

## Jeff Kirkendall's Thoughts For The Month Column

### Thoughts, Opinions, Reviews, Commentary & More!

Hello and Welcome! My name is Jeff Kirkendall and I'm an independent filmmaker and actor from the Upstate New York area. This is the section of the Very Scary Productions website where I write about topics related to independent filmmaking, digital video production, acting, movies in general, horror movies in particular, my own indie movies, as well as anything and everything related or in between.

I decided to create this commentary page because I find that I often come across things that either interest me, excite me, intrigue me, or maybe just bug me. Any topic related to movies and cinema is fair game, from the most mainstream to the most controversial. For example I'll often read about movie projects that I have a strong interest in or opinion on, for one reason or another. This page gives me a forum to discuss these things. It's all about discussion and furthering understanding of our pop culture. Anyone who has feedback concerning what I have to say here, feel free to contact me (see the contact link at <http://www.veryscaryproductions.com/>).

I'd also like to point out that the following is just my opinion, and everyone is free to agree or disagree with what I have to say. Enjoy, and to all the Indies out there: Keep on Filming!

SUBJECT: DVD Horrors Movie Review: ***Night Train to Terror*** - August 2006

When it comes to horror movies set aboard (or involving) a train, a couple films come directly to mind. Although a scan through the Internet Movie Database ([www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)) might reveal more titles, off hand I usually think of the 1973 Christopher Lee-Peter Cushing film ***Horror Express*** and the very cool Jamie Lee Curtis slasher film ***Terror Train*** from 1980. While going through the offerings of a recently purchased "horror classics" DVD boxed set however, I came across another entry in this subgenre that I can now add to that list. The 1985 horror movie ***Night Train to Terror*** is an anthology film that features God and Satan on a train discussing the fate of a group of people. The stories of these mortals provide the bulk of the film, while discussions between the two higher powers about their souls and a 1980's early MTV-style band singing and dancing in the next car round out the bill. If this short description already sounds bizarre, trust me when I say it's just the tip of the iceberg.

As white-haired, grandfatherly-looking God and sinister, smooth-talking Satan finish their early discussions, they look out the window onto the first anthology segment which is ***The Case of Harry Billings***. Harry (John Phillip Law) is a man who is involved in a car accident on his wedding night which kills his wife. The unfortunate guy wakes up in a creepy insane asylum where he is treated to shock therapy before being drugged, hypnotized and made to kidnap innocent victims whose body parts are to be sold to medical schools by a pair of sinister doctors. As if this isn't enough, the head psycho at the ward is a big brute named Otto (played menacingly by Richard Moll billed as Charles Moll) who has his way with the unfortunate women before slicing and dicing them up. This segment is a crazy, bloody horror romp featuring gore and body parts everywhere along with enough bare breasts and nudity to fill any exploitation film quota. The story moves along at a brisk pace and should definitely be satisfying to those who like horror

stories that don't hold back on the carnage. Be warned however that this installment of the anthology is definitely not for the squeamish.

The second segment offers up *The Case of Gretta Connors* (Merideth Haze), who the off-screen narrator informs us is a musician from a small town. While working at a carnival selling popcorn to pay the bills she is picked up by a rich eccentric named George Youngmeyer and quickly given a starring role in his line of adult films. Soon after this a handsome young medical student sees Gretta in one of these films, falls instantly in love with her, and quickly lures her away from Youngmeyer to be his girlfriend. Well as one may guess this doesn't sit well with the rich older gentleman, and he soon plans his revenge. First through finesse and then by the use of force he gets the two lovebirds to join his exclusive "death club", which consists of him and his eccentric friends getting together playing Russian Roulette-type games. Here he hopes to eliminate the young man and here is where the real fun begins. The first game features a deadly stop-motion winged beetle, the second a giant computer (with an appropriately goofy computer voice) that sends shocks of varying intensity to the strapped-in-their-chairs participants, and the third a wrecking ball swinging overhead in a scene reminiscent of the old story *The Pit and the Pendulum*. The winged beetle, which is just one in a line of stop-motion and claymation characters to appear in the film, is particularly entertaining. I also liked the segment with the computer where one member of the wacko group gets fried and goes up in smoke. It's good horrific fun to say the least and overall this story is very amusing.

Segment number three is *The Case of Claire Hansen* (Faith Clift), which is a story that actually revolves around a rich, handsome young man who appears not to have aged a day in hundreds of years and may be some kind of servant of Satan. Claire is a respected surgeon and wife to a Nobel Prize-winning author (Richard Moll again) who has written a book basically denouncing any forms of higher power in the universe. Claire is instructed by a priest that she must rip out the demon's heart and place it in a sacred box in order to defeat the evil, while at the same time a detective (played by cult film actor Cameron Mitchell) is hot on the trail of the wealthy young playboy. This story somehow seems a little more serious than the preceding segments, but is however a bit muddled and meandering with too many characters. Things only really get entertaining during some of the death scenes where various characters get killed in outrageous sequences featuring stop-motion and claymation effects. Gore hounds will most likely also appreciate the final scene that has innards flying all over the room as Claire tries to extract the demon's heart.

As I mentioned at the beginning, I found this weird film among a boxed-set collection of "horror classics". Whether I personally would call ***Night Train to Terror*** a classic of the horror genre is something I'm still not sure about. However I will say that it really is quite entertaining in a bizarre, cheesy kind of way. This is a movie where God and Satan are billed in the credits as Himself and Lu Sifer, respectively. And then there is the 1980's band playing and dancing to the same song ("Everybody But You") consistently throughout the movie. Now I'm a huge fan of all things 80's, and I rarely ever use the word cheesy to describe the music of that decade. But if ever that word did fit a musical group it would have to be these people. However, that being said, in the bizarre universe aboard the ***Night Train to Terror*** it just seems natural that this brand of cheese would be in vogue.

One final note here: According to information found on the Internet Movie Database this anthology was made up of an unfinished feature film and condensed versions of two

1980's horror films. Apparently *The Case of Harry Billings* was made from an unfinished feature-length movie, while *The Case of Gretta Connors* was edited from the 1983 film ***Death Wish Club***, and *The Case of Claire Hansen* from the 1980 film ***Cataclysm***.