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## The Scarlet Worm (Blu-ray)

[Unearthed Films](#) // Unrated // April 24, 2012 // Region A

List Price: \$19.95 [Buy now and save at [Amazon](#)]

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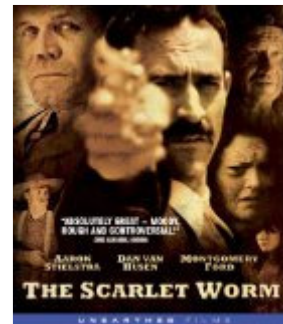
Review by [Bill Gibron](#) | posted April 9, 2012 | [E-mail the Author](#)

### The Product:

When our entertainment mediums were young, the Western ruled. It was our first communal fairytale. Over the years, it was revered and rejected, reconfigured and reinvented, returned to its original roots and reimagined as the story of a still growing nation. It told history. It told travesty. But mostly, it told the standard heroic poems of villains and veiled good guys. Over the decades, it droned on, deviating little from the staid stereotypes and narrative routines that threatened to kill it. Once the '60s arrived, the dying artform was given new life by a group of gonzo Mediterraneans, each putting their spaghetti spin on things. Today, the Western is the realm of remakes, few finding anything original or new in the still overdone dynamic. Perhaps this is why something like **The Scarlet Worm** resonates as powerfully as it does. Writer David Lambert and director Michael Fredianelli have fashioned a first rate oater out of chutzpah, horse operatics, and a definite shoestring budget. The results remind us that, when done right, there is nothing better than a considered cowboy companion.

### The Plot:

Print (Aaron Stielstra) considers himself an educated man. He loves poetry and discussing human nature with his fellow turn of the century Western folk. Oh, and he also likes killing, making his living as a hitman for formidable prairie boss Mr. Paul (Brett Halsey). In fact, Print takes great pride in carving



**CONTENT**  
★★★★★

**VIDEO**  
★★★★★

**AUDIO**  
★★★★★

**EXTRAS**  
★★★★★

**REPLAY**  
★★★★★

**ADVICE**  
**Highly Recommended**

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up his conquests in bloody, nauseating fashion. However, when the order comes down to destroy a local brothel owner (Dan Van Husen) who loves to perform crude abortions on his pregnant girls, Print is in a quandary. Even worse, he has to school a wannabe assassin (Derek Hertig) that may not be cut out for the murder-for-hire life. Naturally, nothing is as it seems, or transpires the way our hero expects...or wants. **The Blu-ray:**

**The Scarlet Worm** (the title is taken from a Psalm in the Bible) is terrific. It meters out its pleasures in carefully considered tropes and takes its time developing into a clever character study. Like **Unforgiven**, and Ed Harris' criminally underappreciated **Appaloosa**, this is a story about people, not problems with ranchers and cattle rustlers. There are no 'injuns' to contend with, no structured standards requiring slit-eyed shoot outs and stare downs. Instead, Lambert and Fredianelli boil everything down to men facing their mortality and then borrow the best lessons learned from that cinematic stalwart to season their simple story. The results are often mesmerizing, the cast completing the vision in a way that makes you pine for more material like this. One of main reasons the Western died off is because there was more or less nothing left to say. Thankfully, the post-modern movement and its varying ideas about approach and iconography allows for even the moldiest meaning to be reinvested with new life. Such is the case with **The Scarlet Worm**.

This is a film of contrasts, an experience where men preach morality while systematically dismembering a corpse. There is violence, but it is frequently offset by the silent contemplation of the characters. There is even distinction in the approach. The low budget limits, which keep things from becoming too open and obvious, work astonishingly well with the narrative themes. Indeed, this small looking movie transcends its traps to become something akin to epic. The differing elements - the abortionist, the sex, the bloodshed, the mentorship, religion - all come together to transport us to a different time, a different place - and more importantly, a different atmosphere. Modern Westerns often make the mistake of trying to incorporate too many contemporary touches. What works better is something like the Coen Brothers' amazing **True Grit**. By applying the language of the era, the euphemisms and personality eccentricities, we are swept away. **The Scarlet Worm** balances the new with the known, the better to create a convincing past.

Then there is the acting. The cast all have the right look, the proper aging antiquity that sells the scenarios. But even better, the performances know how to maintain the proper amount of character intrigue. As our killer, Aaron Stielstra is excellent. He capitalizes on his unusual look to make Print something of an idiosyncratic icon. Then there is 'Montgomery Ford' - who is actually famous face Brett Halsey working under a false name - who does a fantastic job of creating the aura of threat. Add in the enthralling turn by legendary character ace Dan Van Husen (he absolutely nails the part) and you've got a great set of leads. Ancillary parts are then fleshed out by novices and unknowns, and the overall approach is professional and polished. Of course, all praise goes to Fredianelli for finding a way to bring his ideas to the

DVD B

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[I](#)  
[B](#)


screen under some of the most extreme budgetary boundaries possible.

4. [S](#)  
[C](#)  
[I](#)  
[B](#)

#### The Video:

Presented by MVD Visual in a 2:35:1, 1080p AVC/MPEG-4 encode, The Scarlet Worm looks good. It just doesn't look great. There are issues with definition, a frequent lack of detail, and other elements that stem from the money problems the production faced. For the most part, the overall image is polished and professional, looking colorful and artsy. The director's decision to go with a limited palate provides a great deal of mood, and the cinematography more than makes up for any interfering budgetary facets. Still, for those expecting every Blu-ray release to be a revelation, **The Scarlet Worm** won't wow you. Instead, it's a solid cinematic experience.

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[C](#)  
[B](#)

6. [I](#)  


7. [S](#)  
[S](#)  


8. [T](#)  
[C](#)  
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#### The Audio:

The bad news? There is no lossless multichannel track here. The budget just wouldn't allow for a full on 5.1 mix. Instead, we get a dialogue friendly 2.0 Stereo offering that delivers the conversations in crystal clarity. Various ambient noises and F/X round out the backdrop, but there is a real lack of spatial ambience or directional depth. In fact, both the picture and the audio have issues, all of which can be attributed to technological, not artistic or talent issues.

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[C](#)  
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#### The Extras:

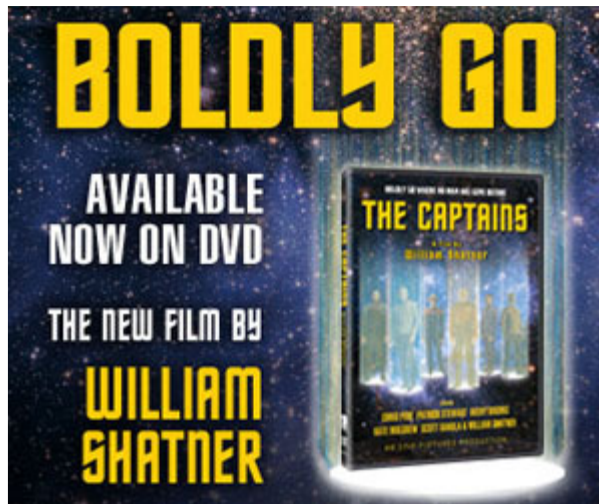
There are two audio commentaries included on the disc, as well as a behind the scenes making-of documentary and a trailer. Of the two scene specific discussions, the one with writer Lambert is the best. He has the best insights about the troubled times on set, as well as the best supporting cast. Everything else here is interesting, if not necessarily essential.

#### Final Thoughts:

While a bit long winded in the exposition department and in need of a few dollars more, production wise, **The Scarlet Worm** is still an intelligent and entertaining fringe experience. It's the kind of indie effort we just don't see that much anymore, made outside the studio system and reeling with artistic integrity. Earning an easy **Highly Recommended** rating, it rewards the viewers patience with passion and drive. Some may find the tech specs a bit wanting and the overall atmosphere is considered, not rushed. Still, for a genre that's been on life support for decades and a core narrative conceit that's been done to death, this is a borderline masterwork. A century ago, the cowboy was our first silver screen myth. A movie like **The Scarlet Worm** illustrates why.

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