



A tribute to corporate raiders? Only the braintrust behind this knows for sure

Edward Hunt's The Brain

The *Brain* reunites the team of Edward Hunt, director, and Barry Pearson, writer. In 1977 the two produced a virtually unknown tax-shelter film, *Plague*, starring Daniel Pilon, Kate Reid and Céline Lomez, that was eventually released on the Texas drive-in circuit in 1979.

Hunt had previously written, produced and directed *Starship Invasion* with Robert Vaughn in 1976, and Pearson had written the screenplay for Peter Pearson's *Paperback Hero* in 1972. You would have thought that these two gentlemen of modest but promising talent would have learnt a thing or two about filmmaking over the years and perhaps gone on to do better things. However, time seems to be working in reverse with the theatrical release of *The Brain*. A more inept, amateurish piece of celluloid excrement cannot not be imagined even in the darkest days of tax-shelter filmmaking.

The film was produced by Tony Kramreither, the man responsible for such Canadian cinematic gems as *Mondo Nude* (1978), *Humungous* (1981) and *Thrillkill* (1983). However, recently Kramreither has been moving away from his more lurid films and getting behind quality projects like Leon Marr's *Dancing In The Dark* and the underrated *Concrete Angels*. *The Brain* represents a major step backwards to the bad old days. In fact, all involved in this laughable piece of junk, including special effects co-ordinator Mark Williams (*The Fly*, *Aliens*), should be thoroughly embarrassed that this film has actually seen the

light of day on the theatrical circuit. *The Brain* is headed directly for the bottom of the bin in the sleaziest section of your local video-cassette outlet reserved especially for this sort of pre-pubescent schlock/horror flick.

The Brain, which borrows liberally from David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* and *Invasion Of The Body Snatchers*, without a whit of justice done to either of these far superior films, concerns the doings of an evil, alien psychiatrist (David Gale) who controls the minds of those who watch his TV show by means of a living brain. The brain, which at first looks like an oversized piece of turd with a tail, is hooked-up to all sorts of electrodes and TV monitors from which it relays commands to its master.

Not content with merely controlling human minds with hallucinations, the brain unexplainedly develops a carnivorous appetite for the mad doctor's female assistant. "That's food for thought!", exclaims the wide-eyed psychiatrist as the unfortunate assistant disappears inside the squirming lump of turd. After a satisfying burp the creature develops the funniest set of fangs and bulging eyes imaginable.

Into this ludicrous state of affairs comes our all-American hero (the suburbs of Toronto and Mississauga are thinly disguised to be somewhere in New York, although the art director forgot or couldn't afford to lose the Toronto transit stops and other assorted bits of Canadiana), played by Tom Breznahan with a perpetual smirk. Of course he is cute and contemptuous of authority. He resists the psychiatrist's attempts at brainwashing and subsequently he is chased all over the lab and town by the mad doctor's remaining assistant, a certain overweight, lunatic-looking Nurse Varna, played unintentionally for laughs by George Buza. Every once-in-a-while the rapidly growing brain will appear out of nowhere to menace our hero and wreak havoc on the good folks of Meadowvale.

Our macho high school hero is helped by his virginal girlfriend, the pretty but incompetent Cyndy Preston, until she too comes under the brain's power. Once again he is chased all over the place by Nurse Varna. Again he escapes and sneaks back into the TV studio, intent on destroying the brain. By now the organ has become the size of a Mack truck, eating everybody in its path, including, thank goodness, Nurse Varna. However, our hero, with his ex-virginal girlfriend at his side, comes face-to-face with the worst case of bad breath this side of King Kong. With an unbelievable sleight-of-hand, he blows up the saliva-drooling monster and happily all the good people of Meadowvale are released from its spell. Canada, oops, I mean America, is once again saved from alien domination.

In the middle of one of the endless boring chases, our hero's best friend and girlfriend, who are looking for him in the TV studio, stop,

and she wails "We have to find him!" "What do you mean we have to?", asks the best friend. "I don't know", is her idiotic response. It seems sad that the makers of *The Brain* also apparently don't know what they are doing. I can only hope they got paid well for their efforts and that the talent wasted here will get on with the better films they all are capable of making.

Paul Townend •

THE BRAIN exec. p. Don Haig p. Tony Kramreither d. Edward Hunt sc. Barry Pearson ed. David Nicholson d.o.p. Gilles Corbeil creature and makeup fx. Mark Williams mus. Paul Zaza co. p. ip. mgr. Ken Gord assoc. p. Phillip M. Good p. exec. (IVE) Victor "Jake" Davich p. exec. (SGE) Gary Drucker asst. to p. Teresa A. Wain art d. Byron Patchett stunts coord. Gary Brown sp. fx. Danny White, Craig Williams cast. Lucinda Sill, CDC 1st a.d. Robert Petovic 2nd a.d. Randi Richmond 1st. asst. ed. Robin Russell 2nd asst. ed. Rae Crombie, Cyndy Fret sd. ed. Karl Konny loc. mgr. Jeremy Gauthier, Tony Morrone, Mark Mowad gaffer J.P. Locherer best boy Alan Pill electricians Yuri Yakubiw, Dean Emerick key grip Bill Heintz 2nd grip John Boan-Mitchell best boy grip Richard Emerson grips Bruce Chadwick, Mark Mavrinac sd. rec. Jin Hong, Rae Crombie boom Doug Dixon cast. des. Eva Gord ward. Jocelyn Senior ward. asst. Sara Schult set dresser Nick White 1st. asst. cam. John Joffin 2nd asst. cam. Jane Davis cam. assts. Dvgr Plank, Josh Melamed, Ben Sharp, Gisele Turpin, Mark Willis key props Danny White props asst. Craig Williams Dial. ed. David Nicholson sp. fx. assts. Ray Greer, Cathy Mullanphy, Gabe Fallus, Rae Crombie, Kevin Danzey, Thomas M. Bellisario brain op. Chris Thiesenhausen, Phillip M. Good video cons. Bruce Parlette p. coord. Sandi Henri, Sandra Deziel 3rd. a.d. Carlos Caneca a.d. trainee Christine Doré office p.a. Tom Willey cont. Karen Paterson set des. Roderick Mayne asst. art d. Michael Borthwick 2nd. a.d. Andrea Stokes art dept. trainee Tamara Boan-Mitchell const. foreman Andrew Colpitts hd. carpenter Jim Parry carp. Chris Radley Walters, David Hoekstra painter Harry Patchett p.a. Thomas M. Bellisario craft Anne Fotheringham hair/makeup Odelya hair/makeup asst. Donna Keravica driver capt. Noella Nesdoly drivers Mark Currie, Andrew Sparkes, Andrew Ward, Andrew Vincent comp. animation Larry Chase stills photo Sophie Hogan extras cast. JW Casting Foley artist Reid J. Atherton Foley asst. Maureen Wetteland neg cutter Catherine Rankin video transfers Alndon Grp. Prods. re-rec. mix Mike Hoogenboom asst. mix Peter Kelly adr sd. rec. Rae Crombie Inserts crew: p. mgr. Rae Crombie gaffer Phillip M. Good key grip Mike Brown grip Harold Delisle p. asst. Mike Toke stunts Gary Brown, Ed Hellier, Steve Pernie, Cindy Goldhawk equipment Cdn

Motion Pic. Equipment Rentals l.p. Tom Breznahan, Cyndy Preston, David Gale, George Buza, Christine Kossack, Bret Pearson, Bernice Quiggan, Susannah Hoffman, Justine Campbell. Presented by Brightstar Films.

George Erschbamer's Snake Eater

O.K. It plays like this. Vietnam vet "Soldier" is back home after serving in the crack search-and-destroy squad the "Snake Eaters." Back in civvies there's not much call on the streets of "big city U.S.A." for eating snakes or searching & destroying, so our boy lines up undercover work as a narc stinging dope dealer. Benefits include a sexy black pusher with a scar from neck to navel who likes to play strip poker without the poker. Anyway the boy plays by his own rules and when the junkies come by he nails their feet to the floor to make sure they don't split. His superiors at the P.D. don't like his approach and turf him from the force.

Meanwhile, down some desolate backwoods bayou, Soldier's family are vacationing on their houseboat when set upon by a group of snarling, sadistic hillbillies who've been festering in the Ozarks since *Deliverance*. Mom & Dad sink into the black cesspool in a burning blaze of glory while lithe, nubile Sis goes off to be a sex slave, locked up in a fetid shack. Soldier finds out that his folks are dead from a sheriff after he's laid out a couple of particularly nasty bikers at a roadside pit stop called "The Cage" where he landed after his chopper went out of control after he veered to avoid hitting a child chasing a ball. The man has a heart of gold.



Josie Bell and Lorenzo Lamas in *Snakeeater*

Anyway he smells something fishy (not surprising considering all the depraved things the locals do with fish) and with an AK-47 assault rifle and his bike retrofitted to cruise the waves, he heads off to seek vengeance...

Snake Eater – a new action/adventure shot in New Brunswick and co-produced by Cinepix and Carota Films. Allow me to ask a rhetorical question? Why does anyone bother to write or produce such nonsense? Why does anyone (does anyone) go to see such schlock? I know, I know – it's escapist entertainment written to appeal directly to the adolescent midbrain. The infantile jokes, references to masturbation, beer bottles in the groin, gimmicks with condoms, etc. appeal to the adolescent sense of humour. All the knives, guns, blood, gore, fights, shootouts, imaginative ways of killing people, etc. appeal to the sense of action and adventure. Gets the adrenalin flowing. And the barely clad, semi-clad, and un-clad female bodies, wet T-shirts, and bestial sexual attitudes of the uncouth hillbillies – well I don't know what lurid fantasies they're supposed to appeal to.

And they make them in the U.S. and if we want to show we're every bit as good (or bad) as the Americans then... And they have them on the back racks of the video section of the convenience store where they rent for a couple of bucks and make money for someone but, but, but... seriously, why bother? Is it too idealistic to believe that one can make other hip stuff which will appeal to teenagers without the veneer of violence? That turning this material out into the community just reinforces sexist stereotypes and exploits the female body? That all the money and time and effort and talent that go into making *any* feature film could be employed in better ways?

The only thing, in fact, that can be said for *Snake Eater* is that it avoids the very worst excesses of the genre. There is some humour, the plot, while not actually credible, at least hangs together. The climactic shootout is sparse on anything other than rounds of ammo and the film dribbles to a conclusion with an after-the-fact filmic aside in a warehouse involving an arsonist-cum-bug exterminator and a condom full of lighter fluid. Try and figure that one out. The cinematography is passable and the art direction creates a certain appropriate ambience. Lead Lorenzo Lamas of *Falcon Crest* fame manages to cultivate some character and Ronnie Hawkins and Josie Bell have a moment or two. *Snake Eater* is only slightly less appetizing cuisine than its name might suggest. Avoid it like a pit full of vipers.

Christopher Majka •

SHAKE EATER ex.p. Andre Link p. John Dunning d. George Erschbamer ior. Michael Paseornik & John Dunning d.o.p. Glen MacPherson music John Massar l.p. Lorenzo Lamas, Josie Bell, Robert Scott, Ronnie Hawkins, Cheryl Jeans, Larry Csonka, Ben DiGregorio, Mowava Pryor. A Cinepix/Carota Films co-production.

A few short films and videos in two of the programs, Childhood's End: Working on the Family and Family Secrets, in the overflowing cornucopia at the Images '89 Festival of Independent Film & Video in Toronto, May 3-7/89.

QAGGIQ

This impressive work is the one against which all others viewed at the Festival were judged! Zacharias Kunuk wrote a script, and then members of the Igloodik community improvised the docudrama under his direction. This story of home life in the Arctic in the 1930s centres on a young man who wants to marry a local girl. Her father won't give his consent, his wife favours the match, but to no avail.

The community prepares for the annual Qaggiq games, and builds a large igloo to house the gathering. People come by dog team for the singing, the telling of stories, and the games. The young man hopes to win over the girl's father by displaying his courage and strength.

Right from the large-screen video opening shots, one's interest is caught and then held throughout the unfolding of the story. The sheer "foreignness" of it all is overwhelming – the unending open spaces of ice and snow; the unfamiliar language (accompanied by adequate English sub-titles); the Inuit seen not as we know them today, but as they were in the '30s with authentic clothing and large and beautiful dog teams. The slight storyline is fleshed out by the daily round of living in a male-oriented, harsh environment.

A visitor brings a new pipe for his friend – the father of the girl who's desired by the young man – and there's much talk about its merits as it is passed around. When the sun shines, the children play outside and good humour abounds with everyone saying that it's a fine day – when the temperature must be way below zero.

The staging of the games event starts with the building of the large igloo, and here the camera is right inside the edifice with flakes of ice raining down on the lens as the work progresses. When the igloo is filled with people, the storytelling and singing and drumming starts, and is soon followed by the young bucks displaying their skills and staying power. Wriggling out of their large jackets, stripped to the waist, the youths indulge in good-natured

competition in such exotic sports as mouthpuling (complicated to describe precisely...).

Qaggiq is in a direct line from Flaherty and, assuming its authenticity, is a rivetting glance over the shoulder into the past. Director Zacharias Kunuk was unable to attend the screening, but sparse information gleaned indicated that he has made about eight films, and *Qaggiq* will be shown on the Inuit Broadcasting Channel this year. Would that a wider audience could see more of his work.

A video by Zacharias Kunuk. (1989) N.W.T. 58 mins.

FARM FANTASY

Elizabeth shows us her family at work on their potato farm in southern Ontario – but with a twist. This short video charmingly portrays family members animated and larger than life, working steadily, and looming over the horizons of their acreage as the seasons follow each other. A pleasant little piece with a specially composed and agreeable C&W soundtrack.

A video by Elizabeth Van der Zaag. (1989) B.C. 4 mins. Distributor: Video Out

MATEUS – FIFTY YEARS A COALMINER

The filmmaker's grandfather, Mateus Pieszchala, came to Canada in the 1920s from Poland looking for a better life. Through his children's memories and his painfully sparse disclosures, Mateus's hard life and battle against poverty, hardship, and discrimination emerges.

An interesting record of an immigrant family's struggle during the Depression years, contrasting vividly with today. The children are outgoing, comfortably settled and fluent in English, while Mateus appears lost and uncertain and, at times, unintelligible in his adopted tongue. One is acutely aware of the large gulf between children and father in this family.

A 16mm film by Rock Whitney. (1987) B.C. 25 mins. Distributor: Canadian Filmmakers' Distribution West (604) 684-3014

ZOE'S CAR

The avalanche of advertising gets a drubbing in this somewhat entertaining send-up. Zoe's parents enjoy looking at ads and dreaming about a life far from their own humdrum existence.

Giving into her pleas, they order a farm set for Zoe, which turns out to be a teeny-tiny tackey

version of the one depicted in the come-on catalogue. But, in this electronic age, it results in the family name and address being added to endless mailing lists, and so the glossy, seductive material rolls in to tempt and to upset the family balance.

Though lighthearted in style, with cut-out ads worked into a number of collages, the underlying message is a dark condemnation of the divisive nature of advertising.

A video by Ardele Lister. (1986) B.C. 8 mins. Distributor: Video Out (604) 688-4336

BORN TO BE SOLD: Martha Rosler Reads the Strange Case of Baby SM

The video artist relates the details of the famous surrogate mother case in the U.S. and, in the process, manages to analyse, dissect, and have a certain amount of highly entertaining fun with a serious issue that turned into somewhat of a circus.

With the aid of written material and TV clips, plus added pseudo-dramatizations, Rosler zeroes in on family rights and class attitudes and cleverly turns them on their collective ears. A mite too long, but gruesomely amusing nevertheless.

A video by Martha Rosler. (1988) U.S.A. 28 mins. Distributor: V/Tape (416) 863-9897

PRETENDING WE WERE INDIANS

A small video speculation by a walking woman as to a perceived, but not confirmed, family secret. A whiff of native ancestors, hushed up long ago; pieces of a puzzle worked upon during the walk; scraps of information sifted through her mind – what really happened?

A 16mm film by Katherine Assals. (1988) Québec. 3 mins.

MOLD GROWS ON BABY

The viewer is in the driver's seat looking through the windshield as the car moves along in a frosty suburban winter landscape. The car radio spews out the story of a widow, and her daughter who, as a teenager 20 years earlier, gave birth to an illegitimate child. The baby died – perhaps murdered? The unresolved family mystery is rehashed, with recrimination and speculation tossed between the mother and daughter. The landscape slips and slides past the window, but all the unhappy talk fails to provide an answer to the unsolved secret: who killed the unwanted child?

A "radio" video! The viewer is trapped inside a moving automobile and, with no visually dramatic highpoints, is forced to concentrate on the dialogue. After a while, the movement of the car and the blandness of the passing scenery combine to induce a hypnotic effect, to the detriment of the subject matter. But this is an intense, uneasy video which does not reach a safe, orderly conclusion.

A video by Shalhevet Goldhar. (1988) Ontario. 50 mins. Distributor: V/Tape (416) 863-9897

From *Quaggiq*, by Zacharias Kunuk: in a direct line from Flaherty's *Nanook*.

