

XTRO: LIMITED EDITION BOX SET is released on **UK Blu-ray** June 18th courtesy of *Second Sight*.

REVIEWED BY DANIEL GOODWIN

THE LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT

THE FILM: Described as one of the grisliest and nastiest films of the 1970's – or ever – *THE LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT* is one of Wes Craven's more brutal horror features. The film follows a couple of young women who are held captive by a group of sadistic convicts. The film is renowned for its sharp turn of events, where the kidnappers become the trapped after the girls' parents discover what they've done.

The film was shot for a measly \$90,000 budget and, boy, does it show. The film's visual aesthetic is equally as grimy as the thematic content; it's shakily and inconsistently shot with uneven angles making way for close-ups and unsteady zooms. The scenes chop and change how they please, awkwardly shifting from the girls' torment to their parents making a cake, before cutting back to the convicts or "horny old pigs" as they call themselves. *THE LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT* is overwhelmingly amateurish and the events on-screen appear all the more disturbing for it. Like a type of twisted, uncomfortable documentary, it's undeniably difficult to watch and plain hideous, because it feels and looks so damn real.

The moments of torture are straight-up awful and I can't deny the impact they have on a first watch, but it's hard to take seriously a film that does not appear to be doing the same for itself. There is a strange tone carried throughout the film that borderlines on comedic, where the horror of what's on-screen is handled almost humorously. The uncaring air becomes the most shocking part of a film that features rape, abuse, murder and deadly revenge, and that's a problem.

This really is a strange film. It's horrid, but not quite horrid enough. It's not funny, but you feel like you want to laugh at it. You'll remember how icky you felt when you watched it, but it's hard to pinpoint moments that are truly, horrifically memorable. It's a film filled with oppositions; men vs women, revenge vs murder, innocence vs the corrupt, but since 1972, we've seen better, ickier, nastier and more brutal horror films that tackle similar subjects. Sure, they owe a lot to this Craven original and its unabashed exploration of every young woman's nightmare, but this is far from the best of the genre and pales in comparison to Craven's later works like *THE HILLS HAVE EYES* and *A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET*.



All in all, *THE LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT* doesn't manage to land the gigantic leap it tries so hard to make. It's simple and exploitative, something that would have surely scarred audiences 30-or-so years ago and it is a striking directorial debut, but now, it's not so impressive. Maybe it's the non-stop juxtaposition, where chirpy, upbeat songs by David Hess are followed or accompanied by the film's most violent moments and shocking imagery. It takes away the shock and brings the audience back to the harsh reality; that this is only a movie. Only a movie. Only a movie. Only a movie...

Rating: 🧠🧠🧠🧠

SPECIAL FEATURES: No extras were supplied on the review disc.

THE LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT Limited Edition [Blu-ray] is out now courtesy of *Arrow Video*.

REVIEWED BY JESSY WILLIAMS

DEATH SMILES ON A MURDERER

THE FILM: Joe D'Amato's *DEATH SMILES ON A MURDERER* is a chilling horror and stars Ewa Aulin as a young girl named Greta. After dying in childbirth she is brought back to life by her brother Franz and it's not long before she uses her rebirth to get revenge on those who wrong her. One part gothic horror one part supernatural revenge, *DEATH SMILES ON A MURDERER* is not afraid to confuse viewers with its broken timeline whilst weaving a web of mystery that ends with a mighty shock.

As director D'Amato's ambitious voyage into deeply taboo subjects will no doubt remain as shocking today as it was upon its release. But all incest, adultery and savage battery aside, *DEATH SMILES ON A MURDERER* is an incredibly unnerving watch. Harnessing its power to shock and

stun his audience, D'Amato demonstrates his ability as a filmmaker in leaps and bounds. Combined with unforgettably eerie visuals and a deeply engrossing plot, he has delivered a film which embraces the usual tropes of Italian Gothic cinema to become an intense slice of European cinema.

The cast might not be up to par with the rest of the film but there's no denying the presence that Aulin holds when she appears on screen. As Greta she oozes charm and elegance and makes it easy for the audience to get behind her character. Joining Aulin on screen is Luciano Rossi as Greta's brother. One of the films most despicable characters despite only appearing in a handful of scenes.

In the role, Rossi is completely unlikable as the character commits some revolting acts. Adding to the evil of the film is Sergio Doria as Walter Von Ravensbruck, a man who leaves Greta to die alone in childbirth, and Angela Bo who appears as Eva von Ravensbruck (the daughter in law of Walter) whose jealousy of Greta is dangerous. After watching what poor Greta goes through it's no wonder what happens next.

Unsurprisingly, as an ensemble, the cast do a decent job to keep the film ticking along (some more than others) so thankfully D'Amato's efforts elsewhere to deliver a solid thriller more than makes up for it. So, if you don't mind the odd occasion of sexual and gratuitous violence combined with badly aged gore effects, you should certainly check out *DEATH SMILES ON A MURDERER*.

Rating: 🧠🧠🧠🧠

SPECIAL FEATURES: This brand new presentation from Arrow Films includes a brand new 2K restoration from the original camera negative and comes complete with the original Italian and English soundtracks. Not only does the film look incredibly crisp but it comes with an optional audio commentary by writer and critic Tim Lucas. As if that wasn't enough, fans can look forward to D'Amato Smiles on Death, an in-depth interview with the director of the film and a video essay titled Smiling on the Taboo. Both features offer plenty of insight into the film from personal experiences being on set and insight from an educational standpoint too. They are both make for compelling viewing. Wrapping up the disc's amazing special features are a series of original trailers and stills from the film.

Rating: 🧠🧠🧠🧠

DEATH SMILES ON A MURDERER is out now on **UK Blu-ray** courtesy of *Arrow Video*.

REVIEWED BY JON DICKINSON