

## REISSUES



## RARE BAVA RESURRECTED

CALTIKI, THE IMMORTAL MONSTER  
(1959) Blu-ray/DVD

Starring John Merivale, Didi Sullivan and Gérard Herter  
Directed by Riccardo Freda and Mario Bava  
Written by Filippo Sanjust  
Arrow Video

He wouldn't make his official directing debut until the following year with *Black Sunday* (1960), but Mario Bava already had plenty of experience behind the camera when he was forced to take over the directorial reins on 1959's *Caltiki, the Immortal Monster* from his frequent collaborator Riccardo Freda. In fact, *Caltiki* was the second film, after 1957's *I Vampiri*, that the cinematographer and special effects man had to rescue after Freda walked away from the project. And, indeed, the best things about this riff on Hammer's *The Quatermass Experiment* (1955) and *X the Unknown* (1956) are its chiaroscuro lighting and creepy creature effects – both of which were handled by Bava.

John Merivale (*Circus of Horrors*) stars as Prof.

John Fielding, a biologist who is part of a scientific team investigating the ruins of an ancient Mayan city whose residents mysteriously abandoned it. Their investigation of an underground temple where a colleague disappeared leads them to an attack by a massive amorphous blob – a creature the Mayans called Caltiki, to whom they made human sacrifices. The creature is destroyed but a fragment survives, leading to a full-scale monster attack in the film's final reel.

Beyond the interest of Bava's involvement, *Caltiki* is a mostly successful wallow in '50s sci-fi clichés, from scientists spouting off about gamma radiation to giant cardboard computers with lots of blinking lights. It is a bit slow going until the monster shows up, but *Caltiki* is worth the wait; Bava crafted the creature out of actual tripe (animal stomach) and manages to endow it with menace as it grows, churns, and crawls.

Arrow Video has given the film a generous upgrade from previously available versions, including a 2K scan of the original negative (that further solidifies Bava's reputation as a master of lighting); two new commentaries by Bava biographers Tim Lucas and Troy Howarth; and a discussion with film scholar and author Kim Newman on the influ-



ence of other monster movies on *Caltiki*.

It's a handsome package in service to a flawed but fun film that should appeal not only to Bava completists but monster kids everywhere.

SEAN PLUMMER

## MIKE IN THE '90S

BLACK SOCIETY TRILOGY Blu-ray/DVD

Starring Kippei Shina, Shō Aikawa and Kazuki Kitamura  
Directed by Takashi Miike  
Written by Ichirō Fujita, Seigo Inoue and Ichiro Ryu  
Arrow Video

Before smacking horror fans awake with button-pushing shockers *Audition* and *Ichi the Killer*, Takashi Miike made a name for himself as a prolific director of Japanese direct-to-video (or "V-cinema") movies. After delivering twelve of these in just under five years, he graduated to theatrical features – and international acclaim – with *Shinjuku Triad Society*, the first of three crime films that came to be known as the *Black Society Trilogy*. While these three films are narratively unrelated with marked differences in style and tone, they offer an intriguing early glimpse of the sensibilities that would fuel the director's later, more celebrated work.

*Shinjuku Triad Society* (1995) is the most unmistakably Miike film of the bunch. Even before the title appears, we are bombarded with a disembodied head, a slashed wrist spraying blood and a cop brutally attacking a female witness. As this story of feuding police, triads, and yakuza unfolds, it only gets more depraved, relying on cartoonish gore, sexual violence, and the occasional scatological flourish to hold the viewer's attention.

Even if you respond favourably to Miike's shock-for-shock's-sake approach, you can only watch so much underworld excess before you lose your appetite, which may explain his subdued, arthouse strategy on 1997's *Rainy Dog*. As an introverted hit man (Miike regular Shō Aikawa) gets to know his mute son, a reflective slide guitar lulls us into a state of calm, making the film's occasional bursts of violence far more impactful than *Shinjuku Triad Society's* incessant assault.

*Ley Lines* (1999) splits the difference, offering a mix of shock and restraint. A trio of bored young adults befriend a prostitute and find themselves mixed up in Shinjuku's criminal underworld. Released the same year as *Audition*, *Ley Lines* is more cinematic and polished than the trilogy's previous entries, even if the dreariness of the characters' lives occasionally infects the film itself.

