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DVD Review: *The Scarlet Worm* (2011)

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Author: [K. George](#) — Published: [Apr 15, 2012 at 11:10 am](#)

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In the American southwest of 1909, an enforcer named Print (Aaron Stielstra), who works for a rancher named Mr. Paul (Montgomery Ford), justifies his work by transforming each killing into a kind of artistic statement. He likes to lecture his victims on the finer points of the meaning of life before finishing them off, then turning the scene into a kind of [art installation](#) as a sign to others, a clue to the mysteries which underlie existence.



In *The Scarlet Worm* (2011), having just killed a rustler and stuffed his body into a dead cow as if it had died in the act of giving birth to the man, Print is called to a meeting with his boss and given a new assignment. It seems that there's a brothel run by a man named Kley (Dan van Husen), where the whores are routinely subjected to abortions to keep them available for work. Mr. Paul expresses

moral and religious objections to this practice and wants Print to execute Kley. This set-up is pretty original, and ambitious for a very low budget movie made by a group of friends, film historians and enthusiasts who originally came together over the Internet. David Lambert's script offers a meditation on violence and the meaning of taking lives, unborn and otherwise, in a society rooted in violence.

The western, of course, is one of the most flexible genres, capable of containing virtually every other genre from comedy to musical to horror to psychological study, crime story, social issues tract and tragedy. It can encompass realism, surrealism, myth and the deconstruction of myth. The central core of the genre is the individual poised between the encroachment of civilized "restrictions" and the unfettered "savagery" of the Other in the wilderness, a character who forges his own morality, with heroes and villains equally celebrated because they have the power to self-define their place in the world.

It's a genre with a rich history which includes the (sometimes tedious) mythologizing of John Ford, the psychological intricacies of Anthony Mann, the subtlety of Budd Boetticher. But by the '60s, the western was in decline, partly because times had changed and rugged individualism was becoming less socially tenable. The frontier was gone and American culture was increasingly focused on urban existence, the western increasingly subsumed by the cop story (Don Siegel's *Dirty Harry* [1971] is essentially an urban western, one which clearly shows the difficulty of maintaining the old archetypes in this new world).

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Article Author: [K. George](#)

I have been a film editor for some twenty years, cutting shorts and features, drama and documentary, theatrical and television.

Since my earliest memories of movies — watching Omar Sharif as Ghengis Khan, Ursula Andress as She in the ...

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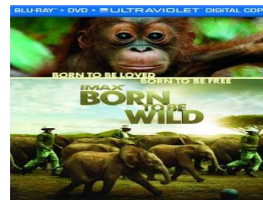
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