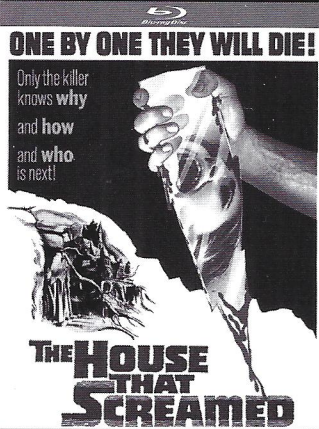


THE HOUSE THAT SCREAMED

Directed by Narciso Ibáñez Serrador
(1970) Scream Factory Blu-ray



In the 19th century French countryside, Mademoiselle Fournau (Lilli Palmer; *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, 1971) runs a remote boarding school for troubled girls. Everything is proper and precise, and the icy headmistress brooks no foolishness, dispensing punishment such as imprisonment and lashing for the slightest deviation from her norm. New student Teresa (Cristina Galbó; *What Have You Done to Solange?*, 1972; *The Living Dead at Manchester Morgue*, 1974) is enrolled, and during her tour of the facilities is followed by a shadowy figure.

Teresa is well received by the other girls who inform her that five previous students have run away. It doesn't take Teresa long to learn the pecking order of the school, which begins and ends with Irene (Mary Maude; *Crucible of Terror*, 1971). Irene serves as a combination of teacher's pet and enforcer for Mme. Fournau, while simultaneously lording over the other girls by arranging an illicit rendezvous with the local woodsman each month. Also in the brooding manor is Luis (John Moulder-Brown; *Vampire Circus*, 1972), the pampered and oppressively overprotected teenage son of the headmistress. (The relationship between Mme. Fournau and Luis cannot help but call to mind the smothering affections of Pink's Mother in *Pink Floyd: The Wall* (1982).

Mme. Fournau forbids Luis to talk with any of the girls or even look at them, which, of course, is exactly what he does with his time. He spies on them as they shower (in their nightgowns, further emphasizing the repressed sexual tone), and for some time has held clandestine meetings with them. It isn't long before Teresa is stealing through the gloomy hallways, following in their footsteps. Irene discovers Luis and Teresa's meetings, and she uses the knowledge to bully and haze the new girl.

The number of missing girls increases and Mme. Fournau turns the school into even more of a prison than it already is, going so far as nailing the windows shut. But the missing girls didn't run away. They were murdered by the same shadowy assailant who trailed Teresa during her tour, and who is now locked inside the school with plenty of victims. Teresa must survive long enough to uncover the grisly secret in the attic and to identify the killer.

Directed by Narciso Ibáñez Serrador, a veteran of television writing and directing since 1957, *The House That Screamed* (original title: *la Residencia*) was his first feature film. "The Hitchcock of Spain" (as he is referred to in the supplemental material) would also go on to helm the controversial and disquieting *¿Quién puede matar a un niño?* (*Who Can Kill a Child?*, 1974), another excellent piece of Spanish cinema. Instead of the uneven, heavy-handed effort we might expect from a director in Serrador's position (transitioning from the small screen to the big screen), he proves he is more than capable of making the jump.

The film is an interesting mix of the gothic "old dark house" story and what would, before the decade was over, become the slasher subgenre. The elements of the gothic are obvious: a looming old house, females are in distress, creaky doors and furtive shadows, sinister characters, and a persistent sense of claustrophobia and repressed sexuality. Under Serrador's direction, these blend surprisingly well with the graphic onscreen violence and menacing killer—elements that would become the obligatory standard of stalk-and-slash films. He holds these disparate styles in tension with flair and restraint.

Serrador does not allow the film to descend into sleazy exploitation (which could easily have happened in any number of ways). There are suggestions of incest and lesbianism but they are never fully realized. They hang ghostlike in the background, uneasily permeating the environment without needing to be manipulated. *The House That Screamed* has the look and feel of a Hammer film from the same period. Sumptuous attention to detail, a billowy orchestral score, and the heavy tone of constrained feminine sexuality make it a close cousin to the best of Hammer. The film was influential on Dario Argento's *Suspria* (1977) as well as Juan Piquer Simón's far less classy guilty pleasure *Pieces* (1982).

The House That Screamed works and can be read as a statement on Spain under Federico Franco. Mme. Fournau is the obvious Fascist leader, imposing her unbending will on everyone around her. The repressed sexuality among the students echoes the same that was present in Spain at the time symbolic of the vast network of secret police that spied on Spanish citizens. And the Catholicism practiced by the inhabitants of the school reflects the only tolerated religion of Francoist Spain.

Scream Factory brings *The House That Screamed* to high definition for the first time. The Blu-ray includes two cuts of the film: an HD theatrical version (94 minutes) and a HD extended version (104 minutes). The additional scenes are in standard definition and contain some synch issues from the source material. In addition there is some warbling on the soundtrack in places, including the opening credits.

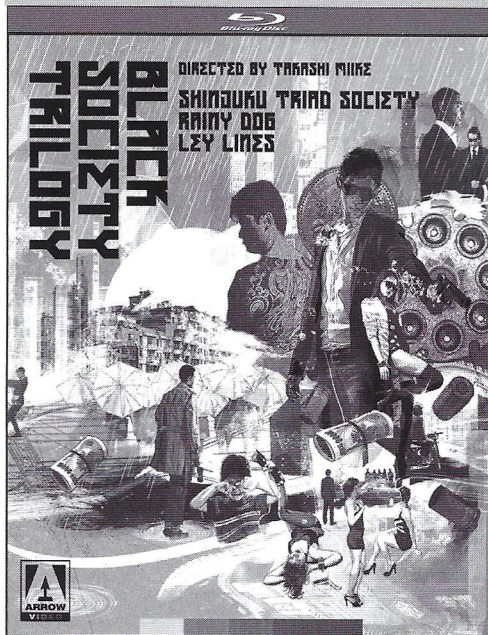
The film has an earthy color palette that doesn't give the high definition transfer a chance to pop. However, the upgrade brings so much more of the film into sharper focus. The most notable differences are between interior and exterior shots. Scenes shot in the studio are clean and bright; location shots are darker and grittier.

Extras include an extremely casual interview with John Moulder-Brown (6m, 12s; filmed in a restaurant at the 2011 Munich Film Festival) talking about his first "adult" role (he already had over 20 film appearances as a child by the time of *la Residencia*) and how the film made more money than *Gone With the Wind* in Spain. There's also an interview (12 m., 14s; conducted at the Festival of Fantastic Films in 2012) with British actress Mary Maude reflecting on her experiences filming in Spain. Additional materials include a theatrical trailer, television and radio spots, and a photo gallery. Language options are limited to English (with removable English subtitles).

J. Todd Kingrea

BLACK SOCIETY TRILOGY

Directed by Takashi Miike
(1995, 1997, 1999) Arrow Films Blu-ray



Genius and prolificacy are two states that can be embodied by one filmmaker, but not always at the same time. Takashi Miike is a prime example of this. To date, the pioneering auteur of Japanese extreme cinema has made 100 films spanning multiple genres. A workaday pro who directed 15 productions in just the years 2001 and 2002, (is that some kind of record?) Miike lives to shoot and shoots to kill. Some rounds in his continually reloading and firing directorial machine gun, if you will, have been blanks, while others have landed a bloody bullseye straight into the heads of viewers in search of shock, subversion and a cinematic vision that shares their sick sense of humor.

On the surface, it looks like Miike's *Black Society Trilogy*,

recently released as a box set by Arrow Video, represents a rare, "stars in alignment" moment in which a director's genius and prolificacy actually meet. The reality is only half-true: The trilogy's three films—*Shinjuku Triad Society*, *Rainy Dog* and *Ley Lines*—were in fact made in 1995, '97 and '99, respectively, and their stories, though similar in style and subject matter, do not overlap or take place within the same cinematic universe. Instead, what these three films about triad and yakuza gangsters prove is that the more movies Miike makes, the more apparent their links become, and the easier it becomes to look at them as one in the same.

The first film in the trilogy, *Shinjuku Triad Society* was widely considered to be Miike's coming-out party in the Japanese underground genre scene, as it called attention to itself as a harbinger of the director's patented melding of sadomasochistic violence and sexuality. Nominally a cat-and-mouse game between corrupt police detective Kiriya (Kippei Shiina) and vicious Taiwanese mob boss Wang, (Tomorowo Taguchi) the film follows the money trail left behind by the latter, all the while exposing the relative amorality of the former, who will do employ virtually any means—including theft, rape and murder—to achieve his objective end. Most potent in this introductory installment of Miike's trilogy is its establishment of the utter nihilism that runs rampant in his depiction of various parts of Asia, from Japan to Taiwan. Further, Miike and Taguchi's characterization of Wang as a leader secure in his homosexuality yet oozing with machismo, here, hints at the socially attuned side of the director's sensibility that would grow in sophistication as he continued to expand his output.

Considerably more disciplined than its predecessor, the trilogy's second film, *Rainy Dog*, pits its antihero, a freelance hitman named Yuuji (Show Aikawa), against the unexpected responsibilities of fatherhood, as he reluctantly steps into a paternal role upon discovering that one of his forgotten one-night stands accidentally produced a son years ago. Again, nihilism—this time, manifested in the reckless abandon of Yuuji's promiscuity— informs the world of Miike's characters, though here the fabric stitched together by family prevents it from going unchecked.

The trilogy's final entry, *Ley Lines*, might be considered a blueprint for the off-beat jokiness that would abound Miike's work for years to come, and serving as a counterpoint of levity to the cold and bleak conditions of his filmic world. Turning its attention to the lives of three ethnically Chinese children struggling to assimilate in Japan, the film, like *Rainy Dog*, juxtaposes youthful innocence with the ugly, jaded figures of the criminal underworld to sharply contrast the dimensions of humanity inherent in each side of this proverbial yin and yang.

Arrow Video has presented this three-headed landmark of arterial arthouse genre film with meticulous care, contextualizing *Black Society Trilogy* with three Arrow Video's has presented this three-headed landmark of arterial arthouse genre film with meticulous care, contextualizing *Black Society Trilogy* with three authoritative feature commentaries by Tom Mes, resident expert and author of the Miike-centric book *Agitator*. In a 45-minute interview with Miike featured on each disc entitled "Into the Black," the filmmaker recalls his formative years as an artist, his major influences and, most notably, the essential crash course that working in V-Cinema (the Japanese direct-to-video industry) gave him in making films quickly, effectively and on the cheap. (Without this unique kind of preparation, one wonders whether Miike would have been able to complete, from a sheerly practical standpoint, even a fraction of the amount of achievements he has managed to add as incremental notches on his career-spanning belt.) Additionally, Aikawa comments on he and the director's creative chemistry in a separate 22-minute interview, adding some key observations that nicely supplement Miike's own thoughts on their production training ground in V-Cinema.

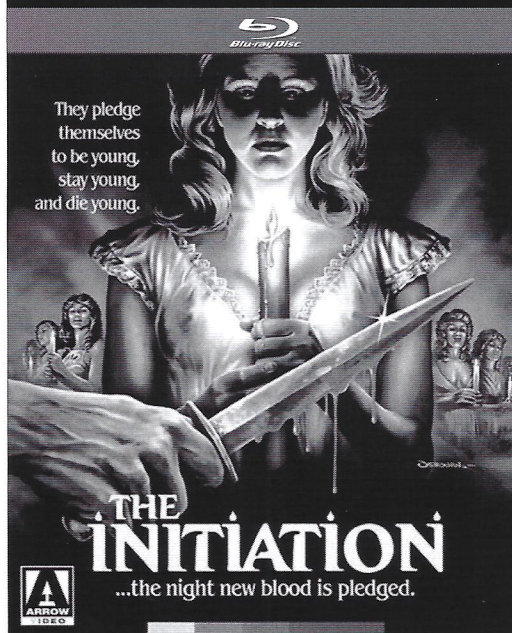
Arrow's 1080 high-def transfer suits the trilogy's rather soft lighting effects—which give one the impression of gazing at one's own reflection on wet pavement, or peering through a wet and foggy storefront window lit up by streetlights at nightfall—quite well, leaving little with which to find fault. The package's LPCM 2.0 stereo sound mix, too, reinforces the films' deft use of formal elements, which punctuate the aural dimensions of Miike's atmosphere with piercing gunfire and guttural violence that's staged and shot for impact.

The remarkable and, admittedly, perplexing thing about a director like Takashi Miike is that the frequency with which he makes new films raises slews of questions about what goes into his process that may never be answered—simply because someone who works this hard and this often likely does not allow himself the time to think step outside of himself and look at such activity with clinical detachment. However, this is precisely what makes Miike's work pulsate with energy and urgency, and *Black Society Trilogy* brilliantly crystallizes this fascinating paradox. Arrow Video has curated a collection of feature and supplemental material that admirably resists the opportunity to indulge in the trappings of Miike's over-the-top style and instead focuses on the director's substantive contributions to the many avenues of genre and representation that these three films traverse. The result is a worthwhile addition to your collection that hits its intended target without overstaying its welcome.

Max Weinstein

THE INITIATION

Directed by Larry Stewart
(1984) Arrow Films Blu-ray / DVD combo



In hindsight, it almost seems hard to believe that jocks, cheerleaders and the like had a monopoly on cool in the movies. Today a lack of sensitivity, casual misogyny and anti-geek attitudes are considered anathema to mainstream popularity more than they ever were (though there's still a long way to go.) But in 1984, campus Greek life was still such a one-way ticket to big-screen glory that *Revenge of the Nerds* was propping up its rituals as social misfits' sole shot at "redemption" from their miserable, pointless existence.

On the other hand, pledging a fraternity or a sorority in a horror film, even during an era in which people un-ironically took fashion cues from *The Official Preppy Handbook*, has always been a riskier proposition—one not without its pleasures but also one that might not promise a happy ending. Enter *The Initiation*.

Made four years after *Terror Train* and one year after *The House on Sorority Row*, director Larry Stewart's entry in the canon of '80s "sex = death" slashers announces its send-up of so-called "sisterhood for life" with the tongue-in-cheek incantation: "*Delta Rho Chi, never will die.*" (Of course, nearly every aspiring ΔPX

introduced here will die—hard—,but not before they repeat this chant so much that you'll have no choice but to say it out loud yourself, becoming the good little tool that the film's marketers hoped you be.) Centered on college student Kelly Fairchild's (Daphne Zuniga) bouts with a recurring nightmare and the pressures of her soon-to-be sorority's "Hell Week," *The Initiation* finds itself in that no-man's land between cult, camp and crock—a story so insipid and yet so mean-spirited toward its even more insipid characters that the line between satire and celebration of its one-two punch of humping and hazing could only be made less blurry if audiences wear beer goggles as they watch.

Still, curiously enough, *The Initiation* has a little more than a little in common with another '84 "dead teenager" flick about the terror of bad dreams. Read it and weep: This movie and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* have a lot in common—so much in common that you couldn't be blamed for wondering if one outright stole from the other's narrative playbook. (They were only released a month apart!) Like Nancy Thompson in Wes Craven's metaphysical masterpiece, Kelly's persistent nightmare features a very badly burned man who lurks around her childhood stomping grounds. Kelly's mother is a lot like Nancy's—unbalanced and always on edge, working hard to hide a long-kept secret from her increasingly troubled daughter. And, like the pseudoscientific pretense of *Nightmare*, *The Initiation* involves a belabored subplot in which Peter, (James Read) the graduate assistant in Kelly's psychology course, monitors her brain activity during REM sleep, spewing more Freudian clichés than a Woody Allen film in his quest to solve the analytical Rubik's cube of her puzzling dream.

Now with a full restorative treatment courtesy of Arrow Video on Blu-ray, *The Initiation's* newly polished, candy-coated color scheme compensates somewhat for its misfires, and the disc's extras provide some context on this slice of sleaze that might otherwise be doomed to vanish into the '80s ether. Along with one minute of extended footage that lengthens the film's already-pretty-damn-long party sequence, 54 minutes of interviews with screenwriter Charles Pratt, Jr. and actors Christopher Bradley and Joy Jones round out as definitive a conversation as you're likely to ever get on this nearly forgotten film. Pratt, whose father produced the original *Willard* in 1971, is eloquent and animated throughout his chat, and unabashedly reveals just how many things that *could* have gone wrong *did* go wrong during the shoot of the film—from a stalled shooting schedule, to an abrupt change of directors, to a lowered morale among the cast and crew and more. Bradley and Jones' discussions stress just how important the simple act of "showing up" was to being cast in their roles, underscoring the charming yet undeniably amateurish approach to filmmaking that's felt in nearly every frame of the film.

Though Arrow was unable to lock down any of the film's participating cast/crew members for a feature commentary track, the co-hosts of *The Hysteria Continues* podcast step up to do the honors. The unbridled enthusiasm for *The Initiation* they express throughout, coupled with a commendable attention to detail, is a reminder of one of the best qualities of cult cinephilia—an unwavering love of something subject to (and in this case, arguably worthy of) derision that takes precedent over the film itself and instead invites us to share in the spirit of its community of supporters.

Presented in an 1.85:1 aspect ratio on Arrow's dual-layer Blu-ray disc, *The Initiation's* visuals can't be accused, here, of looking chintzy. For all its flaws, this isn't the product of someone who doesn't know how to light a film, and some moments even evoke the cinematographic palette of Sergio Martino in his early years. The film's uncompressed, 16-bit monaural soundtrack is perfectly serviceable (a sufficient mix for a film not remotely interested in using sound to evoke mood, suspense or dread.)

The same thing that discourages an endorsement of *The Initiation* as an example of any of the many things it's trying to be can also be used to mount an impassioned case in favor of it. In a sense, whatever wonky allure it does possess is derived from the fact that, despite its themes about the lengths young adults will go to "fit in," the film doesn't quite fit in anywhere on any end of spectrum of any genre, movement or time period—either as a dark sex comedy, a sorority-bound slasher, a psychological thriller or something in some other cinematic territory it clumsily flirts with. For some fans, that disjointedness and lack of identity will be a turn-off, but for others, *The Initiation's* failure to find a home might encourage them to embrace it as the aberration that it is.

Max Weinstein