

## BLACK SUNDAY

Directed by John Frankenheimer  
(1977) Arrow Video Blu-ray

Despite the best efforts of studio publicists and film critics who, over the years, have tried to label it one thing or another, John Frankenheimer's 1977 thriller *Black Sunday* defies classification. It's part political thriller, part disaster movie, and part meticulously realistic sports movie. But it's also more than those constituent pieces: In sum, a truly original, if not entirely successful, picture.

The plot finds Mossad agent David Kabokov (Robert Shaw) trying to wipe out a cell of Palestinian terrorists including lovely Dahlia Iyad (Marthe Keller). In the film's opening moments, Kabokov and fellow Israeli agents bust into the terrorists' secret headquarters and shoot to death nearly everyone. But Kabokov lets Iyad (who he discovers in mid-shower) escape, not realizing she is the key to an operation in the U.S. She has recruited Michael Lander (Bruce Dern) a disgruntled Vietnam veteran, now the pilot of the Goodyear blimp, for an audacious plan to set off an explosive device in the middle of the Super Bowl, killing an entire stadium full of spectators—including President Gerald Ford. Kabokov spends the rest of the film trying to deduce and then prevent the elaborate scheme, but always seems one step behind Iyad and Lander.

When it debuted, *Black Sunday* was promoted as a disaster movie, sort of a cross between *The Hindenberg* (1975) and *Two-Minute Warning* (1976), about a sniper at a football game. But unlike those two films, it lacks the typical structure of a disaster movie, with a star-studded cast whose interlocking soap opera-like subplots come to a head when catastrophe strikes. It's arguably closer to the white-knuckle suspense of *Day of Jackal* (1973) and *The Odessa File* (1974), but those pictures were set in the past, affording viewers the comfort of knowing from the jump that the schemes they depict were thwarted in the end. *Black Sunday* may be closest in impact to Frankenheimer's own it-could-happen-tomorrow classics *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) and *Seven Days in May* (1964), though it never rises to either's level of inspired paranoia. It also owes quite a bit to Frankenheimer's *Grand Prix* (1966), recycling the techniques that made that picture one of the most realistic auto racing films ever shot.

*Grand Prix* was shot in part during actual Formula One races, and Frankenheimer shot *Black Sunday* in part during actual NFL games, including Super Bowl X at the Orange Bowl in Miami. The footage of the Pittsburgh Steelers and Dallas Cowboys was taken at the actual game, as was a shot of Shaw racing down the sidelines and across the end zone, and other things. Goodyear allowed Frankenheimer access to its actual fleet of airships. And cinematographer John Alonzo films everything in semi-documentary fashion, further bolstering the verisimilitude of the piece.

The story, adapted by Ernest Lehman, Kenneth Ross, and Ivan Moffat from the debut novel of future *Silence of the Lambs* author Thomas Harris, proves just as gritty and non-sense. The only thing that rings phony about the project, unfortunately, are its characters, who remain bland, one-note stereotypes, despite the earnest efforts of a very good cast. We get glimpses of their back stories but it's all the kind of predictable stuff you would expect. At no point does anyone surprise us. It's as if Kabokov, Iyad, and Lander are on train tracks and can't do anything except trundle along to their pre-set destinations. Dern's Lander is the most colorful of the three, mostly because Dern brings his trademark squirrely energy to the part. He enjoys the film's most impressive character scene all to himself, as Lander sits and sits—a sweaty, fidgeting, bundle of nervous energy—in an office waiting room for a psychiatric check-in with clueless social worker (William Daniels).

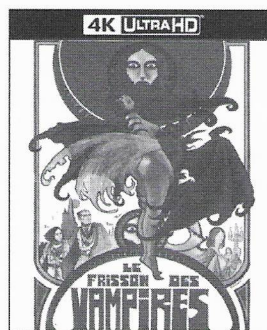
*Black Sunday* did respectable theatrical business but wasn't the blockbuster producers hoped it would be. Talking heads in bonus features included on this disc suggest that it underperformed because it was promoted as something it wasn't, and Friedkin thought *Black Sunday* suffered because *Two-Minute Warning* (a terrible film, by the way) beat it to the box office. It was also released in April of 1977, and was soon eclipsed by *Star Wars* and *Smokey and the Bandit*, which gobbled up huge shares of ticket sales that summer. Later in the year, *Saturday Night Fever* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* arrived to eat up even more box office. In the shadow of all those megahits, *Black Sunday* has been reduced to a mere footnote, which is unfortunate.

While its inert characters prevent it from being the great picture it might have been, *Black Sunday* remains a gripping watch, and its climax delivers the goods, featuring some truly spectacular stunt work in addition to all that super-realistic football business. A few unconvincing rear projection shots aside, its visual effects are also worth the wait. Hopefully Arrow Video's new Special Edition Blu-ray will help garner the film some belated attention. Arrow offers the film in a sparkling 2.35:1 widescreen, hi-def (1080p) edition that recreates the dense, slightly grainy theatrical look of the picture, rendering Alonzo's rich but subdued color palette faithfully. There are three audio options (lossless mono, recreating the original sound of the film; a lossless stereo track; and 5.1 surround sound). Optional English subtitles are included. All of them sound great, so pick your favorite.

As usual, Arrow also provides a healthy assortment of supplements, including: A fascinating in-depth audio commentary by film historian Josh Nelson; a 29-minute visual essay by critic Sergio Angelini (essentially a making-of featurette); the John Frankenheimer episode of *The Directors* series, which runs an hour and features interviews with Frankenheimer and key collaborators; as well an image gallery.

*Black Sunday* remains tough to pigeon-hole, but *Scream* recommends making room for it on your Blu-ray shelf—in one category or another.

Mark Clark



## THE SHIVER OF THE VAMPIRES

Directed by Jean Rollin  
(1971) Indicator 4K/Blu-ray  
(region free import)

Jean Rollin is back again, this time in 4K. We've seen *The Shiver of the Vampires* on VHS, DVD, and Blu-ray. Each time the film seems better, and this time there are plenty of extras as well. If you've been thinking about an upgrade,

this is the time to do it. If you haven't jumped into the Rollin's pool—well, what are you waiting for? Everyone has his own favorites, but *The Shiver of the Vampires* (*Le Frisson des Vampires*) is usually near the top.

This was Rollin's third "horror" film, after *The Rape of the Vampire* (*Le Viol du Vampire*) and *The Nude Vampire* (*La Vampire Nue*), and by now, the director is firing on all cylinders. And this time, Rollin's decided to throw some acid rock as well. It's surreal, bizarre, bloody, as well as sexy (it's always sexy, of course). We've seen a lot of castles and a lot of breasts over the years in England, America, Spain, etc., etc. but France had its own spin, with Rollin leading the pack. Antoine (Jean-Marie Durand) and Isle (Sandra Julien) are on their honeymoon (we've seen a lot of haunted honeymoons as well). For some reason, these two have decided to stop by Isla's cousins. Unfortunately, they're dead—freshly dead, as a matter of fact. Soon, they'll stay in an old chateau, they get to meet several vampires, and various peculiar things will also happen. Other words, it's Jean Rollin. And did I mention several breasts?

The viewer is never sure what's happening—but *something's* happening. Is it a comedy of some sort? Dreamlike, perhaps? Or is it straight-up horror? Rollin can do them all at once. This time Marie-Pierre Castel (*Requiem for a Vampire*) is working alone, with her twin sister Catherine Castel (*Lips of Blood*) is MIA. Instead, the newlyweds meet two weird maids, Castel and Kuelan Herce. At the midnight hour, things get even stranger. The famous big set piece is an old grandfather clock which opens to reveal a rather nice mod vampire. This is Isolde (Dominique Toussaint). Isle and Isolde are spirited away to the graveyard where more vampires await. Soon, Isle is shivering as well. Meanwhile, Antoine has no idea what's happening. We don't either, really, but it looks great! Rollin's is almost always absolutely spectacular.

It's not surprising that Jean-Jacques Renon is the cinematographer here, as both men worked together for much of the 70's. As previously mentioned, the reds and blues are simply lush and jaw-dropping this time around with Indicator. That chateau alone is breathtaking. The cemetery is gorgeous as well. Older prints of the film look much darker. Indicator's edition of *The Shiver of the Vampires* is easily the best the film has looked on physical media. For starters, this 4K (as well as a stand alone edition Blu-ray) looks fantastic. French or English audio are optional. Indicator also packs a wealth of fantastic bonus features on the disc and features two audio commentary tracks. From 2006 director Jean Rollin discusses the film. Audio is French, unfortunately, but it has an optional English subtitles. That's important, as Rollin is getting quite deep into the weeds, in every detail. It's little easier to listen to this new commentary with Jeremy Richey. This one is broader, as Richey delves deep into Rollin's filmography.

Other extras include a short video introduction by Rollin (in English). There are seven insert scenes in various erotic exports that run about 25 minutes. This includes some S&M, and more lesbian odds and ends. These can be rather explicit, although that's normal fare for Rollin. There's an interview with the director in English, from 2004 (approx. 40 minutes). Rounding out the disc is an 18-minute program with several of Rollin's assistants from *Shiver*, which is intersperse with several clips. All are in French, with optional English subtitles. An informative video essay from Virginie Selavy, a film scholar and journalist is a worthy addition here as well. English, German, and French theatrical trailers and an image gallery are the final bonus features on the disc. First pressings include a limited edition 80-page book, with a new essay by David Hinds (*Fascination: The Celluloid Dreams of Jean Rollin*), plus several interviews, including the actor Marie-Pierre Castel (actor, *The Shiver of the Vampires*, *Requiem for a Vampire*, *Lips of Blood*). Even if *Scream* readers own previous physical media editions of *The Shiver of the Vampires*, the Indicator upgrade is worthy, as there's a wealth of new features for Rollin enthusiasts.

Chris Herzog