

The Phantom's
**FEAR FILM
 FAVES!**

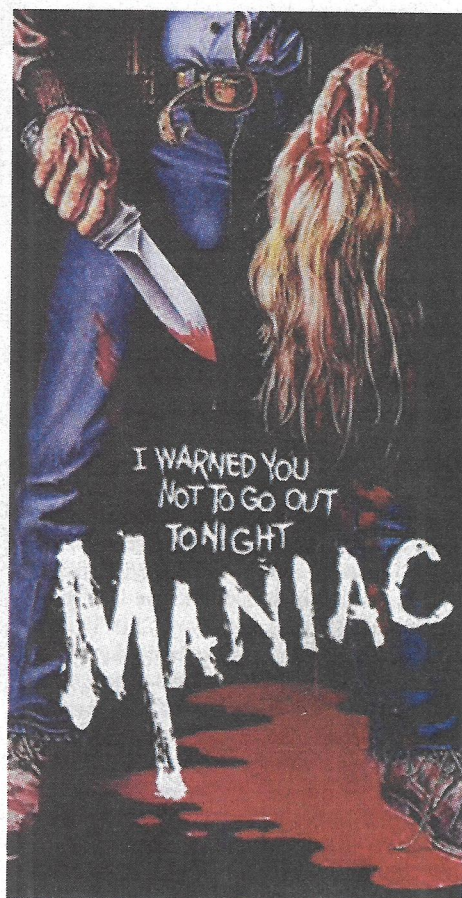
SHOUT! FACTORY

(\$29.99 Blu-ray each) 9/18, 8/18

BRAIN DEAD (1990) ♂♂♂♂

D: Adam Simon. Bill Pullman, Bud Cort, Bill Paxton, Patricia Charbonneau, George Kennedy, Nicholas Pryor. 84 mins.

Your Phantom's admittedly a sucker for surreal shockers, especially when they involve deranged brain experiments. (We wouldn't go so far as to say we've never met a deranged brain-experiment movie we didn't like, but that wouldn't be too far off the mark.) Simon's *Brain Dead* represents a welcome addition to this cerebral subgenre. Updated from a previously unfilmed script (originally titled *Paranoid*) by the late, great scare scribe Charles Beaumont, who wrote many of *The Twilight Zone's* best episodes, *Brain Dead* stars Pullman as Rex Martin, a neurologist so in love with his work that he talks to the preserved, jar-encased brains that line his lab. Martin's troubles begin when corporate creep Jim Reston (Paxton) enlists him to retrieve a vital mathematical formula buried deep in the addled cerebrum of paranoid genius James Halsey (Cort, in a memorably over-the-top turn). No sooner does our hero consort with Halsey than he too descends into total paranoid lunacy. Or does he? Only sinister shrink Ramsen (Pryor) seems to know for sure, and he may be jiving too. Aside from conscious nods to *Re-Animator*—Martin is a graduate of H.P. Lovecraft's infamous "Miskatonic" med school—and the notorious nympho-ward scene from Sam Fuller's *Shock Corridor*, *Brain Dead* wisely plays its mad material straight. Add graphic brain-surgery close-ups, a cameo by the legendary George Kennedy as a craven corporate head, and inventive nightmare imagery and you have one of the '90s' freshest frightfests, guaranteed to keep adventurous viewers both guessing and gasping. Director Simon—whose main claim to fame may be as a fleeting opening-reel audio in-joke in Robert Altman's *The Player* (VS #2)—deserves credit for recognizing the brilliance of Beaumont's script and bringing it to healthy hallucinatory screen life. Extras on Shout!'s new Blu-ray include an audio commentary with director Simon and co-writer Rodman Flender, deleted scenes, and original trailer. Shout! also issues a bonus-laden Blu-ray of John Flynn's 1991 chiller *Brainscan*, starring Edward Furlong and Frank Langella, arriving with audio commentaries, interviews, behind-the-scenes featurettes, deleted scenes, trailers, TV spots and more.



THE UNBORN (1991) ♂♂1/2

D: Rodman Flender. Brooke Adams, James Hayenga, James Karen, Lisa Kudrow, K Callan. 84 mins.

A variation on Larry Cohen's *It's Alive* killer-infant trilogy (with even deeper roots in *Rosemary's Baby*), *The Unborn* stars Adams as Virginia Marshall, an infertile children's-book author who, with lawyer hubby Brad (Hayenga), consults upscale fertility expert Dr. Meyerling (Karen). Said visit soon leads to a series of creepy artificial insemination procedures. Despite the doc's assurance that "this is not a gothic novel," Virginia finds herself pregnant with your typical genetic mutant. Adams, whose character already suffers from preexisting mental imbalances, delivers an intense perf as the understandably paranoid monster-mom-to-be. Callan supplies dark comic relief as Virginia's even nuttier mother Martha. Upon observing her extravagantly pregnant daughter smoking cigarettes and knocking back hard liquor, mom remarks, "Isn't that bad for the baby these days?" *The Unborn* is at its best when satirizing sinister medicos, slick media types, and pretentious New Agers, like the lesbian couple who ban fathers from their holistic birthing classes because they consider them "outsiders" (!). Electronica pioneer Gary Numan composed the effectively spooky score. *The Unborn II* (VS #11) followed three years later. *Scream's* new 2k restoration Blu-ray includes a fresh audio commentary by director Flender and fellow filmmaker Adam (*Brain Dead*) Simon. ♂

**Rob Freese's
 SLASHER CLASSIC
 FLASHBACK!**

BLUE UNDERGROUND

(\$39.95 3-Disc Limited Edition Blu-ray + DVD + CD) 12/18

MANIAC (1980) ♂♂♂♂

D: William Lustig. Joe Spinell, Caroline Munro, Abigail Clayton, Tom Savini, Hyla Marrow, Sharon Mitchell. 88 mins.

Frank Zito (Spinell) is an ugly, sweaty, scabby sleazoid living in a rundown apartment decorated with bizarre posters and artwork as well as department store mannequins with the scalps of murdered women nailed on their heads. Zito is a depraved, murderous psychopath who wanders the dark streets of New York City looking for victims to slash, stab, garrote and shotgun to death. Somehow, ditsy fashion photographer Anna D'Antoni (Munro) is receptive to the guy. They go on a date, eat cheese sticks, then detour to the graveyard so Frank can freak out while hallucinating that his wicked mother is crawling out of her grave. Anna flees into the night with the hulking psycho in pursuit. Spinell is only on screen a few seconds before we instantly believe he is capable of the disgusting acts of violence on display. *Maniac* sparked serious outrage when it was released theatrically, where it had a successful run before becoming a big hit on the then-burgeoning home-video market. (I still remember walking into video shops and seeing the *Maniac* poster tacked to the wall.) The flick has lost none of its power to unnerve. What helps make the film such a brutal viewing experience is the great acting. During one harrowing scene in which a nurse is stalked in a subway bathroom, the actress (Kelly Piper) portraying the nurse sells the fear so well you physically feel a punch to your gut when Zito appears behind her in a mirror. This over-the-top, gritty stalk 'n' slash flick is also a showcase for some of Savini's best special effects. Fans have debated for years over the ending. This three-disc special edition provides a plethora of bonus material: an audio commentary with auteur William Lustig and producer Andrew Garroni; a second track with Lustig, Savini, Joe Spinell, editor Lorenzo Marinelli, and Spinell assistant Luke Walter; interviews with Munro, Savini and composer Jay Chattaway; **Returning to the Scene of the Crime** featurette with Lustig; the documentary **The Joe Spinell Story**; Lustig visiting songwriters Michael Sembello and Dennis Matkosky to find out if his movie inspired the hit single "Maniac" for the film *Flashdance*; archival TV appearances, including Joe Spinell on *The Joe Franklin Show*; a *Maniac* Controversy gallery of newscasts showcasing the picketing of the movie by feminist groups; outtakes, trailers and TV spots; a collectible booklet by Michael Gingold; and more. If you're a fan of the film, which is recognized by most as a classic of slasher cinema, then I heartily recommend this set, even if you have one of the many previous editions. ♂