

BIKINI BLOODBATH CHRISTMAS

(2010) ♂♂1/2

D: Jon Gorman & Thomas Edward Seymour. Rachael Robbins, Margaret Rose Champagne, Dick Boland, Phil Hall, Lloyd Kaufman, Debbie Rochon. 71 mins. (Brightly Entertainment) 10/10

While it doesn't quite reach the dizzying heights of *Bikini Bloodbath Car Wash* (VS #71), partly due to our own Debbie Rochon's reduced screentime (her "Miss Johnson" character cameos as a coma victim and appears in flashbacks from the previous pic), *Bikini Bloodbath Christmas* maintains the no-budget franchise's expected standards, celebrating sheer stupidity on a scale rivaled only by Mike Judge's *Idiocracy* (VS #62). As in the previous entries, the action unfolds in its own alternate universe, one that makes Lloyd Kaufman's Tromaville seem a bastion of civility. The typically simple set-up sees a gaggle of bubble-headed gals, fronted by the appealing Robbins, and a few token male morons sliced and diced by reanimated (once again) maniac Chef Death, this time in Santa mufti. While determinedly offensive, *BBC* is rarely mean-spirited and in fact yields more laughs from its ditsy characters, throwaway situations and inspiredly non-sequitur dialogue than it does from its gross-out gags and gore moves. Adding to the merriment are Boland, channeling erstwhile Python Terry Jones in drag, as Miss Johnson's sister Mrs. Johnson, and the above-mentioned Kaufman, cast here as a cheerfully befuddled surgeon. Wisely limiting their runtime to an in-and-out 71 minutes, outré auteurs Gorman and Seymour supply sufficient fun to make *BBC* worth a look for committed bad-taste buffs. Extras include outtakes and filmmakers' commentary.

—The Phantom

BRAIN DEAD (2007) ♂♂1/2

D: Kevin S. Tenney. Joshua Benton, Sarah Grant Brendecke, David Crane, Andy Forrest, Alexandra Goodman, Jim Wynorski. 91 mins. (Breaking Glass) 10/10

Near a fishing lodge in the mountains, a meteorite comes bursting from the sky and buries itself into a fisherman's skull, instantly turning him into a brain-eating snot monster. Two convicts on the run, a couple of sorority sisters and a sleazy reverend and his young secretary all happen along the fishing lodge and have to fend off the phlegm creature without being transformed. One unbelievable close-up gross-out happens underneath a young girl's dress. Throwing caution to the wind, Tenney creates a heady stew of outrageous Gabe Bartalos gore effects, humor, gratuitous nudity and fast-paced action. Benton is a hoot as the wise-cracking jailbird, upstaged only by director Wynorski, who portrays the redneck law officer Sheriff

Bodine. *Brain Dead* reps a perfect blend of lowbrow humor, exposed skin and over-the-top gore.

—Rob Freese

CAT CITY (2008) ♂♂♂

D: Brent Huff. Julian Sands, Brian Dennehy, Rebecca Pidgeon, Alano Massi, Shawn Huff, Lou Beatty Jr. 90 mins. (MTI Home Video) 8/10

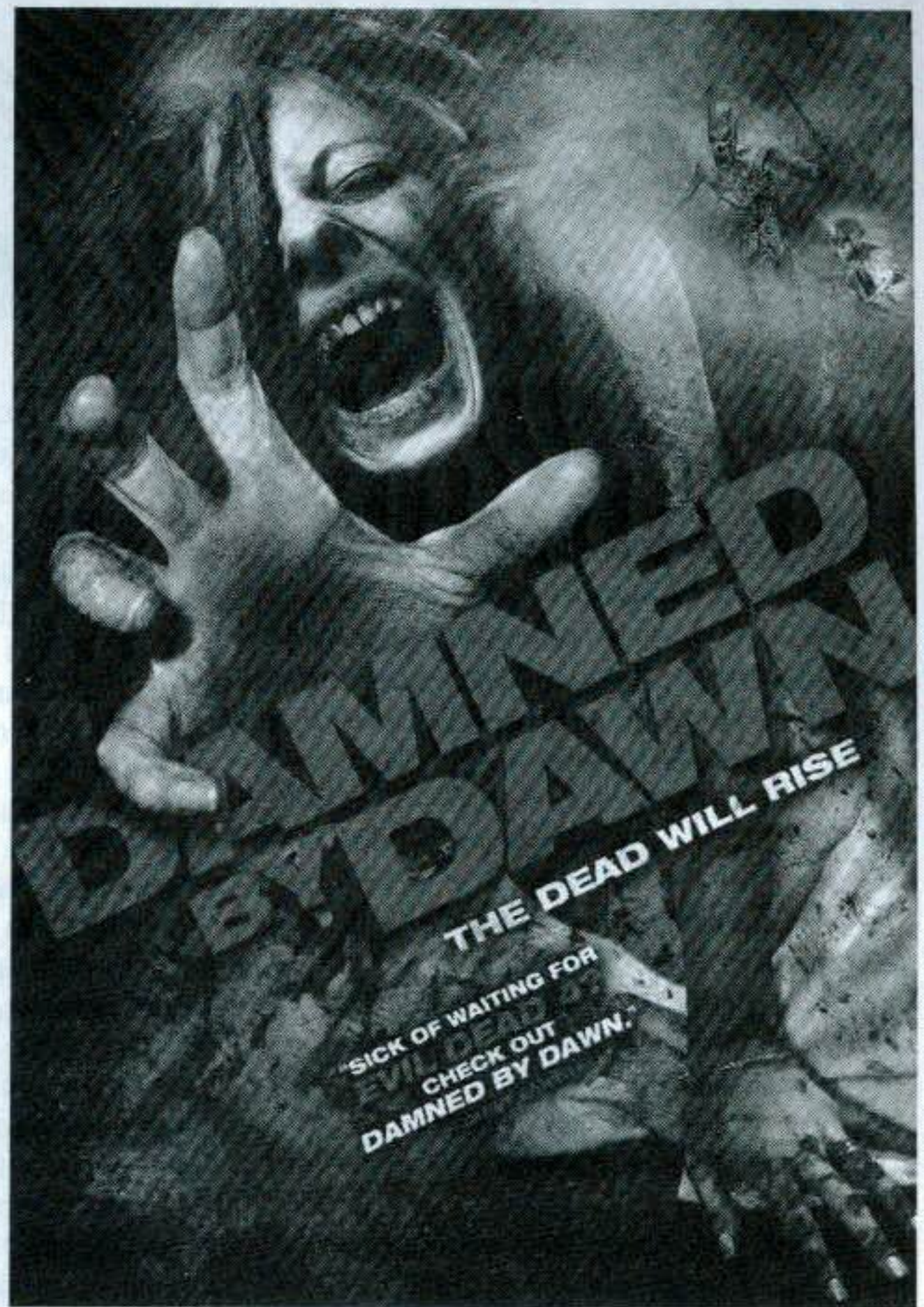
If you are a cost-conscious consumer, you can find economical transportation at a local used car lot. If you are a low-budget indie director, you can't find cheaper actors at a Hollywood "pre-filmed" thespian dealer. If you could do so, '80s stars Brian Dennehy and Julian Sands might be prominently featured. Why not? Both men have very extensive Internet Movie Database credits that include separate episodes of *Law & Order: SVU* and this feature. Its title refers to a Palm Springs area municipality, so the movie may disappoint viewers who expect a film about cats or cathouses. Protagonist Nick Compton (Sands) cheats with lawyer Samantha Greene (Huff), friend and partner of wife Victoria (Pidgeon). Her specialty: family law! Nick's California Indian casino scam stings investor Vince Roland (Massi), the type of "pigeon" who is Bernie Madoff's worst nightmare. Sands offers enough nuance to create audience sympathy for Compton when the con artist is framed for murder—one only roots for the character to get his *just* desserts. He is outclassed by newcomer Massi, who knows how to portray a charismatic menace. Dennehy fans will be pleased to see him portray ex-cop/P.I. Harold Vorgessor in an unassuming manner. He is particularly effective in his scenes with Beatty, who plays his police lieutenant ex-colleague. Huff elevates this routine drama via his ability to motivate his production team, who cleverly reveal the characters' ugliness and the region's beauty. Although *Cat City* was originally released back in 2008, today's audiences will be able to identify with the characters' financial concerns.

—Ronald C. Epstein

DAMNED BY DAWN (2009) ♂♂♂

D: Brett Anstey. Renee Willner, Bridget Neval, Dawn Klingberg, Taryn Eva, Danny Alder, Mark Taylor, Peter Stratford. 85 mins. (Image Entertainment) 11/10

On the disc's 55-minute making-of doc, and in all of Image's press releases, *Damned* is touted as a return to the atmospheric chillers we were enamored of during the heyday of Hammer Horror.



Indeed, Anstey's film is beautifully shot in a desolate, fogbound section of the Australian outback. The film looks creepy as hell—the "farmhouse" that serves as the story's main setting more closely resembles Frankenfurter's mansion in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. But the film's execution is closer to *The Evil Dead*—which is not necessarily a bad thing. The bare-bones plot doesn't make much sense: On the night of her grandmother's death, Claire (Willner) makes a fatal error. She tries to destroy the screaming, bloody-eyed banshee that's come to lead grandma on her "journey." Big mistake: the dead, many of whom are inexplicably buried on her dad's farm, rise out of their graves. That farm is populated by some of the dumbest people seen onscreen since Tippi Hedren shut the attic door behind her in Hitchcock's *The Birds*. Instead of doing the smart thing—leave—every single one of them walks right into harm's way. The body count is high, the gore intense. As the banshee, Neval plays nothing more than a scary-looking caricature, but she's very good—a frightening visage. Willner is superb. It's nice to see a woman in a horror film who's willing and able to fight back. She's a strong one! Klingberg is terrific as the grandmother. The film's early scenes feature her quiet dignity as she faces her end; her performance will touch viewers' hearts. *Damned by Dawn* does an excellent job of simultaneously recreating the visual styles of both 1960s Hammer and 1980s zombie movies. It may not make much sense, but it's a fun thrill ride.

—David Alex Nahmod