

this film with what is often considered Argento's masterpiece. *Suspria* was, and still is, so beautiful, horrific and unique, that much of his other work pales in comparison. Even so, it seems a slight cop out on his part to lift what feels like whole scenes from the earlier film - heads through windows, young victims trapped in rooms where they face certain death - and repeat them here in everything but name. Even the presence of Donald Pleasance - as a slightly potty, reclusive scientist - and the woefully underused character of his pet chimp, cannot save the film from a sense of familiarity, interspersed though it is, with short, sharp, shocks.

Ultimately it's hard to dismiss *Phenomena* completely out-of-hand as, looked at purely as a form of entertainment, the film does deliver. Everything is present from mad characters and beautiful settings - the sweeping Swiss vistas are to die for, literally - to marvellous set piece murders which pack a punch despite the fact you can see most coming a mile off. Just don't look for any deeper Argento message, which is something this particular outing fails to convey.

Rating: 🧠🧠🧠🧠🧠

SPECIAL FEATURES: It's hard to know where to start with the extras accompanying Arrow Video's ultimate Collector's Edition of Dario Argento's fantasy shocker *Phenomena*. They've packed in so many that you may be tempted to forget the three presentations of the main film - including the 116 minute Italian, 110 minute international and 83 minute Creepers cuts - and get stuck straight into the additional features instead.

As well as those which you'd expect - limited edition booklet, subtitles, trailers and audio commentary - there is also *The Three Sarcophagi*, a specially commissioned visual essay by Michael Mackenzie, which compares all three cuts of the film.

To round off the release is a remastered CD of the film's soundtrack, by Argento's favourite musical collaborators, Goblin. Which proves the perfect accompaniment to wind down to, after subjecting yourself to this weird example of the art of filmmaking, by one its most bizarre practitioners.

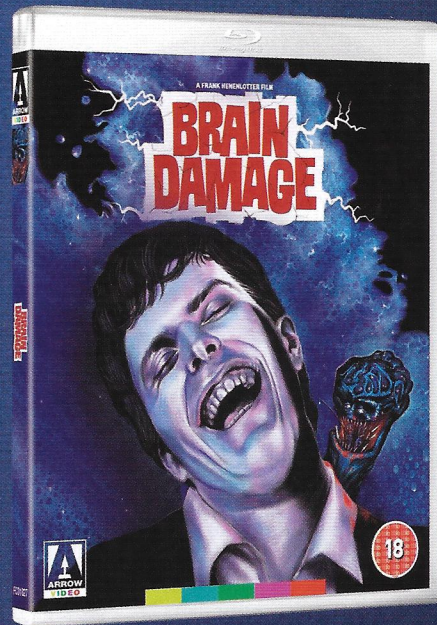
Rating: 🧠🧠🧠🧠🧠

PHENOMENA is out now on **UK Blu-ray** courtesy of Arrow Video.

REVIEWED BY CLEAVER PATTERSON

BRAIN DAMAGE: LIMITED EDITION

THE FILM: You cannot discuss *Brain Damage* - the 1988 cult horror comedy by director Frank Henenlotter - without slipping into a torrent of offensive language and puerile sexual innuendo. However as this was clearly Henenlotter's intention, there is no avoiding such vulgarities. The infamous sleaze-fest that follows the trail of mayhem left by a parasite - which looks like the cross between a turd and a penis (sorry, you were warned) - is enough to have even those with cast iron constitutions, heaving.



As with all the best films which rely heavily on SFX as part of their main attraction, there is little in the way of a storyline to obstruct *Brain Damage*'s unending barrage of gross out visuals. Brian (Rick Hearst) has a shaky relationship with his girlfriend Barbara (Jennifer Lowry), and as a result takes to sulking in the bedroom of the seedy New York flat he shares with his brother Mike (Gordon MacDonald), who also happens to have the hots for Barbara. One night a strange parasite called 'Aylmer' - the true origin of whom is never fully explained - kept by a wacko couple in the apartment upstairs, escapes and finds its way into Brian's flat, and his bed. There it latches itself onto his neck injecting the helpless kid's brain with a psychedelic drug, taking him to untold levels of joy and euphoria. In exchange for continuing shots of this 'happy juice', all Brian has to do is find Aylmer a regular supply of his favourite food, human brains. Let the carnage begin.

If you're looking for the perfect example of the sleazy comedy horrors which saturated the market during the 1980s, you could do worse than pick Frank

Henenlotter's *Brain Damage*. Though his mad classics *Basket Case* (1982) and *Frankenhooker* (1990) might be more famous, his third feature length outing as director surely rates as one of the sickest films, not only by him, but any other filmmaker.

You'd like to think Henenlotter was trying to promote some form of social message here, touching on every possible taboo subject from drugs and alcohol to sex of all kinds, both straight and gay. Unfortunately though this is probably crediting him with too high a degree of moral conscience. Everything is tainted with such a depressing air of grimness that little of it appeals, and one can't help feeling Henenlotter simply introduced the scenarios to see how far he could push the boundaries of acceptability: you can see why the infamous sexual encounter in the 'Hell' nightclub - shown here in its full glory - caused so much consternation with the censors, as it will likely make even those with the broadest mindsets gag.

With a finale which will literally blow your mind, *Brain Damage* is - one imagines - like the ultimate 'trip', complete with bells, whistles and neon lights ten feet high. Just don't watch before eating, as it could well result in a wasted meal.

Rating: 🧠🧠🧠🧠🧠

SPECIAL FEATURES: As is frequently the case with a release from Arrow Films, the extras accompanying their Blu-ray edition of Frank Henenlotter's *Brain Damage* are better than the film itself.

Included amongst such regular features as subtitles, the theatrical trailer, audio commentary - by Henenlotter himself - and reversible cover art for the box, you get a host of mini-features filmed exclusively for the new release. Though the Q&A with Henenlotter - recorded at the 2016 Onscreen Film Festival - makes for interesting viewing, it is without doubt the interviews with SFX wizard Gabe Bartalos, and stills photographer Karen Ogle, who discuss their memories of working on the film, which stand out. These, along with a guide to the NYC locations used in the film as well as a slightly disturbing interview - *Tasty Memories: A Brain Damage Obsession* - with self-confessed *Brain Damage* mega-fan Adam Skinner, make for some meaty side dishes to accompany a film of truly 'offal' proportions.

Rating: 🧠🧠🧠🧠🧠

BRAIN DAMAGE is out now on **UK Blu-ray** courtesy of Arrow Video.

REVIEWED BY CLEAVER PATTERSON