

## Document Citation

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# LABYRINTH OF PASSION

(NR)

(CINEVISTA)

Color/1.85

100 Mins.

Cast: Cecilia Roth, Imanol Arias, Helga Line, Marta Fernandez-Muro, Angel Alcazar, Antonio Banderas, Agustin Almodovar, Pedro Almodovar, Fanny McNamara.

Credits: Written and directed by Pedro Almodovar. Director of photography: Angel L. Fernandez. Production design: Almodovar. Edited by Jose Salcedo. Music by Bernardo Bonezzi. Lyrics by Almodovar. An Alphaville Production

**Deliriously raw, hilarious early work from Pedro Almodovar shows his talent already working in high gear. Everyone's Madrid vacation should resemble one of his films.**

The experience of watching an Almodovar film can be like that rare moment at a party when everything—the music, the wine, the people—clicks and you have a fabulous, never-want-it-to-end

good time. His second film, *Labyrinth of Passion*, was made in 1982 and is just being released here, but, subjectwise, it's very much of a piece with his later work and it's technically very assured. He gets down to business in the first scene with an utterly crazed drag queen (Fanny McNamara) simultaneously sniffing nail polish, downing drinks and cruising the action at an outdoor Madrid cafe. The many other characters, and their interlocking relations to each other, are introduced in rapid-fire fashion. Riza Niro (Imanol Arias) is the young, gay successor to an Arab empire, who has escaped to Madrid in search of fun. Sexilia (Cecilia Roth) is a nymphomaniac rock singer with a morbid fear of the Spanish sun. Her gynecologist father specializes in artificial insemination because the idea of bodies touching disgusts him. His patient, the villainous Toraya (Helga Line), is bent on upholding her right to Riza's throne. Queti (Marta Fernandez-Muro) is a laundress who must contend with the incestuous advances of her aphrodisiac-crazed father ("You get used to it," she tells Sexilia.). Sadeq (Almodovar's preferred leading man, Antonio Banderas) has fallen in love with the elusive Riza after a quickie pick-me-up and uses his uncanny sense of smell to track him down. His Arab terrorist roommates, interested in kidnapping Riza, are always one step behind him.

Almodovar blithely takes these mad ingredients and shakes them up into a potently funny, psychedelic cocktail. The kaleidoscopic action culminates in a breathless airport denouement that prefigures his *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*. Loose ends are not so much tied up as gaily knotted, with Riza turning (inoffensively) straight, and Sexi and her father resolving their sexual problems by bedding down together. The sheer outrageousness of the conception, the shameless coincidences and holes in the plot, keep you smiling and laughing, while challenging you to maintain pace with the frantically overlapping developments. All of the characters are typically romantic, candid and endlessly loquacious, in a hedonistic Paradise/Madrid that's like one big post-Franco fiesta. One scene has Almodovar himself directing an s-m photo shoot with Fanny, doing unmentionable things with an electric drill while yakking on the phone to a girlfriend, "If I survive this, we'll go to a cafe and eat something really greasy while I tell you all the gory details." The director makes another appearance in a rock club, clad in a black leather mini and fishnet stockings, singing, "Looking for your love I went down to the sewers and the rats gave me their love" (lyrics by Almodovar, natch). His dizziest notion is a Freudian flashback involving the main characters as children, which explains their psychoses; it's a terrific takeoff on glib Hollywoodiana, complete with schmaltzy, overwrought score. His work here, with something to offend everyone, marks him as the true heir to the irreverently entertaining tradition of Bunuel, as well as screwball comedy of the '30s. While some of his ideas and gross-out effects may resemble those of John Waters, his sense of control, even in this early piece, is far superior, that of a true artist. (He approached a Lubitsch-like elegance in *Women on the Verge*.) The film is cleverly and gaudily photographed, edited and designed (by Almodovar), and boasts one of the best boudoir sets (Sexilia's) in all film.

—David Noh