

The Scarlet Worm (2011)

By: [Devon B.](#) on October 13, 2012 | [0 Comments](#)

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Unearthed Films | All Regions, NTSC | 2.35:1 (16:9 enhanced) | English DD 2.0 | 92 minutes [\(Full Specs\)](#)

The Movie

Despite the revelation I had about Unearthed Films while reviewing **Two Front Teeth**, I still think of the company that released titles like **Aftermath**, **Cannibal** and the **Guinea Pig** series as a bastion of extreme cinema. When I heard Unearthed had released a Western called **The Scarlet Worm** I figured it would be the grittiest, most extreme Western of all time, and when the film featured a bloody squib right away I thought I was in for something that would make **The Proposition** and **The Wild Bunch** seem like **The Man From Snowy River** and **The Apple Dumpling Gang**. But no, it would seem that Unearthed have moved into the philosophical film genre. I know they released some mindfuck movies, but **The Scarlet Worm** is more about minds and less about fucking... though prostitutes do play a major roll... I guess there is fucking, but it's not necessarily a mindfuck for the viewer.

The film is about a fatigued gunman, wondering if he's tired of killing. He's a poetic type who mixes his artistic leanings with his violent ones, and his employer wants him to create his murderous masterpiece with a man who's forcing his whores to have abortions. This seemed like an overblown response given this was probably common practice at the time, but it is explained later why the employer wants this particular pimp slapped. The gunman takes on a trainee, and the pair set out to gain the trust of the pimp so they can kill him. I must've missed the reason they can't bump him off on first sight.

The Scarlet Worm is a tough one for me. It was made by some guys who love movies and wanted to do their own Western. They probably had about \$5 for a budget, so I want to be kind, but I found the lack production values really distracting. Everything looks clean and new, and the at times shot-on-video look of the film is hard to ignore. I couldn't pretend I had a window into the early 20th century when what I was watching had such a contemporary texture. Combined with the lead's arty pretensions, the whole movie ends up like JB in PJ's **King Kong** - too modern to be convincing as something from the early 1900s. Some of the guns looked like toys to me, and digital gunfire further enforced the feel that **The Scarlet Worm** is a product an era much later than the one the filmmakers were trying to emulate.

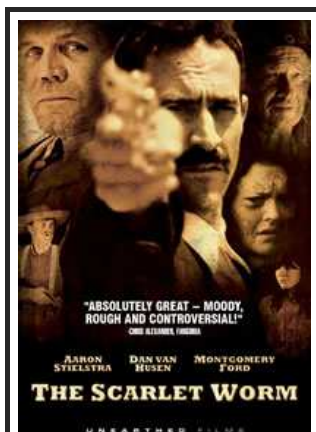
Complaining about what these guys were able to achieve with no money feels petty to me, but there are some other problems that could've been avoided. The lead's relationship with his green partner often reminded me of the far superior **Unforgiven**, which just made **The Scarlet Worm** seem even cheaper after I drew that comparison. The film is far too talky for my liking, with its philosophical and meandering plot keeping the action at bay. Maybe my expectations were skewed because of Unearthed's involvement, but the film wasn't edgy enough for me, and it seemed pretty tame next to something like **Deadwood**. **The Scarlet Worm** has some nudity and a few more squibs in its arsenal, but this is far more a movie about how people feel about stuff happening than stuff actually happening.

That's not necessarily a bad thing, it's just not the sort of movie I would usually watch, and certainly not the type of Western I would seek out. Given the low budget, the filmmakers have put together an incredibly competent movie with much stronger performances than I was expecting. There're some nice directorial touches, like extended takes, and the film does have some intriguing ideas.

These elements didn't rescue the film for me, so while I respect the achievement, the movie is a reminder that labours of love can sometimes be laboured.

Video

The Scarlet Worm often looks shot on video, so I found the widescreen image a little odd. The film has a bit of macroblocking, but is usually fine. I didn't think the look was gritty



Credits

Director: Michael Fredianelli
Starring: Aaron Stielstra, Dan van Husen, Montgomery Ford, Derek Hertig, Kevin Giffin
Screenplay: David Lambert
Country: USA

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[Stuart Giesel](#)

Sounds a little like the brutal but brilliant "I Saw The Devil". Count me in.

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[Craig Villinger](#)

This is one flashback heavy movie! It started off well with a slick but grim tone, and the violence was as powerful as something like Last House on the Left at

enough, but that's not the transfer's fault.

Audio

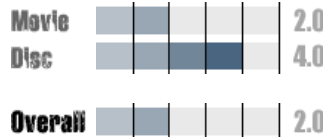
The 2.0 mix is adequate and I could understand most of the dialogue. There was occasional distortion, but it seemed like it was a fault with the source material.

Extra Features

The DVD includes two trailers, plus trailers for **Rock & Rule**, **Flexing with Monty** (which looks *insane*), **Mercy** and trailers for other movies from the team that did **The Scarlet Worm: The Minstrel Killer**, the cool looking doco **Eurocrime!**, and **Sarbata's Pistol Does Not Discriminate**. There's also a short making of that's rather jokey, but is interesting, and two commentary tracks. The first commentary is with the writer and cast/crew members. It's a bit chaotic at times, but these guys are all film fans so, while they do wander off into talking about people that I don't know and won't ever hear from again, they are able to provide solid info on how things were achieved. The writer also explains some of the historical and filmic inspirations for parts of the script. The second commentary is with two of the actors/producers. This track explains some of the problems with the film's inconsistent look, and the pair are honest about some of the film's flaws. Both tracks could be useful to those looking to make a low budget film. Info does repeat across the extras, but I don't know that the two commentaries could've been consolidated as the first one already had plenty of speakers.

The Verdict

Unfortunately **The Scarlet Worm's** story wasn't engrossing enough to distract me from everything looking sterile and pristine. I can handle a dose of philosophy with my action, but I still like a healthy dose of action from a Western or else I could watch shit like **Little House on the Prairie**. **The Scarlet Worm** isn't as bad as that, but by the halfway point I was completely disengaged. There is merit within the movie, so Western fans may appreciate it a good deal more than I did.



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Devon

That would make sense, actually. I did read that it was based on Jackie Chan, maybe that was just the look of the guy in the game moreso than the "story?"

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McSTIFF

Was 'Kung Fu' possibly a home version of the arcade game 'Kung Fu Master' where the player had to ascend a building, level by level, to rescue his girlfriend? I always assumed that this was based...

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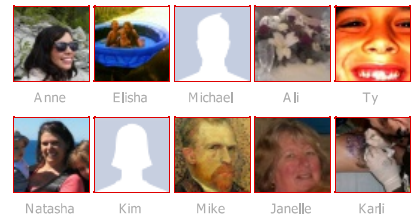
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