

# The Reel Reviewer watches Jake Kennedy's **PENANCE!**

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***“Can you help me? No. Can I help you? No. Can you help yourselves? No. Are you absolutely, positively fucked? Yes.” — Mann (Michael Rooker)***

The Butcher of Bega, a media label for Graeme Stephen Reeves, a deregistered Australian OB-GYN (obstetrician and gynecologist) physician and surgeon who illegally practiced obstetrics post year 1997 and, also, has over hundreds of allegations against him for sexual abuse, incident assaults, and the genitalia mutilation over the course of three years, from 2001 to 2003, at three different hospitals: Bega, Pambula, and Richmond.

One of the allegations came from a former patient of Reeves, Carolyn Dewaegeneire, who broke her horrifying story to the national news media. Dewaegeneire was admitted to Pambula hospital in 2002 to have minor lesions removed from her labia. Before losing total consciousness from anesthesia, she claims Reeves whispered to her, “I’m going to take your clitoris, too.” After the operation, she discovered the outer portions, “all the fun bits” as Reeves called them, of her labia had been removed and was told she wouldn’t need them since her husband had been deceased.

This introduction of Graeme Stephen Reeves is to relate to you the sinister antagonistic character from the film **Penance** to which Reeves is inspired by. Branded a motive and given a slight name change, the Geeves character captures and maintains the same sadistic and demented qualities inspired by the real life, infamous person counterpart - if you can even put someone like him in the same category as people.

In a tale of survival terror, this story begins with modest life Amelia, a desperate single mother who takes on the uncharacteristic work of stripping as a way of obtaining fast money to hoist her out of debt and to receive medical treatment for her only child Asher who has been diagnosed with Neurofibromatosis. With the help of her pro-stripper friend Suzie, the shy Amelia lets loose to earn fast and easy cash. However, it is when she takes the reigns out of commissioned Suzie’s high priced and secretive gig that places Amelia in a world where cleansing the mind, body and soul of sin comes at a higher price. Captured, tortured, abused and mutilated by a sadistic surgeon named Geeves, there seems to be no hope for Amelia

and the others that have been confined in his incarceration. Their forced **PENANCE** is for these strippers own heavenly purification good.



Meet the strippers: "Sassy" and "Gypsy"

Writer, director, producer Jake Kennedy has created a haunting and an intensively intrusive film that will stand still in time as forever frightening. With the help of a phenomenal, well-introduced cast, **Penance's** subtle approach into this bleak disturbing world breaks the constant rut and regurgitation of what ill-tempered critics label this sort of film as "*torture porn*;" a label that has been long known for it's stably published negativity. However from what I viewed, I can't follow my fellow critics and label **Penance** as this for it would be a mistake. Yes, Penance has its fill of half naked female strippers. Yes, it is chalked full of extremely graphic violence. Yes, it resembles in look and feel of that of Eli Roth's **Hostel** films. Yet, I can't call it "*torture porn*". There in lies a meaningful point that **Hostel** films, and sometimes the **SAW** series, seem to lack, or forgotten through all the buckets of gore and entrails, with the sinister characters. Beyond the fulfillment of pleasure sought out of the humiliation, the whipping, the mutilation and, the eventual, murdering of these women, there holds a certain driven force that bounds the lead captor Geeves aka the Butcher of Baker.



Rooker as the Mann

**Rambo's** Graham McTavish's portrayal of Geeves does the character justice. The insanity of his purification methods and his monotone, automaton posture really heightens the character's nature making him one of the more frightening villains to ever jump right out from the screen and plaguing your mind. I can still recall, in detail, everything said and done by this character and days have passed since I viewed the film. McTavish isn't the only stand out actor. The cast is a slew of high profile names, but Jake Kennedy did this right and had those names stand in cameo roled boots. I'm a firm believer that big names

can overshadow smaller projects which in turn seem to focus on the actors themselves rather than the concept of the movie; however, in **Penance's** case, there is nothing small about this film. Michael Rooker had me shaking when he delivered the quote you read at the beginning of this review. Rooker plays Mann; a merciless hit man who has ties with Geeves. Basically, Mann's role forms into the executioner whenever one of the girl's doesn't pass their purification tests. Rooker has the rugged looks, the mannerisms, the voice and the overall creepy factor that is well in tuned with the tone of **Penance**. You ready for another big name? **Candyman** himself, Tony Todd, has a short lived role as the chauffeur and only holds less than 4 minutes of screen time. Yet, he is a foreshadowing icon of the more grim reality to what lies before Amelia.

Now, I've never heard of Mariah Delfino, but I've seen **Jeepers Creepers 2**, and if I can't remember her from the Victor Salva film, than there are two possible reasons for that: her role was minimal or her performance was forgettable. Being her first lead role this reviewer has seen, I'm positioned right on the fence with her. Delfino does deliver a remarkable frightened performance as she attempts defiance and a believable stomach up in your throat scream that sends goosebumps up your back. As far as her other scenes go, she went over the top in some; one scene in particular that stood out as over the top was the "Are you ready for your final test?" scene. As she sat at her desk, literally a desk for this purification "institution," she was ask the said question by Eve, Geeves's right hand woman. Her expression and her actions were almost comical; she went for the chopfallen, haggard hopeless yet vengeful spirit look, but the expression didn't align itself with the rest of the film's grave intent.



A purifying punishment

Now, I hope I didn't scare any of you readers away with the mentioning of "*torture porn*." Its a gross comparison, but I find this film to excel beyond anything that that subgenre has invented and stands to create in the future of film making. **Penance's** girth lies strong with it's grisly brutality. We, as in average people, attempt to cover our most sensitive areas when there is a harmful threat to our external body. The act of shielding mainly involves the face, the eyes and the genitalia, and when a film like **Penance** is viewed for an audience, there will be at least 6 or 7 out of 10 people who will have to either shut their eyes, turn their head or leave the viewing to vomit out their tub of popcorn consumption at the thought of graphically realistic genital mutilation; those other 3 viewers, which I would consider myself included, will watch in astonishment and shock, feeling the amazement of sadism and sadomasochism novelty rather feeling the disgust of that bad taste of spew which now steams from off the floor. A couple of scenes will definitely cross some legs and hold some crotches. Yet, the actions of mutilation are not done perversely, making yet another example why this film separates itself from the hated "*torture porn*" that hides in the darkest corner like a self-loathing emo kid.

Kennedy's envision and approach of hand held video embarks on the right path. The hand held style has always been a fan favorite style with this reviewer. I dug **Cloverfield**, **Diary of the Dead**, and though I didn't think the **Blair Witch Project** was all that great, I thought the home video style shooting was. This style gives the film a more authentic feel and look; video film puts you, the viewer, in the movie - you turn, you fall, hell, you are dizzily thrown in any direction that is feasibly possible with the camera. Kennedy's implement use of the hand held adds more of that gloom and doom effect and creates a

suspenseful anxiety. First time cinematographer Lawles Bourque certainly has a challenge of topping his own work. The serious lack of color speaks to the persona of Geeves and his followers; in fact, those characters in particular are omitted of any bright, soothing colors with the exception of Mann. He pertains to send people to their final destination and, thus, the lighter colors make him more of a savior; though merciless, you could see he is quite merciful in comparison to the captors.

As always, I succumb to the bothersome facts when I near the review's end. Whether those facts are technical, story, crew or thespian related, I must expel them like a Catholic confession. There are quite a few plot holes which some are explained in the extra features. My first concern stands to the attention of the military outfits and of the demeanor of Geeves and Eve? When they are introduced, there was a mixed confusion of whether they were religion extremists or a rogue PTSD vet. These military motifs carried on without explanation, leaving me quite confounded. My second concern lies with how Suzie, Amelia's stripper friend, comes into being contacted by Geeves and company for this secretive gig. Was there a lottery for this gig? Did one of Geeves's minions scout strip clubs? My third and final concern had been solved but the answer is told only with in the special features. After being capture and her camera, which was at the hands of her fated boyfriend Will, was confiscated, she somehow obtains a camera during her incarceration. There was no explanation of this found object until you watch the deleted scenes. One last issue, another minor annoyance, came with the how-to-be a stripper montage. Amelia's learning of the ways of the stripper from Suzie played more off a comedic silliness rather than a "my daughter's dying and I need quick cash" scenario. I found it inappropriate for Amelia's underlying cause. Though bewildering, these are minor discrepancies and issues that can easily be overlooked as the concept of **Penance** is more powerful and commanding of your attention, drawing you in into the story of Amelia's struggles and Geeve's ever going gruesome fight of purification.



Amelia doesn't seem to need help with stripping, yes?

The Reel Reviewer says that **Penance** pleasingly and surprisingly "*Shocks and Awe!*" You may not be familiar with the Butcher of Bega, but the Butcher of Baker gives you an idea, or a model, of how seriously grotesque that pertains to the disregistered surgeon Graeme Reeves. Absolutely chilling tale of strength and survival that quickly ends into a short stint of roughshod ridden revenge and satisfaction.

## DVD REVIEW

Independent Media Distribution's and Musisc & Video Distribution's single DVD release of **Penance**, yet again, doesn't disappoint. The widescreen 16:9 ratio is right in your face with it's brutality. The grain, and color filter, reduction plays to the tune of the whole tone leaving nothing but dreadful bleakness which speaks highly in sync with the rest of the film. Graced with a well-balanced 5.1 audio surround sound, you hear every jolting scream and every rip and snap of genital loin; both from which you can nearly recreate a feel from their ambient auditory.

What usually rides with small budget films are small time features; however, **Penance** strives to be so

much more than small time - like I said earlier. With that being said, if you sit down to watch the special features, you better make yourself comfortable as possible because the extras are as extensive as the film's duration.

Jake Kennedy did a superb job of cutting out certain scenes. Some of the deleted scenes and alternate endings seemed too cartoon plausible and/or too gimmicky, which might have reflected negatively on the film. I'd really suggest the director interview with Kennedy for the hardships and the amount of work in attempting to jump start this low-budget film and how fortunate his luck had become when he scored great actors and locations with a well-written script. And if you want a good laugh, there is an *interview with the cast in character* featurette - the lighter side of **Penance**. Along with those said extras, the DVD extras also include director and producer commentaries along with featurettes: *Anatomy of a Scene*, *"How to Strip"* and a *behind the scenes*.


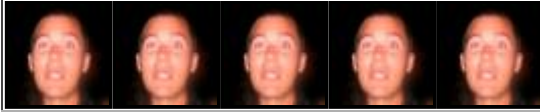

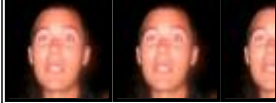
The Reel Reviewer says the DVD release of **Penance** is *"Unbelievably Stocked and Well Presented!"* I'm surprise the DVD package doesn't weigh a ton with all the features on this bad boy. A release that passes every test with out slight hesitation or a stuttering step. Even the cover art presents itself in grand gloom appeal. You can purchase **Penance** on DVD from **Amazon.com**, **Music & Video Distribution**, and **Penancefilm.com** which will include 5 various downloadable formats for purchase.

All images and logos are provided by Music & Video Distribution, Jake Kennedy, and Penancefilm.com.

#### The Reel Reviewer Head Count


*5 heads = Fan-fucking-tastic! / 4 heads = Damn Straight! / 3 heads = Good But Where's the Heat!*

*2 heads = All I Got Was Sizzle! / 1 head = No Meat What-So-Ever!*

Movie	
DVD	
Gore	
Nudity	





  
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