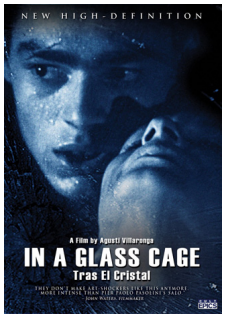
On the sleeve of Cult Epics’ new two-DVD set and Blu-ray debut of Agustí Villaronga’s horrifying melodrama IN A GLASS CAGE (TRAS EL CRISTAL), eternal enfant terrible John Waters cheekily proclaims that he’d be too nervous to show his friends the film, and that it’s worse than Pier Paolo Pasolini’s notorious SALO. A mindbending statement from the man whose PINK FLAMINGOS still stands tall as one of the most offensive works ever committed to semi-mainstream film; presumably his circle of pals has a higher tolerance for pictures that challenge good taste, no?

That said, CAGE certainly tries hard to provide the viewer with as much revulsion as it can, with pedophilia, torture, murder, naziploitation, kinks of all kinds and far worse things. The film was alarming upon its initial release in 1987 and it’s still a fierce piece of cinema today, but the big difference is that it’s also a remarkable work of art, grimly humorous and absolutely dazzling to look at, even when it’s causing your other senses to spin.



German actor Günter Meisner stars as Klaus, a despicable Nazi war criminal who exploited his dubious concentration-camp status to sexually assault, torture and murder children. With the war over, he continues his crimes until exhaustion or remorse makes him opt for suicide—a failed attempt that leaves him paralyzed and enclosed in an iron lung, the “glass cage” of the

title. He whiles away his miserable days in the Spanish countryside, cared for by a wife who despises him and a child who seems to have inherited some of his insanity. One day, a new nurse arrives in the form of Angelo (David Sust), an attractive lad who, after a bizarre first meeting, manipulates his way into the household, torturing the immobile, wide-eyed Klaus and revealing his secrets one by one. Soon, more children die…

If you’ve ever wanted to see a preteen get killed by having gasoline injected into his heart, then IN A GLASS CAGE is for you. Still, again, there’s a grimy black humor about the film, and Villaronga ensures the debauchery moves with elegance and intent. At the core of the film—and perhaps its most troubling conceit—is the fact that Klaus is a monster, an absolute beast…and yet, he becomes our unlikely protagonist. Villaronga asks us to empathize with his situation, and because his “condition” is suggested as being a genuine illness over which he has little control, we are meant to root for him. And against our better judgement, we almost do.

Cult Epics’ new anamorphic hi-def presentation is arresting and makes you appreciate each frame, with colors that erupt on screen (credit Jaume Pericaula’s delicious cinematography) and a sensuous Spanish sensibility that goes beyond the language itself. And maybe that’s really what would upset and confound someone like Waters, whose bad taste was on the table, obvious and scatological; with a picture this grim and depraved, to have the word “sensuous” be the first one on your lips…well, a certain amount of self-questioning ensues.

Villaronga addresses the picture’s controversy and enthusiastic critical reception (*The Village Voice*, among other outlets, has called the picture a masterpiece) in a supplemental interview, and a greater understanding of the fillmaker’s work (which includes last year’s phenomenal, award-winning dark drama BLACK BREAD, 2011’s Spanish entry for the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar) can be found in a new documentary, simply titled “Agustí Villaronga.” We also get his first three short pictures (this critic’s favorite being the eerie LABERINT) and a majestic 5.1 surround mix—which, if you’re situated in the right spot, makes you feel like you’re inside the fetishized iron lung itself.

A beautiful film about unspeakable ugliness, IN A GLASS CAGE is a must-see for Eurohorror lovers.

MOVIE:

DISC PACKAGES: 💀💀💀💀