

# RUE MORGUE

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BLOOD ON A BUDGET

## BLOOD ON A BUDGET HAS FOUR HEADS

[PATRICK DOLAN](#) ON MAY 31, 2013 | [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

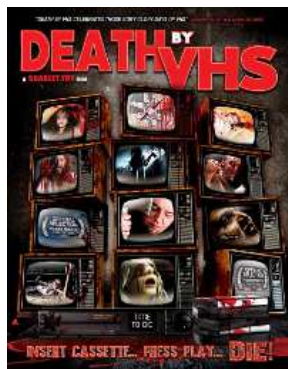


Featuring *Death by VHS* and *Slaughter Tales*

For a lot of horror fiends, VHS is what first brought those mind-warping fright films into their homes, and into their black hearts. Thanks to the video boom of the late 1970s and 1980s, all manner of horror invaded the homes of the masses. I first saw *Evil Dead* and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* – and of course a slew of lesser horrors – on this clunky plastic format. For those experiences, I'm forever indebted to the Victor HR-3300 (the first VHS VCR on the consumer market).

Of course, the video boom was not without its downside. As a result of the new market, countless shot-on-video crapfests crept onto video store shelves, nudging up to classics like *Phantasm* or *Basket Case* and tricking us into watching them, hoping for a similar scare. What we experienced instead was a new sensation, an enjoyment of inadequacy and a realization that really bad can also be really good.

The films in this entry were made by fellow analog appreciators who have each cranked out an apt tribute to these substandard scare films.



### DEATH BY VHS

Starring Courtney Morgan, Jared Leve Squee and Brian Smith  
 Directed by Scarlet Fry, Jacob D. O'Neal and David Sabal  
 Written by Scarlet Fry, Laurence Holloway, Jacob D. O'Neal, David Sabal, Brian Everet Smith and Richard Stoudt  
 World Wide Multimedia

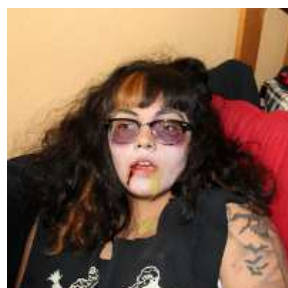
**BLOOD:** Not a splatterfest, but not too shy to show a little red, either

**BUDGET:** \$7,000

With "VHS" in the title, it's clear this cheap chiller is, overall, a tribute to the low-rent horror of the video boom. What isn't clear is if the film's abysmal acting, crackpot plots and dreadful directing is due to painstaking homage or just plain old filmmaking incompetence. However, once you find yourself knee deep in this shoddy shocker, its

flaws float away and its fun rises to the top.

After procuring a VCR (described as "a drug you watch") from their dealer, two junkies have a tripped-out TV party that frames this boisterous, no-budget anthology. Included in the junkies' rental are strange, numbered VHS tapes that make up the terrible tales of this cut-rate compilation.



Despite two insipid stories about postmortem revenge and zombies, the majority of this movie's vignettes make for an enjoyable time. The first one features a facially deformed female who finds a black magic cure for her affliction. The side effects, unfortunately, are somewhat vampiric. The second stand-out surrounds a mentally disabled protagonist who calls upon the Krampus to kill his dysfunctional family around Christmas time. Finally, the closer sees Jesus hunt down a homicidal, mustachioed Easter Bunny.

A heavy use of juvenile humour (the stereotypical portrayal of a voodoo-ish drug dealer, an insulting imitation of a mentally disabled person, and the whole Jesus vs. Easter Bunny thing) manages to feel outdated, stale and in bad taste. The prominence of consumer grade video, hacky film effects, and chintzy title fonts don't help the film's quality either. But that's what makes this film such a guilty pleasure.



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Death by VHS is piss poor, and proud of it. Written by six people (three of whom also direct), this endeavor feels like the filmic equivalent of a group of friends hanging out at a bar. They are obnoxious to all those around them, but if you're in on the fun, you'll have one hell of a time.

Whether or not the film is purposely terrible, this modern shot-on-video shlock is still a rude and raw riot.



**SLAUGHTER TALES**

Starring Johnny Dickie, Joe Ankenbrand and Joey Davalos  
Written and Directed by Johnny Dickie  
Briarwood Entertainment

**BLOOD:** Mountains of makeshift gore

**BUDGET:** About \$65 (no kidding)

The film's tagline – "It's more than just a bad movie" – is an understatement. This love letter to horrible VHS horror has all that constitutes a bad movie – gratuitous gore, laughable dialogue, preposterous plots – but possesses a raw insanity that makes it feel more like peering inside the horror-freaked mind of the 14-year-old director than watching a conventional film.

This shot-on-video debut, written, directed, edited by, and starring Johnny Dickie, involves a foul-mouthed ne'er-do-well (Dickie) who steals a VHS tape that summons forth a supernatural serial killer when watched.



The majority of the movie's hour-and-a-half running time is spent viewing VHS's feature presentation, which is made up of horror shorts also produced by and starring the director. These brief vignettes are streamlined stories (e.g. a killer kills people, a weird worm kills people, a possessed person kills people) that house Dickie's special brand of brutal, bargain-bin brilliance.

Never missing to chance to show a bit (or a lot) of blood and gore, the near-nonexistent plot is only a canvas to showcase cleverly made and excruciatingly enjoyable make-up effects (Bunuel-style eye slashes, facial peeling, a bathtub of bodily mush), all done by Dickie himself. A crude, cartoonish humour also infects the film, best shown in Dickie's constant sailor-mouthed soliloquizing on transpiring events and his cruel criticism of his own films while his character watches the VHS. Dickie also has a penchant for hammy

performances. All the actors in the film go for broke in their line deliveries, but Dickie stands out, as best seen when the demon Caninus dominates his character's soul and the filmmaker portrays the ordeal like a Pazuzu-possessed Bruce Campbell.

With nearly every production role filled by Dickie, *Slaughter Tales* is a true D.I.Y. endeavor that's blood-soaked boisterousness makes up for all technical flaws. Still a teen, there's sure to be far more mayhem to come out of the mind of Johnny Dickie.

*Death by VHS* can be purchased through [World Wide Multimedia](#). *Slaughter Tales* is available through [Briarwood Entertainment](#) on both DVD and VHS. Johnny Dickie also writes a VHS appreciation blog called [Video Vendetta](#), and has recently done effects on the upcoming film *Survive* which should be hitting the festival circuit mid summer.

**PATRICK DOLAN**

Do you have or know a film that you think should be reviewed here? Contact [patrick@rue-morgue.com](mailto:patrick@rue-morgue.com)

**TAGS:** anthology, D.I.Y., Death by vhs, eighties, johnny dickie, Scarlet fry, Shot-on-video, Slaughter tales, vcr, VHS, video boom

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