

# On Pain of Death

'Bloody Child' puts the sting in true story of murderous Marine

By **DAVE KEHR**

Daily News Movie Critic

★★★½

THE BLOODY CHILD. Tinka Menkes, Russ Little. Directed by Nina Menkes. At the Anthology Film Archives. Running time: 85 mins. Unrated.

**W**ITH MOVIES LIKE "Volcano" around to remind us how violence has simply become another tired bit in the show business repertoire, it's bracing to come across a film like "The Bloody Child." It restores the impact and immensity to an act that, in many other American movies, would just be an occasion for a quick thrill or laugh.

Directed by Nina Menkes, one of the leading avant-garde film makers on the West Coast ("Queen of Diamonds"), "The Bloody Child" is based on an actual

incident in which a Marine officer, just back from the Gulf War, killed his wife and was caught trying to bury her in the California desert.

This isn't a story with a beginning, a middle and an end, but a moment suspended in time, examined in all of its ramifications and associations. Menkes focuses on a single gesture, as the Marine (whose face is never seen) is grabbed and shoved

in the back of a squad car. The female military police captain (played by the director's sister and constant star, Tinka Menkes) looks on helplessly, gripped both by the horror of what she's seen and the suffocating desolation of the desert.

Using repetition and incantation as her main rhetorical tools, Menkes drains the sensationalism from her subject, leaving behind the brute fact of a faceless evil.



**HAUNTED BY EVIL:** Tinka Menkes plays an MP unsettled by an officer's crime.

By poetic implication, the killing is linked both to the unequal power relationships within the male-female couple and the military's role in America's foreign policy.

Obviously, this isn't Saturday night entertainment, but it is remarkably thoughtful and haunting film making.

(Unrated: Language, violence.)