



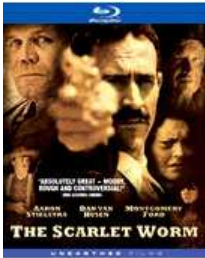
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The Scarlet Worm (Blu-ray)

MVD Visual // 2011 // 93 Minutes // Not Rated
 Reviewed by Judge Daryl Loomis // January 16th, 2012

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Note: This is a pre-release review. **The Scarlet Worm (Blu-ray)** will be available for purchase on January 31st, 2012

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Scales of Justice

Video:	87
Audio:	85
Extras:	50
Acting:	84
Story:	94
Judgment:	92

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The Charge

"God is a circle," he said. "God is a circle because a circle is infinite. Since God is infinite," he said, "he can only create the infinite. We are all circles in this sense. In this sense, nothing dies."

Opening Statement

The title of **The Scarlet Worm** refers to the Bible's Psalm 22, in which the prophet David describes the subject crying out to God, who says, "But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people." Religion plays a big role in the story, but make no mistake that **The Scarlet Worm** is no religious film. A modern western perfectly in the spirit of Sam Peckinpah's revisionist work of the '60s and '70s and made on an absolute shoestring budget, this is a very strong independent picture that is a hugely pleasant surprise.

Facts of the Case

Print (Aaron Stielstra, **The Big Sleaze**) is a smooth talking, poetry writing dandy of a killer, who likes putting his own creative mark on his murders. He's aging, though, and wants to get out, but his boss, Mr. Paul (Montgomery Ford, **Today We Kill, Tomorrow We Die!**), gives him one last big job. Heinrich Clay (Dan van Husen, **Nosferatu the Vampyre**), a brothel owner, has been performing abortions on his prostitutes and Paul wants it to stop. Print, with a fresh young recruit, heads out to get a job with Clay so he can study his prey, but when things go wrong, he learns that there is a lot going on behind the scenes that changes the game.

The Evidence

All credit to writer David Lambert and director Michael Fredianelli (**Xenobites**). Fans of the western genre don't get a whole lot of new material to watch outside of the very few remakes released in the last few years, but these guys have made not only a real labor of love in **The Scarlet Worm**, but a genuine example of what's so good about the genre.

Perp Profile

- Studio:** [MVD Visual](#)
- Video Formats:**
- 2.35:1 Non-Anamorphic (1080p)
- Audio Formats:**
- Dolby Digital 2.0 Stereo (English)
- Subtitles:**
- Spanish
- Running Time:** 93 Minutes
Release Year: 2011
MPAA Rating: Not Rated
- Genres:**
- [Action](#)
 - [Blu-ray](#)
 - [Independent](#)
 - [Western](#)

Distinguishing Marks

- Commentaries
- Teatorettes
- Trailers

Accomplices

- [IMDb](#)
- [Official Site](#)

western. This is not homage to Italian westerns, though it features people like Ford and van Husen, who appeared in plenty. It has much more in common with Peckinpah, but the story structure and the way the gunfights play out have their roots in even earlier American westerns. The moral lines aren't so clearly drawn as in those films and, surely, it's far more violent, sexual, and downright mean than anything produced during those days, but the film's heart is right where it needs to be to get at a lot of the same themes as those older films.

Print is an enigmatic character, performing his murders gruesomely, but with an artistic method. On a certain level, he seems to actually have a heart with his well-dressed ways and poetry, but killing a man and delivering him stuffed inside a cow the victim stole gives a sense of the sadism that also drives him. This conflict is what makes the character, though, and allows him to join up believably with the brothel owner/abortionist because, while he may have a heart, he has little in the way of morals. Quoting the Bible and expressing a moral code, as he and Clay both do at any given opportunity, fly in the face of the actions of the men, but they seem so convinced of their respective rightness that it's hard to call them on their deep moral failings. In this way, the conflicted morality works very well within the confines of the American West, where everything was subject to an individual's interpretation and they acted accordingly. For both Print and Clay, they keep consistent with their moralities and, while it's easy to take sides in the conflict, especially by the end, both sides act from the same supposedly moral place. It's exactly what a western should be: ambiguous morality and shootouts.

The production of **The Scarlet Worm** is certainly cheap and independent, and the film works really well under these circumstances. Much of the production was filmed in Temeculah, CA, in the loft of a barn where most of the interior scenes take place, whether they're in the brothel, the bar, or wherever. Burlap and wood planks can do wonders to change set dressing, I suppose. The squibs are numerous, big, and bloody, making it one of the most outright violent westerns I've seen in some time, and the lead performances are understated and really great, given the circumstances. The film has really good atmosphere and mood that brings back a lot of the things that I miss from the westerns of old.

The only thing I can really argue with in **The Scarlet Worm** is the level of blatant and unnecessary exposition that occurs at times. Long scenes that have little to do with anything but outward explanation took me out of the movie, but that's not helped by the performances of some of those involved in these scenes. The acting is mostly pretty good, but at times they feel a little bit too modern both in the language and the expressions. It's a small thing, and a small price to pay for a production that is otherwise of such quality to make me forget how long it has been since I watched a really good low budget western.

The Scarlet Worm comes to us in a nice edition from MVD and Unerthed Films. Shot on HD video, the wide 1080p image looks solid. There is a good clarity, though it still displays some of the flatness one often sees in low-budget HD shooting. Still, the colors are bright and full with good black levels and a nice level of detail. The sound, though a mere Dolby stereo mix, is as good as it could possibly be. There is great separation between the channels, most apparent when hearing the wind, which blows strongly from one to the other. Dialog is sometimes a little soft, but the level is consistent and the gunfire is nice and loud. Special features start with a pair of audio commentaries, each with various members of the cast and crew. They are interesting, but could have been combined into one for better efficiency, since a lot of the information is repeated between the two. A short making-of piece and a pair of trailers for the film close out the disc.

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Closing Statement

The Scarlet Worm is one of the best low budget independents I've seen in quite some time, regardless of genre. It's bloody and mean, but has a philosophy and a lot of love and skill behind it. Western fans have no reason not to check this film out. There are very few things to complain about here and I recommend it highly.

The Verdict

Not guilty.

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