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## articles



## BREAKING THE B-MOVIE RULES

### PAUL SCRABO PRODUCES "DR. HORROR'S EROTIC HOUSE OF IDIOTS"

Welcome, all up and coming low-budget producers out there. This article is for you.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to state the facts, or at least my side of them. Yes, "Dr. Horror's Erotic House of Idiots" is a real movie starring Debbie Rochon in her most elaborate comedic role to date. Ms. Rochon also sings, dances and is assisted by Trent Haaga, Michael R. Thomas, Zacherley, Barbara Joyce, Conrad Brooks, Jasi Lanier, Marina Morgan, Nathan Sears, Tina Krause, Rodney Gray, Amy Lynn Best, Rachael Robbins, Ruby Larocca, Brinke Stevens, Dean Paul, Bob Burns and several surprises. It is not a straight horror film, but a satire on assorted B-movie genre including Jim Wynorski's "erotic thrillers", Fred Olen Ray's sci-fi knockoffs and low-budget videos with "erotic" in the title.

To describe our opus as an oddball addition to the cult movie community is putting it mildly, but isn't that what independent producing is all about? Where would John Sayles, Kevin Smith or Spike Lee be if they didn't take risks?

Okay, they were smart and didn't take any risks. Let's move on.

You may have noticed that in my introduction I was careful not to use the word that diminishes every low-budget discussion - a noun that has no meaning. That's right, FILMMAKER!

There is no such job, no such title as "filmmaker". You may attempt to perform the tasks of a writer, editor or if you're foolish enough, a director. What you really are is...a producer. There are painters, sculptors, carpenters, etc., but no filmmakers. You don't work alone. Thank God.

### THE IDEA!

Inspiration comes without warning. I was watching one of those vampire/lesbian (You can never think of one without the other) movies with "erotic" in the title, and at one point I thought, "I have to get in this racket. It doesn't look difficult. I can keep the actors in focus. Maybe THEY can't, but I can!"

There was some scene with a Frankenstein monster making embarrassing bathroom sounds or something, then two minutes later, some lesbian action began. I felt there must be something wrong with me, as this killer combination didn't get me "hot". Let's establish why lesbian scenes are so popular with B-movie producers. If they took the hetero-highway route, there would be an erection on screen and it would be X-rated. See what you've learned already!

Right out of the gate, I made a poor decision for a producer who wants to get rich quick - "Dr. Horror" would not be designed for any perceived exploitation market., but for me. Besides, the "erotic" market seemed to be in strong shape. What did they need ME for?

This decision was based on the absolute number one rule of independent film producing. Get your highlighter marker out for this one -

"There is no real money in producing an independent film."

Remember that the B-movie world and the independent film world are two separate factions, and my production would not only be independent, but absolutely adrift in the universe. Want to live dangerously? Produce a comedy. The global market understands bare breasts and lunatics with knives, but consider yourself lucky if any of your jokes play in New Jersey, let alone the world.

Now, hang on to your hats for a summary of the plot.

While caretaking for a vacationing doctor's retreat, a retired TV horror host and an out of work horror film writer masquerade as sex therapists for some gullible clients. In a nod to horror anthology films such as "Tales from the Crypt" and "House that Dripped Blood", the clients' sex lives take the form of assorted movies that parody several low-budget genres.

There's also a neat musical number.

## THE FILMS OF INSPIRATION

I've purchased dozens of videos from creative writer/directors around the country and there's a lot of incredible work out there. I recommend surfing all those indie producer web sites and buying their movies. From horror to suspense to comedy, these producers are way beyond me, and you can learn a lot from them. As an added attraction, these micro-productions are a unique way to see the sights from around United States. From Pennsylvania to Oregon, you'll see locations never before used. There's no reason to visit Blockbuster, with the choice of films being offered on the Internet. I'll sit back with a Dr. Pepper and a can of Pringles and spend an evening with the works of backyard directors than with "XXX" any day.

THESE films were off-limits in terms of any satirical bent. A better target would be the productions by the professional B-movie industry, the films that are referred to as "McMovies". (Like a McDonald's menu item. They fill you up, but you don't remember what you ate.) These films are usually designed to ride the coattails of current Hollywood A-movies, and do well on foreign television. Also in firing range would be those films guilty of pretensions, i.e.; there's no comedy potential if you persuade a young starlet to take her clothes off and slam some fangs in her mouth, but if you pass it off as "art", let's have some fun!

## WHAT I DID RIGHT!

Another priceless piece of advice - If you don't know what you're doing, hire people that do. Even those who thought our entire concept insane have gone out of their way to express their amazement at the cast and crew who became part of our team. Make-Up by a Saturday Night Live alumni? Lighting by one who lit "The Cosby Show"? A co-writer who's a cult film legend? And a huge cast list headed by none other than DEBBIE ROCHON?

Overlooking the skating rink at Rockefeller Center, Debbie & I had our first meeting about "Dr. Horror's Erotic House of Idiots". We had worked together a year before on the cult movie talk show "Front Row". Now she was busier than ever, and I was amazed at her interest in the film. Without any build-up, I presented her with the script.

I said, "I am not making a horror movie with you."

"Why not"?

"Because everyone else does."

After a few minutes, she lifted her head from the incomplete first draft. I mentioned that the last act was still in the idea stage.

Debbie said, "This is Hope and Crosby. Martin and Lewis. And I get to work with Zacherley?"

"You perform a song and dance number with him."

Not only did Debbie approve of the project, she was responsible for some of the most important casting in the project, including recommending a gentlemen who's becoming one of the most prolific players in independent film; Trent Haaga.

Trent had appeared in several famous cult films, my favorite being "Terror Firmer". When not acting, he's writing and producing. He had recently moved from New York to LA and was quickly establishing himself as a true triple threat in the independent film world. I offered him the opportunity of a lifetime, to play both a werewolf AND a zombie in "Dr. Horror".

## LOCATION SCOUTING!

After our website announcement of “Dr. Horror’s Erotic House of Idiots”, the hunt was for the major location; Dr. Horror’s office/retreat located in the fictional community of Clear Lake. By good fortune, a friend’s lake front house proved ideal. One exterior location used only sparingly was the primary location of most every low budget production - “The Woods”.

“The Woods” is overused due to its easy access and absence of authority (meaning you can shoot without a permit), but in 525-line video, it usually looks muddy, with shimmering leaves and a washed out sky. The worst time to shoot? 12 PM of course, with the sun directly over the actors’ heads. The close-ups will appear so harsh you won’t have to worry about zombie make-up.

## THE SCRIPT

“Clerks” looks like a mess. “In the Company of Men” was shot on outdated stock and consists mostly of master shots, the camera hardly moving. “Cube” was pretty much one set, repainted and reused. So why are these low budget movies held in such high regard? The GREAT SCRIPT. A production cannot rise above its material. The script is the single most important element.

All fine and dandy if you can write. What about me?

What I lacked in talent, I gained in respect for my audience by keeping my scenes as short as they could be. If I could not create any magic, at least the attempts would be brief. Here’s a great tip: Start the beginning of your scene as close as possible to the END of the scene. Forget entrances and exits. Stop shooting cars pulling up and leaving. As always, do what I say, not what I did. There is one scene near the opening of “Dr.Horror” that has Mike Thomas running up a flight of stairs to place a garden rake in a living room. Now, we MUST see him do that, or else there is no payoff later on. But I made the mistake of having the scene consist of just that; the dropping off of the rake, without anything else happening in the scene. What lasts as fifteen seconds on screen seems to take forever.

Bruce Kimmel, actor/writer/director of “The First Nudie Musical” and “Spaceship” gave me a piece of advice that I did keep in mind - “If you’re not a great comedy writer, at least try to invent some interesting characters. If the audience likes the ensemble, they may forgive your mistakes.”

Rochon and company put much comedic life into some of my feeble gags, but as I was going into act three, I needed help.

As successful as she has been in the b-movie acting world (her best work by far has been with Max Allan Collins), writing is Brinke Stevens’ real professional passion. If I could bamboozle the author of “Teenage Exorcist”, “Jacking In”, etc. into co-scripting the last segment, now another great talent from B-movie world would be associated with “Dr. Horror’s Erotic House of Idiots”.

Brinke reacted favorably to the work-in-progress reel., and said it would be fun to do some creative writing. I was ecstatic, since up till now the best B-movie creative writing I’ve seen was Jay Lind’s own review of his own “To Dance With Death” on the Internet Movie Database. Brinke’s primary work on “Dr. Horror” comes in the film’s final half hour, though you can surely spot some of her touches and inspiration throughout the entire movie. Though I did feel a bit guilty in drafting Ms. Stevens into what could become my personal Waterloo, I felt that if she could survive “Demon Lust”, she could survive anything.

## HOW TO DIRECT

After a few films down the line, you can start directing, but right now, you are COVERING, trying to get the scene in a master, and then going in for close-ups. You are more technical than creative. You do want to get it done well, but you also want to get it done! Storyboarding is not a panacea but it helps you keep track of what shots are needed. HINT - Your AUDIO is more important than your video. If your video is lousy, a viewer might stay to the bitter end if the story is interesting, but if they can’t decipher what the actors are saying, the eject button gets pressed. We encountered a surprising lack of barking dogs and traffic noise while shooting our exteriors, so we were able to use most of the existing audio. Another hint: All professional films re-dub most all of their original sound, so the audio ambience matches cut to cut. Close your eyes and just listen to outside scenes of your favorite film. You can’t hear the shot changes and it SOUNDS LIKE A MOVIE. Example: In real life, I may not be able to hear you coming up the stairs, but if I see you climb stairs on screen, I better hear those steps.

Concerning VIDEO, the fact that your new miniDV camera can shoot in low light doesn’t mean anything. You still must

paint the picture. It may not take many lights, but it does take lights. Key light, back light and fill light.

When editing, do not concentrate on just hooking the footage together; the footage has to match! How many of these video features have you seen where the actor sitting down is red, and the guy by the window is blue? Color correct, using a real monitor, not your computer screen.

I cannot stress the importance of using real actors. What a clever shortcut! Debbie and Trent were always prepared, even when I wasn't. Conrad Brooks is used to adlibbing, but I insisted that in order for the comedy to work, there could be no improvisation. He never did the same lines the same way twice, so we kept the camera and audio running at all times which gave us enough elements to create a terrific performance. There were even a few instances where Conrad's line rehearsal was funnier and more natural than a true take and those are in the final edit!

A mini-movie miracle occurred on an early morning exterior scene featuring Conrad, Mike Thomas and Nathan Sears. For the scene to play correctly, it had to be done in one master shot, with the lines delivered at exactly the right time. To be perfectly honest, I was resigned to just getting the scene, not getting the GREAT scene. On "action!" Conrad, Mike and Nathan rushed out of Dr. Horror's office and huddle together against a railing. Every line, every reaction from Conrad was dead on. Perfect.

I was sure I missed something, so I decided to go for another take. It was a mirror image of the first one. Once again, Conrad could not have been better. One more for audio..."action!" Take three was the best of all. Trent, who was next to me the whole time whispered, "The legend is Conrad is great when you shoot him first thing in the morning." Maybe it's not that lofty a goal, but I am proud that Conrad is a true character actor in our production.

When we were close to wrapping principal photography at the lake, Debbie, out in a rowboat, yelled out an idea for a shot that could make the scene funnier. We all chuckled and I packed up the gear. A month later, realizing she was absolutely right, I drove out to the lake and shot the footage.

## MUSIC AND TITLES

Of all the b-movie rules I've discovered, these were the most specific; The titles must be over black accompanied by synthesized instruments, and the end crawl should be loaded with a list of rock bands whose songs were needle-dropped throughout the film. The songs do not need to have any connection with the story or even be heard in the film's soundtrack. There must, however, be this list at the end.

Of course we did the complete opposite for "Dr. Horror". We open with cartoon credits and the Moscow Symphony Orchestra is one of the bands in the film. I'm not kidding. I'm also negotiating for permission to use some actual 1950's recordings of some music used in classic horror/science-fiction films. Song writer Doug Scrivani produced a classic musical comedy sound for the Zacherley/Rochon musical segment.

## THE SPECIAL SNEAK NON-PREVIEW

About halfway through shooting, we felt it was time to show some assembled scenes of "Dr. Horror" to an audience. Michael R. Thomas, who plays Dr. Horror, was scheduled to attend Monster Bash 2002 in the guise of Ygor, a classic Universal horror film character. Since the Bash's taste runs more toward classic horror than modern schlock, we figured this would be an ideal audience to judge whether our experiment had any merit at all. We assumed that the combination of werewolves, zombies and a starring role by the Bash's own mascot would fit perfectly in the convention's agenda and stated as much in my letter to the Bash's head honcho Ron Adams. I was curious about what he thought of the screening copy I sent, but I never heard back from him. Though disappointed in the non-response (a common experience if you're a producer), I still attended Monster Bash and had a fine time. On the last night, I found out the rest of the story third hand. It turns out that Ron didn't focus on the werewolf, zombie or space alien footage, but on a navel. A bikinied woman (Barbara Joyce) appears for about 20 seconds in "Dr. Horror" and Ron figured this was not a presentation suitable for a family-oriented convention. Later, a fellow attendee expressed his regret that the footage was not presented since it would introduce the crowd to something new.

"A B-movie comedy?" I asked.

"No." he said. "Women."

## PUBLICITY

Every book and seminar on producing stresses this requirement; TAKE TONS OF PHOTOS! If you are the so-called director of one of these epics, forget the idea of shooting any stills yourself. You'll never do it. You'll forget it. You'll be too busy. So, at the very least, toss your still camera to the nearest gullible crew member. I was fortunate because my associate producer, Rich Scrivani, did an amazing job capturing the highlights of every scene.

Thanks to Debbie Rochon, a few shots exist to give the impression of the film being directed by yours truly. When I was in still camera range, Debbie would yell at me to point my finger in any direction. The photographic result seems to support evidence that I was actually in charge or at least doing something.

I was warned, however. The publicity stills were pretty tame in the erotic and violence department, and to ensure getting any hype in the cult movie mags, I should lay out some more cash to get a few 'hot erotic horror pics' of some of the female cast members. This could even take care of the cover art for the video release. The busiest photographer around for this end of the business is Ward Boulton, an L.A. guy who specializes in making glamorous b-stars look hideous.

After sampling a bit of his portfolio, I chickened out. The actresses did not look at all like themselves, and I got a bit weary of the 'standard Boulton pose', which is a B-star squatting with a sort of constipated expression while being covered in fake blood.

I passed, hammering another nail in my publicity coffin. We settled on the cast actually smiling at the camera for our primary publicity poster.

#### MAKE A "SPECIAL EDITION" DVD

Now, this is the scam for me! Back as far as the glory days of the laserdisc, I'd been a fan of "extras" such as audio commentary and deleted scenes. Now, in the age of DVD, go figure, EVERY release seems to say "special edition"!

The B-movie industry has not only grabbed hold of this selling point, they've made it a packaging priority. And here's the best part; you can release an hour-long film, as long as you fill the disc with three hours of extras. Here I was, sweating on a one hundred twenty page script when I should have been running around following the making of the film instead of making the film. No wonder my budget skyrocketed; "Dr. Horror" is about 100 minutes in length.

More panic set in when I realized there were no "deleted scenes". In low budget producing, how CAN there be any deleted scenes?

So, towards the end of principal photography, I asked Debbie Rochon and Trent Haaga if they could just improvise a few scenes that I could pass off as 'deleted'. Trent asked if he could improvise a bit on how idiotic my idea was. I said, "That's fine."

In retrospect, it's the best scene in the entire production, and it's a real shame it was deleted.

If you'd like to see it, please buy the SPECIAL EDITION of "Dr. Horror's Erotic House of Idiots".

#### FILM VS. MOVIE

This rule concerns itself with the payoff of the entire producing process and I will strictly adhere to it. You created a video presentation, with possibly some post-production process that gives it a film look. Here is the big secret of the "digital revolution" - there isn't any. It's a phrase used by two elements - film schools and video equipment manufacturers. It's not revolution. It's evolution. Years ago, nothing stopped you from making your own film. You had the option of shooting in 16mm, and some years later, super 8. Today you have the 500-line resolution of MiniDV. But it is not, and never will be, a "level playing field". The big boys are now fiddling with HI-DEF. So drop out of the race and produce the film you want to make, be it in MiniDV, Super VHS, HI8mm, Betacam or Pixelvision.

But when does your film become a MOVIE? When it plays to an audience. "Dr. Horror" will have an opening night showing at a rented theatre in New Jersey. To compound this mistake, there will even be a souvenir program. Our movie comes complete with a built-in intermission, so if the audience does not return for Act Two, perhaps I can pack up early and get a reduction in my theatre rental fee.

I cannot resist a serious comment to end what I hope was a funny take on B-Movie making. I am deeply thankful to the cast and crew of "Dr. Horror's Erotic House of Idiots" for their friendship, hard work, and belief in this project.



## Video &amp; DVD : Reviews : D

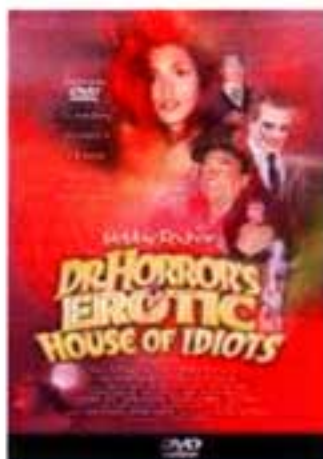
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CINESCAPE'S  
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PRESENTS

## DVD Review

DR. HORROR `S EROTIC HOUSE  
OF IDIOTS

One for the fans

By: BRIAN THOMAS

By: Columnist

Text  HTML 

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© PS Productions

DR. HORROR `S  
EROTIC HOUSE  
OF IDIOTS  
GRADE: B+

Disc Grade: B

Reviewed Format:  
DVD

Rated: Not Rated

Stars: Debbie Rochon,  
Trent Haaga, Michael R.  
Thomas, Nathan Sears,  
Conrad BrooksWriters: Paul Scrabo,  
Brinke Stevens

Director: Paul Scrabo

Distributor: PS  
ProductionsOriginal Year of  
Release : 2005

Suggested Retail

Price : \$19.95

Extras: Making-Of  
feature

Those that approach this entertaining little backyard feature would do well to approach from the rear. Those expecting a horror movie or erotic thriller may find themselves disappointed unless they pay more attention to the **HOUSE OF IDIOTS** part of the title. Paul Scrabo's feature debut as writer and director is actually much more of a broad relationship situation comedy, though it delves into frequent and lengthy horror and sci-fi spoofery.

It's only fitting that the film spends so much time making fun of genre conventions, as most of the people involved met at genre

conventions, such as the annual Monster Bash or one of Fangoria's Weekends of Horror. Everyone in the cast and crew is a convention regular, and many of them formed longtime friendships after making contact at such shows.

Retired TV horror host Conrad Anderson (Conrad Brooks) is minding the home of famed sex therapist Dr. Horace while the doc is away. But when a trio of patients show up at the door, Conrad can't resist the temptation to scam them out of some ready cash, and recruits horror writer Frank (Michael R. Thomas) to pose as Horace's mentor "Dr. Horror". Veterinarian Valerie (Debbie Rochon of **PLAY-MATE OF THE APES**, **HELLBLOCK 13** and many more) is having trouble maintaining relationships because she's a control freak. Photographer Mark (Trent Haaga of **TERROR FIRMER**) is a wolf with a secret. And millionaire Ashley (Nathan Sears) is engaged, but unsure that getting married is the right thing to do. Dr. Horror tries to help them out – or at least help them out of a few bucks – by telling cautionary tales of each patient's possible future. In one story, Valerie marries Mark and ends up murdering him, but is irked to find him keeping his promise to "stay with her forever" from beyond the grave. In another, Mark's chauvinistic ways earn him a gypsy curse that makes him turn into a werewolf every time he's aroused. And Ashley's story is a somewhat elaborate space opera in which his "perfect woman" (Rochon again) turns out to be the queen of an amazon planet.

These stories, and segments in between, all poke gentle fun at other independent genre movies, especially all those 'erotic' thrillers and Naked Vampire Lesbian (NaVaL) pictures. Guest stars Jasi (Roxanne) Lanier, Marina Morgan, Barbara Joyce, Rachael Robbins, Tina Krause and Ruby Larocca - like Rochon, all veterans of those kinds of movies – all lend a hand in lampooning their own work. Other guest stars popping up in cameos include Brinke Stevens, Bob Burns, author Don McGregor, and David "The Rock" Nelson, but the for many the movie earns the price of admission due to the presence of veteran TV horror host John Zacherle, who pops up at odd moments to make hilarious comments on the action, and even performs a song and dance number.

Rochon makes for such a sparkling and attractive leading lady that one wonders why she's so often cast in offbeat smaller roles. Haaga could be mistaken for a young Steve Buscemi, but also manages to pull off the 'juvenile lead' slot when called on. And Sears just seems to be having the time of his life. But it's Thomas that just about steals the show. By trade a make-up man whose career stretches back to the 1960s, a few years back Thomas began entertaining fans disguised as various characters at conventions, especially with his dead-on Bela Lugosi imitation. Highlighting this bit is his imitation of Lugosi's "Ygor" character from the Universal Frankenstein movies, which he performed in **TITANIC 2000** and includes here as well. He mugs a bit too much – Scrabo would have done well to tell everyone to pull in the reins – but he also scores a lot of big laughs.

And indeed, this is one of those zero budget affairs for which the cast is everything, as there isn't much of anything else. One could

say that a more experienced crew might have made the production appear slicker, and a fresh editor may have tightened things up a lot more (the film runs a generous 132 minutes). And given a bit more time, the actors might have delivered better takes than those used, making a better connection with the material and each other. However, it's tough to criticize such an obvious labor of love, and it's a credit to Scrabo that he created a story with actual dramatic progression where others would be satisfied with only a series of parody vignettes. Kudos are due all around for making such a fun little show. The only question I have is how they missed having Forry Ackerman in it.

Producing his own DVD (available for the time being exclusively from [www.scrabo.com/horror.htm](http://www.scrabo.com/horror.htm) until some enterprising label is smart enough to buy the rights), Scrabo packs a few different kinds of DVD extras into one long "That's Independent" Making-Of feature. It not only covers the project at hand through interviews and behind-the-scenes footage, but spends a good deal of time examining Scrabo's early career (complete with amateur shorts with commentrak) and a look at the evolution of the low budget independent direct-to-video horror field. Those who aren't already fans of this sort of thing might think much of it overindulgent. But then, if it wasn't for overindulgence, it's doubtful we'd have any of these fun independent horrors to begin with - and that'd be a dirty shame.

Copyright © 2005 Brian Thomas, author of the massive book **VideoHound's DRAGON: ASIAN ACTION & CULT FLICKS.**

**Questions? Comments? Let us know what you think at [feedback@cinescape.com](mailto:feedback@cinescape.com).**



Valerie (DEBBIE ROCHON) adjusts to living with her zombie husband (TRENT HAAGA) in "DR. HORROR'S EROTIC HOUSE OF IDIOTS" from PS Productions. ([www.scrabo.com](http://www.scrabo.com))

**DR. HORROR'S EROTIC HOUSE OF IDIOTS**

A review by Tim Troutman

could sum up this whole review in one line; **THE HORROR OF PARTY BEACH** meets a Troma film, **MONSTER BASH**, **CHILLER** convention situation comedy. But no, there is much more to it than that.

When director/co-writer Paul Scrabo invited me to a screening of **DR. HORROR'S EROTIC HOUSE OF IDIOTS**, he told me the readers of **SCARY MONSTERS MAGAZINE** would in particular enjoy this film. He is correct on this point, but I played the film for friends and family members who are not that involved in the horror genre, and they enjoyed it. They saw it as it was meant to be, a fun movie with a very talented cast.

This was the key, the most important ingredient in this film, the multi-talented cast. You can feel that the chemistry was there, and that they were having the time of their lives, while filming an obvious labor of love.

Retired horror host Conrad Anderson (Conrad Brooks) is house sitting for sex therapist Dr. Horace while he is away on business. When a trio of wacky patients show up seeking therapy. Conrad sees a chance to make some easy cash, and

help his old partner, horror writer Frank Mannering (Michael R. Thomas, our most beloved Dear Ygor), pay off a gambling debt. He persuades Frank to pose as Dr. Horace's mentor, Dr. Horror and to utilize his horror writing style from yesteryear to conjure up visions of what will happen to them if they don't change their ways.

Beautiful Valerie (Debbie Rochon of **HELLBLOCK 13**, **WITCHHOUSE 3**) cannot stay in a relationship because she is too controlling. Dr. Horror spins a tale of her and Mark (Trent Haaga) being married, but she murders him, and he ends up coming back as a zombie, after he promised never to leave her.

Erotic photographer Mark Adams (Trent Haaga of **TERROR FIRMER**), a playboy about town, is shown a tale of himself turning into a werewolf every time he is aroused by a beautiful woman, if he does not change his wolfish ways.

(Photo below left to right) Michael R. Thomas, Debbie Rochon and John Zacherley perform the musical segment in **DR. HORROR'S EROTIC HOUSE OF IDIOTS**.





(Above) Mark (Trent Haaga) describes his life as a werewolf to the old man (Michael R. Thomas).

Then there is Ashley Cavanaugh (Nathan Sears) a somewhat of a paranoid millionaire, who suspects his fiance of marrying him only for his money. The good Dr. spins a tale about the abduction of earthmen by spacewomen from an Amazonian planet. An elaborate space opera, penned by co-writer Brinke Stevens who makes a short cameo in the film. Many a familiar face grace the screen here, including, John Goodwin, Bob Burns, Don McGregor, Rich Scrivani, and even David "The Rock" Nelson. One might ponder why Forry Ackerman and Ben Chapman weren't in the cast.

Even with the already well rounded cast, the topping on the cake is the every popular veteran Horror Host, John Zacherley, who pops in and out of the film, and even does a song and dance number with Thomas and Rochon. A must for all Zack fans, and a most enjoyable highlight of this picture.

All the fantasy story segments and the situations in between parody other independent genre movies, especial the Ne Val/gore/vampire films, with so many of them boasting "Erotic" in the titles. These films are familiar with some of the other guest cast members, Jasi Cotton Lanier, Marina Morgan, Rachael

Robbins, Tina Krause, Ruby Larocca, as well as Debbie Rochon herself. It is refreshing to watch these actresses in light comedy parts, knowing that they are taking a break from "gore" and "vampire lesbians." You can tell they are having a blast lampooning themselves.

Debbie Rochon and Trent Haaga are perfect for their parts. Both receiving Best Actress and Best Actor awards, respectively in a comedy feature from the Microcinema Awards for **DR. HORROR**. Debbie Rochon is such a good actress, it is surprising she has not been cast in bigger budget features. Though co-star Trent Haaga has relocated to the west coast and is working there, Rochon declines saying, "L.A. is for suckers. Why should I go there and play two dimensional parts? I'd rather stay here in New York where everyone is serious. I can grow and learn here."

Again, cast was everything in this film, but, Mike Thomas as



Retired TV Horror Host Conrad Andrews (Conrad Brooks) attempts to calm Ashley Cavanaugh (Nathan Sears).



Valerie (Debbie Rochon) adjusts to married life with her zombie husband (Trent Haaga).



Michael R. Thomas and John Zacherley record the title song for DR. HORROR'S EROTIC HOUSE OF IDIOTS.

Frank Mannering, and his Lugosi interpretations of Dr. Horror and Ygor were just perfect. Thomas is a make-up artist by trade, but he has always been a funny and entertaining personality at shows and conventions like **MONSTER BASH** and **CHILLER**. Mike and his wife Christine make a good team together, as Christine plays Karen, Frank's wife in **DR. HORROR**.

Mike Thomas has been doing this sort of thing since the 60's, almost as long as Zacherley himself. I asked Mike about the Zacherley TV clip in the film and he confessed, "Yeah, that was a clip from Zach's teen dance show called **DISC-O-TEEN** in 1967. I was about 17 at the time. I was a regular on the show, and it was where I first met my wife, Christine. On that particular show I was made up like Count Dracula and a friend of mine was the Wolfman. I have a lot of fond memories doing that show with Zach. I was happy to relieve some of that on the **DR. HORROR** film." If you are a die hard Zach or Dear Ygor fan, the price of the DVD is worth that alone.

Hats off to Paul Scrabo, George Ann Muller, Brinke Stevens, and Rich Scrivani. Low budget, high quality comedy. Not the slickest production, but, it has a nice feel to it. Isn't that what it's all about anyway? Being able to walk away feeling that you have been entertained?

My only complaint is that the film is a little too lengthy (a generous 132 minutes), but there's an intermission. Zach suggests you get up and get yourself a snack or maybe something stronger, and with the DVD format that's O.K. Alongside the 132 minute feature is a bonus extra, an hour long feature called "That's Independent." This bonus follows Scrabo's early career and home movies, the evolution of independent filmmakers, interviews with the cast, plus some crazy outtakes.

For more information on this film you can go to [www.scrabo.com](http://www.scrabo.com). This is a fun film with a talented cast, crew and writing, zero budget, 100% labor of love. If you like the modern horror genre, and the people that are involved in it, **DR. HORROR'S EROTIC HOUSE OF IDIOTS** is a place you might want to check out. Just don't let them check you in.





Dead husband Mark (TRENT HAAGA) returns home to wife Valerie (DEBBIE ROCHON) in "DR. HORROR'S EROTIC HOUSE OF IDIOTS" from PS Productions. ([www.scrabo.com](http://www.scrabo.com))

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## Dr Horror's Erotic House of Idiots

*Director: Paul Scrabo*

*Writers: Paul Scrabo, Brinke Stevens*

*Producer: Paul Scrabo*

*Cast: Debbie Rochon, Trent Haaga, Zacherley*

*Country: USA*

*Year of release: 2005*

*Reviewed from: US DVD*

*Official website: www.scrabo.com*

*Dr Horror's Erotic House of Idiots* is, at heart, a glorified home movie. But the great thing about this film is that it's what a home movie would be like if it was shot and edited by somebody who really knew what they were doing, working from a proper script. And it's what your home movie would be like if you asked all your mates to be in it and 'all your mates' included a bunch of popular and talented people from the fringes of Hollywood.

In other words, this is what home movies would be like if they were as much fun to watch as they are to make.

Director/producer/writer Paul Scrabo has pulled together an enormously affectionate and at times laugh-out-loud hilarious pastiche of the underbelly of Hollywood, a film aimed fairly and squarely at people who consider *Famous Monster of Filmland* and *Psychotronic Video* to be more important publications than *Premiere* or *Variety*. To a loose story about a clinic for sexually dysfunctional people, he has attached a variety of self-contained stories, making this the sort of anthology picture that any film with the words 'Doctor' and 'House' in the title should be. (Well, apart from, erm, *Doctor in the House*. Obviously.)

Regarding the title, it should be explained that the film is not actually 'erotic' - as several characters point out on various occasions - and the closest it gets to eroticism is a few women in bikinis. That's really a dig at all those low-grade softcore shot-on-video horror films which simply take a well-known title and stick the word 'sexy' or 'erotic' into it for their own version (usually starring Misty Mundae) - which many of the cast and crew here present have actually worked on. The film itself however doesn't really parody those movies. Indeed, although it does contain some parodies (as we shall see) the film *per se* is its own comic creations, lampooning an entire sector of the movie business, making jokes about styles and attitudes and clichés rather than digging at specific pictures or people.

Conrad Brooks, who has made a healthy career out of being 'the guy who used to be in Ed Wood movies' plays a former horror actor, Conrad Andrews, who is house-sitting for Dr Horace, a sex

therapist who runs a successful clinic in the little town of Clear Lake. His friend Frank Mannering, a former horror movie scriptwriter who says he wrote John Carradine's last three films ("and he was dead for two of them") turns up, desperate to borrow 500 dollars. (I think it's a gambling debt, but anyway he needs to have it before his wife gets back from wherever she has been.) 'Frank Mannering', of course, was Patrick Knowles' character in *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* and is played here by make-up man Michael R Thomas, whose other turns in front of the camera include *Erotic Witch Project 2 and 3*, *Mistress (of) Frankenstein*, *Spiderbabe* and *The Ghost of Angela Webb*.

When three clients arrive at the clinic, one of whom is willing to pay \$5,000 cash, Conrad sees a way to help his friend by presenting Frank as Doctor Horace's locum, 'Dr Horror.' Initially opposed to the idea, Frank treats the situation like one of his old movie scripts and plays the character as an impression of Bela Lugosi. And so the confusion, and the fun, begins.

Two of the clients are very recognisable to anyone who watches modern B-movies. Trent Haaga (*Hell Asylum*) is Mark Adams, an insincere creep who sees the clinic as a great opportunity to pick up women. He hits on Valerie Kenton, played by the ubiquitous (but who's complaining?) Debbie Rochon, whose extensive CV includes *Gladiator Eroticus*, *The Sexy Sixth Sense*, *Filthy McNasty* (and other low budget pictures from Low Budget Pictures), *Playmate of the Apes*, *Witchouse III*, *Corpses are Forever*, *Weregrri*, *Bleed*, *Screech of the Decapitated*, etc etc etc. Haaga and Rochon have almost become a double act over the years, having worked together (though not necessarily both on the same side of the camera) on *Terror Firmer*, *Toxic Avenger IV*, *Dead and Rotting*, *Deadly Stingers*, *Killjoy 2*, *Mulva: Zombie Ass Kicker*, *Suburban Nightmare* and *Tales from the Crapper*. The less familiar face is Nate Sears as Ashley Cavanaugh, who is prepared to pay five grand if he can be reassured about his doubts that his fiancée may not be the perfect woman (he is also terrified of lesbians).



The first story presented in the anthology format deals with Valerie and her fear that men will always leave her. In this variation on 'The Monkey's Paw', we look into Valerie's future when she is married to Mark and determined that he will not walk out on her. In order to ensure this, she stabs him to death - but a year later he returns as a pasty-faced zombie. This is a very funny sequence, with undead Mark bemoaning the fact that "since *Night of the fucking Living Dead*" everyone assumes that zombies walk around like so and Valerie realising that not only will he always be with her, but rigor mortis means he will always "be ready"...

Attempts to cure Ashley's fear of lesbians involve a triptych of spot-on spoofs of films by 'Win Jymorski', 'Fred Oldan Gray' and 'Jay Lynched', each of which rapidly descends into sapphic clinches. Mark then features in a werewolf tale, with Michael R Thomas appearing as Lugosi's Ygor character from the Frankenstein movies, complete with broken neck (a character and make-up he previously used in *Titanic 2000*). Haaga's lycanthropic make-up is based on Henry Hull in *Werewolf of London* but as the actor has a much thinner face than Hull this makes him look like one of the geekiest werewolves in cinematic history, which was probably the intended (comic) effect.

Mark finds that he becomes a werewolf whenever he is aroused which, given his wolf-like tendencies, is any time he is with a beautiful woman. The editing in this sequence (also by Scrabo) is superb, cutting imperceptibly - yet with perfect comic timing - between shots of Haaga with and without the quite extensive make-up (applied by Thomas).

Finally there is a science fiction spoof, featuring Ashley, in which a race of female aliens come to Earth seeking a mate for their queen. Written separately by Brinke Stevens (who shares screenplay credit and also makes the briefest of cameos), this features some cheap-but-fun CGI spaceship shots and a certain amount of seaside postcard sauciness which is probably the closest that the film gets to being 'erotic'. Meanwhile in the framing story Valerie has discovered that Conrad was the horror movie host that she watched as a child, a local councillor running for mayor is attempting to get Dr Horace's clinic shut down and Frank's wife is waiting to be picked up at the airport.



above - star Debbie Rochon, writer Brinke Stevens

This canter through the plot(s) doesn't really do justice to a well-thought out script filled with interesting, believable main characters and dozens of clever little cameos. The problem, if one wants to be picky, is that at two and a quarter hours *Dr Horror* is too long. This running time includes an overture and an entr'acte, which are quaint additions that hark back to an earlier era (the latter of which also gives one a chance to grab a drink and/or visit the loo if you're quick). As a consequence of this, the film is probably best watched in two halves.

Scрабо's editing is technically faultless through, not just in the werewolf sequence. However, many of the scenes would benefit from a faster pace, whether that was achieved through editing or direction. *Dr Horror* is basically a slice of vaudeville, packed with plenty of groan-inducing old jokes, but it doesn't have quite the zing of a good vaudeville routine (and even if it did, I doubt whether that could be maintained for 135 minutes). But that's not say there's anything wrong here, it's just a suggestion of how something very good could have been made even better.

And there really is loads to enjoy in this everything-but-Elvira's-kitchen-sink mishmash of monster fun, not least a wonderful song and dance sequence starring Rochon, Thomas and legendary horror host Zacherley (who also pops up occasionally to comment wryly on proceedings).

Among the star-studded cast are *Tomb Raider* comicbook model Roxanne Michaels (*The Resurrection Game*, *Nikos the Impaler* - under her other name of Jasi Cotton Lanier), film historian and collector Bob Burns, Tina Krause (*Witchouse 3*, *Psycho Sisters*, *Bloodletting*), notorious ultra-low-budget auteur David 'The Rock' Nelson (*Conrad Brooks vs the Werewolf*) and numerous other cast and crew from films such as *Weregrrl*, *Erotic Time Machine*, *Quest for the Egg Salad*, *Lord of the G-Strings* and assorted Sub Rosa (and sub-Sub Rosa) mini-epics.

Basically, here's a lot of people whose CVs to date have mostly been lame softcore sex comedies that are about as sexy as *Confessions of a Window Cleaner* but not nearly as funny, finally given the chance to actually play something approaching proper comedy without having to stop every five minutes for another tedious lesbian fondle.

Scрабо himself seems to spend most of his time working on James Bond documentaries and so this must have been both a real change and a labour of love for him. And he can be proud of what he had created: it's funny, it's well-shot, it's nicely packaged and it's unique. In an era when accessibility of technology has vastly increased the number of films being made and distributed at the lower end of the production spectrum, something like *Dr Horror* really stands out, not least because it is genuinely entertaining. Haaga and Rochon hold the film together with their established on-screen chemistry while Brooks and Thomas have a grand old time with their own double act.

If you're not reasonably familiar with the works of people like Debbie Rochon, Brinke Stevens, Trent Haaga and co, the film may fall flat - especially given its length. On the other hand, you don't need to have seen every *Erotic [insert title here]* DTV movie to spot at least some of the inside jokes of casting and directing. (In fact, let's face it, you only need to have seen one of those films - in my case, *Mistress of Frankenstein* - and you have effectively seen them all.) The viewer also has to accept that a lot of this will go over your head. For example, there's an old guy named Uncle Floyd who is evidently a name among aficionados but I haven't a clue who he is.

Slightly confusingly, the 'extras' button on the DVD menu leads not to an extras menu but straight to a pretty good documentary, *That's Independent*. Running about 50 minutes, this is part behind-the-scenes, with the expected out-takes and interviews, and part overview of the genre. Scрабо bravely digs out clips from some of the 8mm films which he made in his youth (plus some footage from associate producer Rich Scrivani's ambitious but sadly unfinished unofficial Universal sequel *Frankenstein Meets the Mummy*) and interviews other low-budget indie film-makers such as Michael Legge and Kevin Lindenmuth. The *Dr Horror* DVD is available from [www.scrabo.com](http://www.scrabo.com).

In short, *Dr Horror's Erotic House of Idiots* is a hoot. An absolute hoot. It could have been self-indulgent rubbish but it's not. It's great.

MJS rating: A-



JOHN ZACHERLE, DEBBIE ROCHON and MICHAEL R. THOMAS in the musical segment from "DR. HORROR'S EROTIC HOUSE OF IDIOTS" from PS Productions. ([www.scrabo.com](http://www.scrabo.com))



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2014

Best Actress (Comedy)  
**Debbie Rochon**  
*Dr. Horror's Erotic House of Idiots*

## PAUL SCRABO: MASTER OF THE "EROTIC HOUSE OF IDIOTS"

by Mike Watt (2006-02-19)



In terms of sheer cameo-weight, "Dr. Horror's Erotic House of Idiots" may possibly be "The Longest Day" of B-movies. Made with love and affection towards the low-budget horror genre by filmmaker Paul Scrabo, "Dr. Horror's" feels like an old-fashioned '60s cavalcade film packed with recognizable faces.

**"There is this endless list of films with "erotic" in the title. I watched a few and thought, this couldn't be too difficult..."**

Starting off with a flashy animated title sequence reminiscent of "It's A Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World", "Dr. Horror's" tells the story of a former horror writer who is conned into posing as a famous sex therapist to bilk the good doctor's patients out of their ample amounts of cash. Equating their sexual problems with plots of dumb horror movies, the movie spins into multiple colorful areas as it becomes an anthology parody and even a musical!

With the star-power of heavy-hitters like Debbie Rochon ([Nowhere Man](#)), Trent Haaga ([Terror Firmer](#)), Michael R. Thomas ("Lord of the G-Strings"), Conrad Brooks ("Plan 9 from Outer Space"), Zacherley "The Cool Ghoul", Tina Krause ("Witchouse 3: Demon Fire"), Jasi Cotton Lanier ("Were-Grrl"), Amy Lynn Best ("Severe Injuries"), Ruby Larocca ([Flesh for the Beast](#)), Rachael Robbins ("The Screaming Dead"), George Ann Muller (who also co-produced) and Brinke Stevens ("Something to Scream About" – who also co-wrote the final story), there's a familiar face at every turn and if you didn't like one joke, wait a few seconds and another is sure to follow.

I recently spoke to Paul about his "Erotic House of Idiots."

### What was the inspiration for "Dr. Horror's Erotic House of Idiots"?

Well, first I have to mention that I have been truly inspired by the amazing work produced by "backyard filmmakers" around the country. They spend their own money, and when it's your own, it's a LOT. So, I do try to support them by checking out the various independent film websites and buying many films. I haven't visited Blockbuster in a few years!

There is a real kick to watching these films because you get to view interesting locations from around the country. I hesitate to list some favorites for fear of leaving a few good ones out, but I do enjoy the multi-directed "Alien Agenda" series, "Hardcore Poisoned Eyes", "Blackwood Evil" and "Housebound". I also enjoy some completely off the wall films like Michael Legge's "Honey Glaze" and Amy Lynn Best's "Severe Injuries", of which just the premise alone makes me laugh.

Anyway, these folks are the true independent producers and are my overall inspiration for even trying. However, the inspiration for "Dr. Horror" came from the other side of the spectrum - the professional B-movie industry. There is this endless list of films with "erotic" in the title. I watched a few and thought, this couldn't be too difficult.

The actual truth is that I am the oddball producer in the B-movie world, and that "Dr. Horror" is my dirty trick to the industry. Whatever the B-movie rules were, we would do the opposite. But we WOULD have "erotic" in the title.

In my regular job in network television, I work with the "hype" and "what sells" mentality. I'm used to it and I am very good in delivering what writers and producers want. This could be a reason why, in doing a project on my own, I did not want to concern myself with what's perceived as marketable for a B-Movie.

**What made you decide to jump feet-first into the filmmaking world with an epic of this proportion?**

I have actually made a few shot-on-video features over the years, but not for public consumption. Years ago, I used a two-piece VHS system for our "video features". Today they call it digital filmmaking. It's still a "video feature" but it sounds sexier, doesn't it?

"Dr. Horror's" was conceived as a B-Movie "epic" because I truly wanted to show off the talents of many cult movie stars, and along the way present some mini-movies parodying some B-movie genres.



Debbie Rochon as Queen Exotica  
in a segment from  
**DR. HORROR'S EROTIC HOUSE OF IDIOTS**

**What is your own filmmaking background?**

I started in Super 8mm. Better start going over the will while I'm here. I made several films with my high school classmates. Most of the footage is lost forever, which is perhaps the best news for the film-viewing public. Only a few reels have survived, and we may include a few minutes of them on the "Dr. Horror" DVD. It was a wonderful era, and it taught you severe discipline. Every shot had to count since film was not cheap, and you only had a few minutes in each cartridge. And what you got back from the lab was your one and only original!

Back in those days, you were the oddball if you took out a home movie camera and attempted to tell a story. Flash forward to today, and I actually read in a B-movie forum that a guy felt his life was a failure, since he was approaching 22 years and hadn't made his first feature yet. We've gone crazy. I'm still amazed at this fascinating scam called "film schools". This is wonderful. I'm not negative on it. In fact, I wish I had gone to one. Imagine how much better "Citizen Kane" would have come out if Orson took "Film Appreciation." I suppose they are good for making contacts. It is a terrific racket and everyone should go for it.

*Get the rest of the interview in part two of [PAUL SCRABO: MASTER OF THE "EROTIC HOUSE OF IDIOTS">>>](#)*

# PAUL SCRABO: MASTER OF THE "EROTIC HOUSE OF IDIOTS"

## part two

by Mike Watt (2006-02-19)

### How did you manage to land such a cast of B-movie greats?

Debbie Rochon became a sort of unofficial casting director and gave some inspiring recommendations such as Trent Haaga for the part of "cool" guy Mark Adams. From the outset, I wanted to design the casting as a sort of celebration of cult stars of all ages, hence the musical number with Zacherley and Debbie! Some actors came aboard because they wanted to be in a film with Zach!

### Conrad Brooks – Have you learned your lesson on this one? We're just kidding!

Well, it could not be an "all-star cult movie cast" without Conrad! But I knew he could take off into his own universe when he is before the cameras. Sometimes his choices can be entertaining, but "Dr. Horror's" was patterned after the style of Billy Wilder and Blake Edwards where the comedy comes from the actions of real people pushed into complicated situations. So, "wacky" Conrad was out. We worked on him, and Conrad worked as well. Halfway through shooting, I realized that Conrad was more attentive to George Ann Muller's blocking directions than mine. She is far cuter than I am, and that helped.

### "Dr. Horror's" boasts leads in Trent Haaga and Debbie Rochon, two of the most talented actors working in indies today – what was it like working with this pair?

It was an extremely clever shortcut. If you don't know what you're doing, it's best to work with those who DO. Trent can do anything. Not only is he a wonderful performer, but an accomplished screenwriter and producer as well. Debbie and Trent exhibit real chemistry in our "Zombie Movie" section, where we satirize the Full Moon/Tempe films.

Much of what you see of the "Valerie and Mark" scenes in the final film was shot without any real rehearsal. I gave some blocking directions and that was it. Both Debbie and Trent have proven their capabilities in straight horror films, so it made sense to have them go for comedy in "Dr. Horror's".

### The music in "Dr. Horror's" is incredible. Was the score composed especially for the movie?

About sixty-percent of the score is original, with the balance provided by library tracks that were used for the "B-Movie" stories. This cost a bit of change, but in keeping with our intentions, we avoided the type of music one normally hears in a low-budget horror film. With the exception of The Moon-Rays surf music track, no rock music is heard. Doug Scrivani composed the music for our song and dance section.

### What have you learned during the course of filming?

I am surprised the film plays as well as it does, because I made many, many mistakes. There are scenes where, in blocking, I did not think "outside the box", but instead insisted on shooting



"Your sound is more important than your picture. Even if the video is lousy, a viewer may continue to watch your epic if he can hear the dialogue and thus follow the story. Not true for the reverse..."

a certain way. Had I just done a close-up here or a reaction shot there, the scenes would have had a better pay off.

Near the beginning of the film, I have a main character holding a garden rake. He runs up some outside steps, opens a door and drops the rake in the room. There was only one purpose for the scene – the dropping of the rake, but it seems to last forever because that's ALL that happens in the scene. I should have done something to make it interesting.

Here are a few things that I did right that saved many scenes from being a total disaster, and although they seem trivial, I truly believe these tips are gold for anyone dumb enough to make a low-budget movie:

Your sound is more important than your picture. Even if the video is lousy, a viewer may continue to watch your epic if he can hear the dialogue and thus follow the story. Not true for the reverse.

Also, I made up for my lack of talent as a writer/director by at least making scenes go by fast. This way, even if a scene isn't that funny, at least it's over quickly. This sort of "slight of hand" can convince the audience not to hate you as much as they should.

### **What's the plan now that the movie is complete?**

I was very happy over the way "Dr. Horror" was received at the New York premiere. In fact, it was beyond my expectations. Debbie received a standing ovation. They really loved her. The entire payoff to a film project is when it plays to a real audience in a real theatre. That is the moment. I hope to have one more public showing before the DVD comes out, and there are a few friends on the west coast looking into any venue for a Los Angeles showing. A professional DVD will be available this spring and it will contain some assorted extras including a very unusual making-of documentary. The cover will even say "Special Edition", and how many DVDs can claim that?

Oh, yeah...all of them!

But, I would love to show the movie in a few more theatres. Nothing beats a live audience, since they can't shuttle forward through any sections. ZIP! Hey! You just flew by two months of our lives there, pal!

### **Anything else you'd care to add?**

Thank you very much for this opportunity to spread the word about "Dr. Horror's Erotic House of Idiots". To anyone interested in the DVD, please check our website, <http://www.scrabo.com/>, for more information. I am very, very fortunate to have worked with this cast and crew. Perhaps we should rethink the pop phrase "Independent Filmmaking". There really is no such thing.



**"Nothing beats a live audience, since they can't shuttle forward through any sections. ZIP! Hey! You just flew by two months of our lives there, pal!"**



Caretaker Conrad (CONRAD BROOKS) and his visitor Ashley (NATHAN SEARS) observe the proceedings in "DR. HORROR'S EROTIC HOUSE OF IDIOTS" from PS Productions. ([www.scrabo.com](http://www.scrabo.com))