiming the matter to be the responsibility of the Church. Scribani continues his deadly work. The Church does nothing until it excommunicates Scribani (a decision later reversed) and finally closes the trials, on the 28th of August 1589. The remaining women are released. Only one - Franchetta Borelli - returns to Triora. The others vanish in time, lost to history and posterity. What really motivated the events in Triora? Like in Salem 100 years later, conjuring with the Devil had little to do with the accusations brought against the accused. Only 300 years after the fact does one man, Michele Rosi, scrutinise the records in Genova's Regional Archives, and finds explanations are more as tragic as they are believable. This is a tale of greed, power and fear. In short, of human evil.

Today Triora capitalizes on its legacy of witchcraft, with black cats, crones on broomsticks, and many a moon and star seen in shop windows. The name of the village, from the Latin *tria ora*, meaning 'three mouths,' echoes those of Cerberus, the infernal hound, who is drawn on the village's coat of arms. Considering the destiny of many small boroughs in the mountains of Italy, empty today thanks to mass emigration, one can imagine that the 16th century witches of Triora really did save it from oblivion.