

The Devil's Backbone

(original title unknown) [El espinazo del diablo]

Spain : 2001 : dir. Guillermo del Toro :

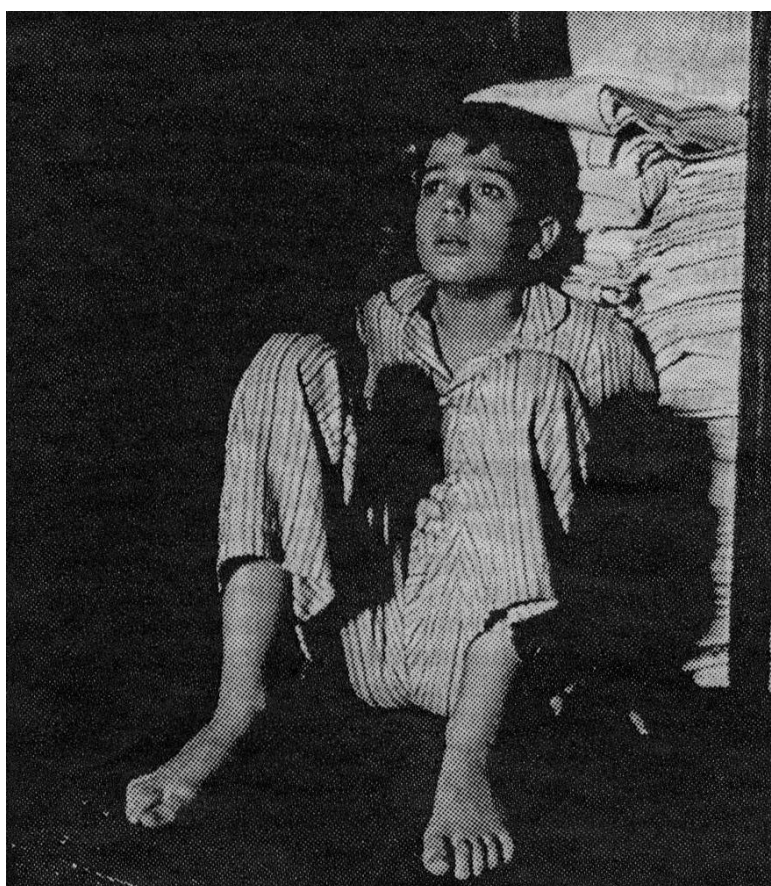
: 106 min

prod: Rosa Bosch : scr: : dir.ph.: Guillermo Navarro

[Fernando Tielve](#)

Frederico Luppi; Eduardo Noriega; Marisa Paredes; Irene Visedo

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	€	M	⚡	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
5853	1.5	2	1	702	3	-	-	-	-	No	<i>unseen</i>



Spooked in España – Fernando Tielve

Source: Evening Standard

Metro review:

“Mexican horror director Guillermo Del Toro seems intent on switching between personal, Spanish language projects and Hollywood blockbusters. He sprung to world attention in 1983 with "**CRONOS**", an ingenious update on the vampire myth, before 1997's flawed giant-bug flick, "**MIMIC**", marked his US debut. "**THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE**" is Del Toro's atmospheric new offering, signalling

not only a return to his roots but also to form. Set during the Spanish Civil War in a labyrinthine orphanage, the roving, inquisitive camera follows Carlos (Fernando Tielve), a young boy who struggles against bullies both young and adult. Bizarrely, it's his frequent visits from a child-ghost that offer most solace, as Carlos sets aside his fear in favour of playing detective. What happened to this poor, lost boy? And can he do anything to set his spirit free?

Beautifully acted and shot with a hypnotic lyricism, "**THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE**" works as both an eerie ghost story and a political allegory, events in the school acting as a microcosm for the war-torn world outside. It's also infused with the director's palpable love of the genre, Del Toro managing to reference numerous horror movies – most pertinently Henri-Georges Clouzot's "**LES DIABOLIQUES**" – without ever snapping you out of the narrative." – Robert James

Evening Standard (29/11/01) review:

"I like my ghost stories refined down for the mind's eye: all apprehension, but no sightings. Until you actually see the drowned child who haunts the dorm in a remote refuge on the plains for boys orphaned in the Spanish Civil War, Guillermo del Toro's film, co-produced by Rosa Bosch, is genuinely shivery.

Even when the spectral tot *[sic]* manifests himself to the jittery kids, an imaginative glaze of liquefaction makes him appear to be still in the watery element that caused his death.

But, unlike the current Spanish-made ghost story with Nicole Kidman, "**THE OTHERS**", the occult this time is mainly a way into the

history of the times – on the Left wing side of the Nationalist forces, of course – with an unexploded bomb dropped from the aircraft that Mussolini lent to Franco to teach Guernica a lesson protruding, rusted, ugly and still dangerous, like a monumental symbol of Fascism in the orphanage courtyard.

The political allegory doesn't run deep. The most striking scene has the orphanage's kindly superintendent (Frederico Luppi) showing little Carlos (Fernando Tielve) the glass jars in which dead babies repose in formaldehyde – suggesting a whole Spanish generation, robbed of life, preserved in limbo. A pity such a promising set-up is diverted into melodrama in the love-hate relationship between the brutal janitor (Eduardo Noriega), the hardened headmistress (Marisa Paredes), whose wooden leg Buñuel would quickly have fetishised, and the comely cook (Irene Visedo): fleshly lusts overtake ghostly frissons.

The film's unalloyed success is Guillermo Navarro's photography and Cesar Macarron's art direction: they set a mood of lugubrious foreboding."

No further information currently available. Could you call Clouzot's "**LES DIABOLIQUES**" a horror film? Well, I expect you could. But it isn't one. I regard horror films and ghosts films as quite distinct categories anyway – "**THE INNOCENTS**" and "**THE HAUNTING**" are a very different kettle of fish from "**POLTERGEIST**", which took the two genres and banged their heads together, loudly. Spectral children are only seldom seen, perhaps because children are not supposed to die in the movies, but a couple of exceptions were "**A GHOST STORY FOR CHRISTMAS: LOST HEARTS**" (UK TV 73, from the M.R. James short story) and "**THE CHANGELING**". Another Spanish film to treat – equally indirectly – with the Civil War was "**LAS LARGAS VACIONES DEL '36**" (76), in which a bourgeois family find themselves trapped at a holiday resort at the outbreak of the fighting. Nothing else is known of Tielve.

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