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Scales of Justice

Judgment: 78

Perp Profile

- Studio: [MVD Visual](#)
- Video Formats:
  - Full Frame
- Audio Formats:
  - Dolby Digital 2.0 Stereo (English)
- Subtitles:
  - None
- Running Time: 91 Minutes
- Release Year: 2012
- MPAA Rating: Unrated
- Genres:
  - [Comedy](#)
  - [Horror](#)
  - [Independent](#)

Case Number 24921: Small Claims Court



### Slaughter Tales

MVD Visual // 2012 // 91 Minutes // Unrated  
Reviewed by Judge Gordon Sullivan // December 7th, 2012

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All Rise...

Judge Gordon Sullivan prefers DVDs to VHS, thanks to the relative lack of evil spirits.

Distinguishing Marks

- Commentary
- Featurettes
- Trailers

The Charge

The last videotape you will ever watch

Accomplices

- [IMDb](#)

The Case

There's an old proverb (supposedly Russian) that states, "The marvel isn't how well the bear dances, but that it dances at all." Of course, the message is to be more impressed by an unlikely occurrence than by how good or ill the occurrence could be judged by normal standards. It's a fine way to approach the world—finding the miraculous even in the incompetent—but I'm not sure it's a good way to sell a film.

I mention this because the flick **Slaughter Tales** has two main attractions. The first is that it's cashing in on a wave of nostalgia for VHS tapes and culture (more on that in a moment) and the fact that it was written, directed, edited, and stars a 15-year-old guy doing 99% of the movie (Johnny Dickie). This is really a case of it being a miracle that the bear dances (or the movie got made) than the dance (or film) being particularly marvelous.

**Slaughter Tales** tells a pretty simple story: a young man (Johnny Dickie) steals a VHS tape from a local thrift market. Before he attempts to watch it, a spirit (also Johnny Dickie) warns him that watching the tape is dangerous and had disastrous consequences for him, the spirit. Of course the young man watches the tape anyway, and we do too, as five stories play out for us with the teen's commentary (usually about how bad the stories are) interspersed as we await the inevitable unhappy ending.

DVD will probably always be the medium I look back on most fondly; all those special features and early double-disc sets really fueled a burgeoning love for cinema during my teenage years. However, I have total sympathy with VHS collectors. I remember those oversized clamshell cases and lurid cover art. Probably because each tape was so expensive, it seemed like more VHS covers were faced out, making them more significant for marketing. It's no surprise, then, that in the age of the Internet, people congregate to trade and collect VHS tapes, waxing rhapsodic about the good old days.

**Slaughter Tales** emerges from that kind of online VHS fandom. Johnny Dickie is an avid collector of VHS tapes, and everything about **Slaughter Tales** (except for the packaging, which isn't a giant clamshell, sadly) harkens back to that mid-to-late-eighties heyday when horror films ruled the rental roost (mostly due to low budgets and high demand for any kind of content). The flick is shot on video, and looks like it's trying to replicate those early shot-on-VHS efforts (think [Redneck Zombies](#)). Pretty much all of the effects are practical, including some stop-motion work, and the actors (besides Dickie) are all pretty much the kind of amateur performers one expects in this kind of low-budget flick (though the cameo by Lloyd Kaufman is a plus

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one era of filmmaking, when men were men and blood was shed. **Slaughter Tales** is an evocation of that, it's an evocation of the worst of that period. That, in itself, is a bit of a gimmick, but by itself, it's not a bad thing. For VHS-era horror, nothing about **Slaughter Tales** is particularly appealing. The weird widescreen look of the film doesn't effectively use the 1.33:1 VHS frame, and though that seems like a small thing, it actually makes the world of **Slaughter Tales** more difficult to inhabit. I can't blame a guy for trying, but when **Slaughter Tales** is the result, I think it would be more appropriate as a series of YouTube videos.

However, what Johnny Dickie has learned from the DVD era is to pack your disc full of extras. It's barely worth discussing the flick's audiovisual presentation, but it's a fine 1.33:1 representation of the VHS-like aesthetic; any compression problems or lack of clarity are due to emulating that look rather than problems with the transfer. Similar, the audio has a warts-and-all approach that keeps things audible but without much pizzazz. Extras, however, are pretty engaging. Dickie and "VHSSHITFEST" pair up for a commentary, with Dickie responding to questions posed by his partner in crime. The presence of a moderator keeps things moving, and Dickie dishes on production info, his influences, and a general enthusiasm for horror's past. Two featurettes follow. The first takes a more general look at the making of the film, while the second looks at its decidedly old-school brand of special effects. Finally, the disc rounds out with two trailers for the film (which are, ultimately, more amusing than the feature from which they are cut).

There may be some horror hounds out there who would enjoy **Slaughter Tales**, perhaps those with a fetish for non-CGI gore effects, but even most horror hounds are going to have a hard time with this piece of horror nostalgia. In another era, this flick would have remained on VHS, circulated to Dickie's friends, perhaps shown to potential investors in his first "serious" movie, but in the age of DVD, it's getting a release. Though I don't want to discourage a young (and fairly talented) director, **Slaughter Tales** probably should have stayed on VHS.

The Verdict

The court will look kindly on Dickie's future features, but this one is guilty.

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Did we give **Slaughter Tales** a fair trial? [yes](#) / [no](#)

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