

FILM REVIEW

Born and raised in Malaysia, educated in North America and having worked and lived in Taipei for the past nine years, Ho Wi-ding (何蔚庭) knows what it is to be an outsider. This no doubt is part of the reason why the director spent the past four years preparing, raising money for and making *Pinoy Sunday* (台北星期天), a humorous tongue-in-cheek peek at the life of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) in Taipei whose stories are rarely told.

The film centers on Manuel (Epy Quizon) and Dado (Bayani Agbayani), two Filipinos who work in a bicycle factory in a Taipei suburb. Their life at the plant entails six days of drudgery. Then there is Sunday. Like other Filipino migrant workers, the two friends make long bus trips to Taipei's "Little Manila" on Zhongshan North Road (中山北路) where they go to church, hang out with their fellow countrymen, have fun and flirt with girls.

On one particular Sunday, Manuel and Dado discover a sofa that's been discarded on a sidewalk. Excited about how the couch could bring a measure of comfort to their drab dormitory life, the pair decide to carry, on foot, their precious find across town, out of the city and back to the factory.

What is supposed to be

a day of rest turns into an adventure in which the two wayfarers encounter various characters as they trek through Taipei's urban hinterland.

Pinoy Sunday shows a different side of Taipei that is foreign to most of the city's inhabitants. Instead of Sogo department stores and Eslite bookstores, our protagonists visit St. Christopher's Catholic Church and Chin Wan Wan (金萬萬) market, where OFWs hang out, shop and seek entertainment. On their return journey, they pass by junkyards and public housing complexes in Taipei's desolate outskirts en route to their home in the city's fringe, which is "far away from Taipei 101," as Bayani's character points out.

Through the lens of American cinematographer Jack Pollack, the image of two men carrying a bright red couch against a sparse rural/urban backdrop delivers a visual contrast that is both amusing and absurd.

"To me, this image is very third-world-country, and it can happen anywhere in the world. Imagine two Mexicans or a couple of poor foreign students carrying a sofa on the streets of Los Angeles," said Ho, who has also made two shorts with Pollack, *Respire* (呼吸, 2005), which won two awards at Cannes, and *Summer Afternoon* (夏午, 2008). The two have been friends since their days as

students at New York University.

When Ho decided to bring to life an image inspired by Roman Polanski's 1958 short *Two Men and a Wardrobe* through a tale of Filipino migrant workers, he embarked on an intense year-long research project that involved hanging out with OFWs at Taipei's Little Manila and similar communities. "It is like an ethnographic film project. You go into a tribe, observe, collect facts and make a report," Ho told the *Taipei Times*.

But instead of making a slice-of-life portrait or poignant social critique like film critic-turned-director Rich Lee (李奇) does in *Detours to Paradise* (歧路天堂), Ho goes for a lighthearted and humorous tone, opting to depict the sunnier side of the lives of migrant workers, who sing karaoke, laugh, relax and can be themselves on their days off.

The discrimination and other forms of injustice inflicted on them by Taiwanese society do lurk beneath the surface, nevertheless, and are often rendered in comic absurdity. One example can be found in the film's most poetic moment, when Manuel and Dado, lost and exhausted on a riverside at dusk, panic over the thought of missing the factory's curfew, which could lead to them being deported. A dreamlike musical sequence follows, showing the two friends floating down the river, singing, drumming and

playing guitar on their couch as if they were taking a boat trip back to their seaside hometown.

The film may be upbeat in tone, but the prospect of it reaching a great number of audiences is not. Despite the favorable reviews the film has received after it premiered at the Taipei Golden Horse Fantastic Film Festival (台北金馬奇幻影展) last month, only two movie theaters, Spot — Taipei Film House (台北光點) and Vie Show Cinemas Xinyi (信義威秀影城), have agreed to show *Pinoy Sunday*. Most movie theaters hung back when they heard the story is about OFWs, and staff at one theater went so far as to say they didn't want foreign migrant workers hanging around in front of the theater, according to Ho.

Moreover, the dominant Filipino language spoken by the leading characters also made the film, a recipient of the government's Subsidy For Film Production (電影輔導金), run into trouble with the Government Information Office (GIO, 新聞局), which issues the money. Because one of the subsidy's rules states that Chinese dialects should be the dominant languages spoken in government-funded films, an additional copy of the film was dubbed in Taiwanese, and several commercial screenings of it are required.

"I think it comes down

to whether the GIO wants to encourage creativity or bureaucracy. We'd like to discuss with the [GIO] how to make the regulations more flexible for movies about new immigrants," Ho said.

Foreign migrant workers with ID cards can buy movie tickets at a discount price of NT\$150. Visit pinoy sunday.pixnet.net/blog/post/6207639 to find out which six theaters are screening *Pinoy Sunday* in Taipei, Jhongli (中壢), Tainan, Douliu (斗六) and Kaohsiung.

Film Notes

PINOY SUNDAY
台北星期天

DIRECTED BY:
HO WI-DING (何蔚庭)

STARRING:
EPY QUIZON (MANUEL),
BAYANI AGBAYANI (DADO),
ALESSANDRA DE ROSSI (CECILIA),
MERYLL SORIANO (ANNA)

RUNNING TIME:
85 MINUTES

LANGUAGE:
TAGALOG, ILONGGO, ENGLISH,
TAIWANESE AND MANDARIN WITH
CHINESE AND ENGLISH SUBTITLES

TAIWAN RELEASE:
TODAY

Hidden in plain sight

'Pinoy Sunday' will most likely not be playing at a theater near you because its subject is Taiwan's migrant workers — a topic most cinemas think will be of little interest to mainstream audiences

BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER



Bayani Agbayani, left, and Epy Quizon star in *Pinoy Sunday*, directed by Ho Wi-ding.

PHOTO COURTESY OF GOOD DAYS FILM

FILM REVIEW

You show me a bloodsucker, and I'll show you a capitalist

The high-concept *Daybreakers* skirts B-movie territory with skill until wiping out in the final quarter, though it's still good value both for splatter and ideas

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW

STAFF REPORTER

Daybreakers, despite its disastrous finish, has plenty to offer in its new take on the vampire genre. To begin with, the vampires are the establishment who hunt and farm humans for

their blood, and regular people, those who don't require a constant supply of human blood to survive, are on the run.

Being in control has its downside, which in the case of *Daybreakers* is that the supply of fresh human blood has become strictly limited as humans are hunted to extinction, and those on the poverty line of vampire society are not getting enough. Being undead — a category of beings such as vampires, ghouls, mummies, all of which are familiar to the fantasy gaming fraternity — and therefore immortal, they cannot simply die of starvation. Instead they transform into sub-vampires of enormous strength and ferociousness, that are both pathetic and terrifying, and which prey on respectable vampire society.

The Spierig Brothers have turned the vampire

movie into an allegory for the blood-sucking tendencies of modern consumerist society, but they remain true to the rules of the horror genre, and this social agenda is kept firmly in the background for those who want it. Otherwise, *Daybreakers* works perfectly well as a regular horror flick, and there is plenty of spurting blood and disembodied limbs to keep gore-fest fans happy.

Ethan Hawke is Edward Dalton, a vampire hematologist searching for a blood substitute for vampires so they can stop preying on the dwindling human population. He has a soft spot for humans, having been betrayed into his vampire existence by his brother, who has joined the vampire military elite. This little subplot is of minor interest, and its attempts to become the main emotional engine of the movie are something of a failure.

Human society is represented



The tables are turned in this novel slant on the vampire genre. PHOTOS COURTESY OF VEIVISION PICTURES

by Willem Dafoe as Lionel Cormac and Claudia Karvan as Audrey Bennett, survivors of the vampire holocaust who are working to re-form human communities. Dafoe applies his considerable dramatic talents to making this human resistance fighter something a little more than a cipher, and Karvan

gives tank tops and jeans a species of counter-culture chic. She also knows how to handle a crossbow.

The original conceit, which has vampire society searching for a dwindling supply of human blood and dealing with a crisis of blood-deprived "sub-siders," who inhabit the subway and drainage

system of the city, is clever and well-realized. It helps that vampires are generally the best dressed of the undead — Gothic-style white foundation, ruby red lips and just the hint of fangs make for an interesting fashion statement. The strong opening raises expectations, but these are not realized as the Spierig Brothers veer into the predictable clichés of a guy-meets-girl romance, father-finds-daughter tragedy, and a final twist that follows a straight and narrow script-writing 101 formula.

The lazy ending is not helped by the fact that a sequel is being set up — the creative energy of *Daybreakers* was expended after about the first hour of the film. It's definitely worth seeing for science fiction and horror fans, but despite a more serious veneer, this film should not be mistaken for more than a bit of light entertainment.

OTHER RELEASES

COMPILED BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW

The Cove

A documentary about an industry that kills thousands of dolphins every year that combines elements of the heist movie with agitprop. National Geographic photographer Louie Psihoyos makes his filmmaking debut with this Oscar-winning movie in which a team infiltrates a cove on the coast of Japan where dolphins are captured for sale to aquariums, or slaughtered for meat. Beautifully photographed using military-grade surveillance equipment, and features Richard O'Barry, the dolphin-trainer from the *Flipper* TV series who is now a passionate dolphin activist.



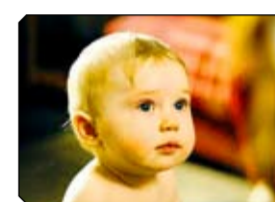
Venerable Jian Zhen (鑑真大和尚)

This animation, produced by DaAi Television (大爱电视台), a Buddhist broadcaster affiliated with the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation (佛教慈濟慈善事業基金會), has already received a huge reception in pre-release screenings, admittedly mostly among the faithful. The story is interesting and little known, dealing with the Tang Dynasty monk Jian Zhen (鑑真), who is credited as one of the most important transmitters of Buddhism teaching to Japan. His epic six attempts to get to Japan, in which he lost his sight and a number of close followers, is regarded as second only to the journey of Tripitaka to India in the annals of great sojourns made by Buddhist monks. The production is based on five years of painstaking research, and features more than 130 characters, many based on original descriptions, all in an effort to give as accurate an historical account as possible. In addition to bolstering Buddhism as part of Japan's religious establishment, Jian Zhen is credited with inspiring the formation of Japan's Ritsu school of Buddhism and introducing many aspects of Tang Dynasty science and culture to Japan.



Ricky

A film about a child who sprouts wings might sound like a comedy, but in the case of *Ricky*, by art house director Francois Ozon, it is anything but. With *Ricky*, Ozon, who has created dense and thoughtful work such as *8 Femmes* (2002) and *The Swimming Pool* (2003), pushes further off into the deep end. The director's attempt to blend a gritty, realist portrait of working-class parenthood and an allegorical tale of a child who is forever taking off for the freedom of the skies is not without some very grave problems, yet its sense of ambiguity and some fine acting makes *Ricky* appealing.



Hot Tub Time Machine

This week sees a number of comedy releases, but not many laughs. The best of the bunch is probably *Hot Tub Time Machine*, which might get the votes of the type of audience members who got off on *The Hangover*. *Hot Tub Time Machine* returns to the 1980s, and nostalgia for the clothes, haircuts and music of that period could work for the over 30s revisiting their misspent youths. John Cusack, among others, gets to do just that, as the filmmakers exploit virtually every paradox and social awkwardness that can be generated from a well-worn time travel scenario. This is far from the height of Cusack's generally strong track record, but for a buddy movie over a couple of beers, you could do worse.



The Backup Plan

Jennifer Lopez is still trying to make it back into mainstream cinema, but this new release reveals that she is in more need than ever of a backup plan to kick-start her celluloid career. The whole concept of *The Backup Plan*, which presents J-Lo as a single woman who finalizes her artificial insemination plans on the same day that she meets the man of her dreams — in this case Australian hunk Alex O'Loughlin — seems off-puttingly gynecological, and is only made worse by a script and acting that has made-for-TV written all over them. Some good supporting performances, but no chemistry in the lead roles.



Furry Vengeance

More attempts at comedy, this time with animals and Brendan Fraser. In a throwback to *Over the Hedge* (2006), the film follows a bunch of animals trying to survive in the face of human encroachment into their natural habitat. This time the animals are real, though much assisted by CGI technology, and they do not talk. That's left to Fraser and Brooke Shields, who are planning to build a green community, at the expense of most of the green and the animals in the area. The humor in *Furry Vengeance* seems to largely rely on Fraser coming off worst in increasingly absurd run-ins with various species of animal. Children over 5 are likely to find their intelligence insulted.

