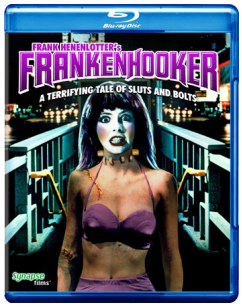
He has given us a malformed, severed Siamese twin viciously mutilating the doctors who separated him from his brother, and oral sex unwittingly performed upon a brain-sucking parasite, but never let it be said that writer/director Frank Henenlotter doesn’t know when to hold back. “I never wanted this to be a gore film,” he says at the start of his commentary track on Synapse Films’ Blu-ray (coming November 8) of FRANKENHOOKER, in which a young self-styled scientist (James Lorinz) rebuilds his girlfriend (ravaged in a lawnmower accident) from parts of dead prostitutes who have exploded after smoking “super-crack.”



Those who haven’t previously seen the movie might wonder what else it *could* be, but those who have will know that it’s a wickedly funny exercise in black-humored horror in which Henenlotter, quite rightly, tones down the bloodshed and exaggerates what could have been lurid and unpleasant into something so berserk that you can’t help but laugh. And if you haven’t viewed the film before, now’s the time. Previously available on a long-out-of-print VHS tape (in a “talking” box that squawked “Wanna date?” in a voice that was not, we learn, that of titular star Patty Mullen) and Unearthed Films DVD, FRANKENHOOKER has been given a very spiffy hi-def upgrade by Synapse, beginning with a vivid 1.78:1 transfer of the uncut feature. Made in the true grindhouse spirit at a time when the actual grindhouses had become an endangered species, the movie retains that grotty veneer while also sporting a pristine image and rich colors. It’s supported by strong DTS-HD 5.1 sound and a full stable of extras ported over from the Unearthed disc, beginning with that commentary, in which Henenlotter is joined by FX artist and longtime collaborator Gabe Bartalos—the man charged with blowing up a roomful of hookers without making this “a gore film.”

Bartalos not only shares insights into the creation of his grotesque/comical FRANKENHOOKER gags, he also serves as a fine moderator for the track as well. Not like Henenlotter needs much prompting—always a great raconteur on tracks like this, he provides a thorough and often hilarious chronicle of the film’s history, from genesis (he recalls coming up

with the scenario on the spot while pitching to producer James Glickenhaus) to filming (anticipating SNAKES ON A PLANE’s brief retitling to PACIFIC AIR 121, this movie was referred to as FRANKENSTEIN ’90 while locations were being sought) to completion (“pointless” trims made to appease the MPAA are noted). Lorinz comes in for some much-deserved praise for his terrific deadpan performance, as the always modest Henenlotter claims that, through his delivery and frequent ad-libbing, the actor turned a character who “on paper, doesn’t work” into a memorably snarky antihero.

Bartalos reveals further details of his FRANKENHOOKER FX in a self-produced minidocumentary that provides entertaining behind-the-scenes footage, a guest appearance by a “fake boob” and a funny detour into “The Bunny Ranch” (though Bartalos never does get into the hot tub). The still-lovely Mullen appears in her own segment in which, contrary to many such reminiscences, she recalls really enjoying wearing the extensive Frankenhooker makeup—and especially the reactions she received when wearing it in public. She has even kept the character’s wig all these years, and puts it on at the end of this piece to prove it.

Her co-star Jennifer Delora, who played one of the doomed ladies of the evening, receives a pair of featurettes (produced by indie filmmaker Scooter McCrae) in which she demonstrates a keen memory and a whole lotta attitude. Claiming she was originally cast in the title role and referring to Lorinz as “a diva,” she maintains a spirited sense of humor as she rails against people who took too much time on the FRANKENHOOKER set—including a pair of actresses to whom she read the riot act when they refused to do a previously agreed-upon nude lesbian scene. “Don’t piss Jennifer off on a set,” she warns, and don’t try to take her Miss Ulster County crown either: Delora remembers how pageant officials tried to strip her of that honor after she appeared in BAD GIRLS DORMITORY, and how her resulting battle to keep it garnered her scads of publicity. She also presents a collection of set Polaroids of herself, her stand-in dummy and her co-stars behind the scenes.

The package is rounded out by the film’s trailer; pretty much the only key contributor conspicuous by his absence here is Lorinz himself. And considering how extensive the supplemental package is otherwise, you have to assume they did at least try to get him.

MOVIE: 💀💀💀🖤

DVD PACKAGE: 💀💀💀🖤