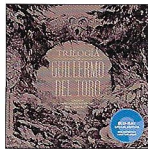


Niro), and Supporting Actress (Foster), *Taxi Driver* is presented here in a sparkling 40th anniversary edition, with extras including a new Q&A with key cast and crew members, audio commentaries, behind-the-scenes segments, a "Taxi Driver Stories" featurette with NYC cabbies, storyboard/film comparisons, and photo galleries. Highly recommended. **Editor's Choice.** (R. Pitman)

### Trilogía de Guillermo del Toro ★★½

Criterion, 319 min., in Spanish & English w/English subtitles, R, DVD: 5 discs, \$99.99; Blu-ray: 3 discs, \$99.99



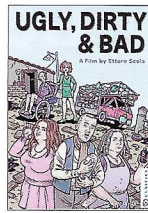
Mexican filmmaker Guillermo del Toro has brought a distinctive sensibility to horror cinema since his debut feature, *Cronos* (1993), which offered an alchemic twist on vampire lore and the costs of eternal life, presented with a mix of clockwork devices and weirdly organic imagery. This box set collects all three of del Toro's Spanish-language films, which afforded him greater creative control in exchange for smaller budgets than his American productions. *Cronos*, a clever take on the vampire film grounded in morality play and human drama, took del Toro to Hollywood, but he went to Spain to make *The Devil's Backbone* (2001), an elegant and harrowing ghost story set in a remote, makeshift orphanage during the final days of the Spanish Civil War, as greedy thieves converge to search for hidden gold. Del Toro uses stark, bold, and intense imagery, but still finds tenderness and even innocence amidst the savagery. Both titles have been previously available on DVD and Blu-ray from Criterion, but *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) makes its Criterion debut here in a beautiful edition. It's an elemental *Alice in Wonderland* tale set in Francisco Franco's reign-of-terror Spain, circa 1944, as young Ofelia (Ivana Baquero) discovers a magic world of faeries and an underworld of monsters. Del Toro's fantastical creatures have a primal, earthy quality and he reaches deep into the mythological subconscious and unadulterated horror of early fairy tales for his primal visions. *Pan's Labyrinth* won Oscars for cinematography, art direction, and makeup. Extras on this handsome set (the films are also available separately) include audio commentaries, interviews with del Toro, a "Welcome to the Bleak House" video tour of del Toro's personal memorabilia, a short film by del Toro, audition tapes, deleted scenes, storyboards, animated comics, a 100-page book, and more. Highly recommended. (S. Axmaker)

### Ugly, Dirty & Bad ★★★

Film Movement, 116 min., in Italian w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$29.95, Blu-ray: \$39.95

In Ettore Scola's 1976 comedy, four generations of an impoverished extended family are packed into a squalid one-room hovel on the outskirts of Rome. As the title suggests,

there's nothing sentimental in this satirical portrait of a clan at the bottom rungs of society. Patriarch Giacinto (Nino Manfredi) was half-blinded in an industrial accident and he hoards the one-million-lire insurance settlement, refusing to spend any of it on his family—a bunch of hustlers, prostitutes, small-time crooks, and layabouts who are all trying to pry the money from him. Giacinto is just as awful as they are; at one point he hires a buxom prostitute, lavishes gifts upon her, and then takes her back home to share his bed with his bitter wife. And that's when the family hatches a plot to murder Giacinto (at his grandchild's christening, no less) and split the dough. This is not the sympathetic portrait of Italy's poor witnessed in the neorealist films of the 1940s and '50s or the socially progressive dramas of the '60s but rather a raucous, raunchy comedy set in a village built out of castoffs and scavenged junk on a hill (overlooking a prosperous Rome) where the inhabitants are in perpetual arguments and screaming matches. The energy and black humor sustain this edgy film, which ultimately paints a portrait of a pitiless cycle of anger, abuse, and codependency that no one escapes. Scola won the Best Director award at Cannes for *Ugly, Dirty & Bad*, which is presented here with extras including audio commentary by film scholar Richard Peña. Aimed at fans of satire and foreign cinema that pushes the boundaries of good taste, this is recommended. (S. Axmaker)



### Vamp ★★★

Arrow, 94 min., R, Blu-ray/DVD Combo: \$29.99



The vampire genre got a revisionist infusion of fresh blood in the 1980s with New Wave style and attitude in films such as *Fright Night*, *The Lost Boys*, and *Vampire's Kiss*. Director Richard Wenk's 1986 minor cult entry *Vamp* features a mix of comedy, sexy horror, and urban adventure, as college boys Keith (Chris Makepeace) and AJ (Robert Rusler) travel to the big city to hire a stripper for a frat party. The pair end up in a club for vampires where the star attraction (singer-dancer Grace Jones) feeds upon loners who are lured into the venue. When she snacks on AJ (mistakenly pegged as being solo), the club tries to cover their tracks by resurrecting AJ as a bloodsucker and having him take out Keith. Dedee Pfeiffer is a rookie stripper who teams up with Keith when things get weird, while Gedde Watanabe and Billy Drago costar. A lesser entry in the pantheon of '80s horror comedies, borrowing from such films as *After Hours* (the crazy cascade of disasters that befall Keith) and *An American Werewolf in London* (the buddy relationship between human Keith and vampire AJ), *Vamp* adds some neon MTV lighting and

a juvenile sense of humor. Memorable only for the mesmerizing presence of Jones, who brings a feral presence to her role, *Vamp* is presented in a Blu-ray/DVD Combo set with extras including a retrospective documentary, Wenk's 1979 short film "Dracula Bites the Big Apple," behind-the-scenes rehearsal footage, a blooper reel, and a photo gallery. Optional. (S. Axmaker)

### Vampire Ecstasy/Sin You Sinners ★★★

Film Movement, 176 min., not rated, DVD: \$29.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99



Writer-director Joseph W. Sarno (1921-2010), a pioneer in the sexploitation genre, gained attention in 1964 with *Sin in the Suburbs* (which focused on sexually promiscuous housewives) and has more recently won a considerable cult following. The second film in this double-feature set, *Sin You Sinners* (1963), is actually credited to director Anthony Farrar, but Sarno apparently took over in mid-shoot. The transfer is from the sole surviving print, and while it suffers from almost constant streaking and some crude edits, the loss is not that great: the plot, centering on an aging exotic dancer (June Colbourne) who uses a magical amulet to control those around her—including audiences—is nonsensical, while the threadbare production values are of Ed Wood quality, with risible dialogue and atrocious acting. Sarno wrote and directed the 1973 *Vampire Ecstasy* (aka *Veil of Blood* and *The Devil's Plaything*), which is a substantial effort, although still obviously low-budget. Once again melding supernatural elements with plenty of sexual titillation, the story centers on efforts by a grim housekeeper at Castle Varga to bring a vampire countess back from the dead, using a trio of voluptuous Varga heiresses as tools. The plan—involving many nighttime orgies that feature lots of female nudity—is interrupted by the arrival of a brother-and-sister team of vampire-hunters who become embroiled in the proceedings. The storytelling is not particularly coherent, but Sarno does effectively invest the film with a lurid atmosphere that is accentuated by a garish color palette. Extras include an audio commentary, interviews, and a booklet. Optional. (F. Swietek)

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