

DVD OF THE MONTH



Interrogation

Ryszard Bugajski; Poland 1982; Second Run/Region 2; Certificate 18; 111 minutes; Aspect Ratio 4:3

**Film:** A damning indictment of the oppressive policies of Stalin-era Poland, Bugajski's harrowing film features a superb performance by Krystyna Janda as a young nightclub singer who is arrested and repeatedly tortured psychologically and physically by secret police hoping to extract a confession for a non-existent

crime. The politically explosive film was shot during the Solidarity era, a brief spell of Polish artistic and social freedom lasting from 1980 to 1981. Bugajski was then forced to smuggle it out of the country when martial law was declared in December 1981 and the film was banned outright by the Communist authorities. Despite the ban, the film was widely circulated in Poland via samizdat video and was named best film at the 1987 Rotterdam film festival. Polish audiences were finally allowed to see it legally following the restoration of democracy in 1989. A year

later, Janda won the best actress award at Cannes. The film remains gripping and powerfully shocking. As a statement of defiance against the barbarism of Soviet totalitarianism, it compares with the books of Victor Serge and Arthur Koestler.

**Disc:** A fine transfer. The set features an informative, newly commissioned documentary in which the director reflects on the making and history of the film. The accompanying booklet includes two essays discussing the film's troubled history, as well as two original storyboards. (JB) (MFB No. 679)

Amen

Costa-Gavras; France/Germany 2002; Pathé/Region 2; Certificate PG; 126 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: trailer

**Film:** Compared with Costa-Gavras' seminal political thriller *Z*, this account of the Catholic Church's refusal to intervene in the Holocaust seems well-meaning but extremely flat-footed. There is an excellent performance from Ulrich Tukur as the real-life SS officer who tried to alert his fellow Catholics to the genocide, but Mathieu Kassovitz's young priest is less credible. Though handsomely shot, it's a solemn and somewhat stolid affair. The controversy that surrounded its original release had as much to do with Oliveiro Toscani's poster showing a bloodied swastika/crucifix as with anything in the film. **Disc:** The transfer is fine but the only extra is a trailer. (GM) (S&S August 2002)

Appleseed

Shinji Aramaki; Japan/Korea 2004; Optimum/Region 2; Certificate 12;

104 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9 Anamorphic; Features: commentary, 'The Birth of 3D Live Anime' featurette, staff profiles, image archive, trailers

**Film:** Aramaki's post-apocalyptic manga adaptation offers an uneven mix of *Matrix*-style pyrotechnics, utopian politics and clunking character drama. With its muddy plot involving a supersoldier heroine, cyber conspiracies and genetically engineered 'bioroids', the film flits between sleek mayhem and stodgy debate. While the action scenes have a propulsive dynamism, the motion-capture used to animate the characters has produced slimy-looking creatures devoid of personality. **Disc:** A clinically bright transfer. The extras focus on the laborious production process. (ML) (S&S September 2005)

Box of the Banned

Anchor Bay/Region 2; Certificate 18; Features: 'Ban the Sadist Videos' documentary

The Evil Dead

Sam Raimi; US 1982; 86 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: commentaries,

featurettes, biographies, trailers, TV spots, stills galleries (MFB No. 586)

The Last House on the Left

Wes Craven; US 1972; 84 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: documentary, musical featurette, trailers, TV and radio spots, biographies, stills galleries (MFB No. 583)

I Spit on Your Grave

Meir Zarchi; US 1978; 96 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9

The Driller Killer

Abel Ferrara; US 1979; 96 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9 (MFB No. 605)

Nightmares in a Damaged Brain

Romano Scavolini; US 1981; 97 minutes; Aspect Ratio 4:3; Features: stills galleries (MFB No. 588)

Zombie Flesh Eaters

Lucio Fulci; Italy 1979; 90 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9 Anamorphic; Features: trailer, TV and radio spots, biographies, stills galleries (MFB No. 554)

**Films:** While these six films unite under the 'video nasty' banner, they vary greatly in style, content and quality. Arguably, the most distinguished of the batch is Raimi's electrifying *The*

*Evil Dead*, a touchstone for the recent backwoods-horror revival (*Cabin Fever*, etc.). The grisly debuts of two other American auteurs are also represented in the form of Ferrara's *The Driller Killer* and Craven's *The Last House on the Left*, both of which remain distinctive and at times disturbing examples of their respective sub-genres (slasher and rape-revenge). The oddest of the set is the schizophrenia-themed *Nightmares in a Damaged Brain* (notable for its emphatic use of editing), while the most straightforward is *Zombie Flesh Eaters*, a spirited Romero rip-off – albeit one that offers the graphic gut-munching without the incivile social comment. But the most stomach-churning entry is *I Spit on Your Grave*, a gruelling rape-revenge odyssey that presents both halves of its equation as coldly visceral spectacle without making any apology for its lack of psychological insight. **Disc:** With the exception of *Zombie Flesh Eaters*, most of the transfers are of sub-standard quality (which somehow adds to the films' disreputable appeal). Only *The Evil Dead* and *The Last House on the Left* sport substantial extras (culled from previous releases), though a seventh