



HEAD TRAUMA (USA) In this game melding of the conventions of the modern Japanese ghost story with those of the standard American amnesia melodrama, writer-director Lance Weiler delivers a fair number of chills, a modicum of thrills and some downright nifty pyrotechnics. Tracing the doomed efforts of its whiny protagonist (Francis Coppola look-alike Vince Mola) to salvage the run-down and apparently haunted house he's inherited from his grandmother, *Head Trauma* unassumingly works its way under the skin, raising neck hairs while teasing us to pry open its psychological puzzle box of unpaid pipers and arrested development.



Head Trauma. **George Walker** returns to his claim his dead grandmother's home in a rural backwater. His intent to find a safe haven in an otherwise chaotic life quickly evolves into his worst nightmare as neighbors harbor suspicions and something horrid in the basement of the ramshackle house begins to make its presence felt. A low-tech horror outing that revives the under appreciated monster of the id to great effect.

StarTribune.com

HEAD TRAUMA

This effective, atmospheric chiller seeps into your fear center like damp rot. George Walker, a damaged soul with nowhere to turn, moves into his deceased grandmother's house, hoping to persuade city authorities to let him renovate the place instead of proceeding with their planned demolition.

A scuffle with a neighbor, who mistakes the disheveled drifter for an illegal squatter, gives George a bruised head and a steady stream of nightmares involving a murdered girl and a car wreck. Or are they repressed memories, struggling to the surface?

Writer/director Lance Weiler makes Grandma's crumbling house a vivid symbol for George's fractured consciousness, and Vince Mola, a Paul Giamatti type with talent to burn, makes the protagonist both disturbing and sympathetic. The result is a smart, goosefleshy psychological jigsaw puzzle.

Scares, simple and spot-on

*** (out of four stars)

By Steven Rea

Any number of big-deal filmmakers - M. Night Shyamalan, for one - would be well-served by a viewing of the low-budget *Head Trauma*. Shot on digital video by Philadelphia-area writer-director Lance Weiler, this simple and effective psycho-thriller creates a mood of dread and dissociation, and sustains it, without resorting to elaborate special effects, or a colorful crowd of actors, or otherworldly mystical hoey.

Weiler, along with Stefan Avalos, delivered the creepy-crawly 1998 faux-doc *The Last Broadcast*, a DIY cult hit that predated, and presaged, the indie horror phenom *The Blair Witch Project*. *Head Trauma*, which begins with a car crash and flashes forward, and back, and inside its protagonist's battered skull, aims for a different kind of realism: that is, the point of view of someone who has lost his hold on the real world.

George Walker (Vince Mola) is a bearded, scruffy jobless guy who returns to his hometown after many years to fix up his deceased grandmother's abandoned, dilapidated house. At least that's the plan, but George, crawling into his makeshift tent in the middle of a ratty room, falls asleep and descends into a nightmare realm. Or maybe he's not asleep at all, and those aren't nightmares, but some kind of fractured memory?

Whatever they are, menacing scenes of a lifeless body being dragged through the woods, of a hunched-over, hooded figure haunting a run-down motel, of a cardboard box and an eerie little pamphlet, keep recurring in George's head - and in Weiler's movie.

Mola, with his glasses, beard and bug-eyed, intelligent air, projects a Paul Giamatti-ish Everyloser vibe, and Jamil Mangan and Mary Monahan, as a comic-drawing neighbor and an old flame, respectively, bring easy authenticity to their roles.

Head Trauma is a razor-sharp, bare-bones genre film, and doesn't pretend to be anything more.



Head Trauma Review

In the course of covering Fantastic Fest, I've seen 25 features so far, with more to come. My mind feels like it's reaching capacity with blood, body parts, savage killers, and psychic traumas doing battle within my cranium.

Yet I keep coming back to *Head Trauma* as one of this year's touchstones.

Directed by Lance Weiler, the film had its World Premiere at the Los Angeles Film Festival earlier this year, and then Weiler took the still daring and semi-insane self-distribution route across the United States. *Head Trauma* is [available now on DVD](#).

Weiler captures the free-floating anxiety caused by skittering insects running across a hardwood floor when it's pitch black and you're lying all alone in a sleeping bag in an abandoned house.

George Walker (Vince Mola) returns to his hometown after a lengthy absence. His grandmother has died and left him title to her crumbling multi-story house, which is on the verge of being condemned.

George is not a very appealing character. He's balding, overweight, dresses bad, and unintentionally annoys people. Still, after a confrontation with a neighbor and old nemesis, it's easy to take George's side as he attempts what seems impossible: to fix up the old house on a tight deadline to keep the house from being condemned and torn down.

As George chips away at the garbage and decay, he enlists the reluctant assistance of another neighbor, Julian Thompson (Jamil A.C. Mangan), a young artist, and tries to rekindle a romance with long-ago girlfriend Mary Sherman (Mary Monahan), who is now involved with that old nemesis of a neighbor.

The problem is that the more time George spends in the house, the more he's afflicted with bad dreams and discovers unsettling items left behind in the house. And we just know that the mental trauma he begins to experience will spill over into real life.

Demonstrating once again that ingenuity and invention are more important than millions of dollars in budget, Weiler most effectively works within the confines of the dark house. As more and more unsettling things start to happen, it's almost as though the house were growing into a full-fledged, recently awakened character that is not sure what it wants to do when it sees that it's under attack.

Head Trauma creeped me out. Wherever you're able to see it, make sure the lights are out. And bring a friend.

ELECTRIC CITY

Head Trauma

In the classic *Cat People*, Jacques Tourneur played on our fears by capitalizing on ambiguity, terrorizing us with a deadly predator that remains sight unseen. In the legendary *Jaws*, Steven Spielberg played on our fears by capitalizing on our overactive imaginations, frightening us with a deadly predator that remains mostly sight unseen. With the psychological thriller *Head Trauma*, director Lance Weiler plays on our fears by giving us a mind-bending Rosharch Test in which the protagonist - and the audience by proxy - spirals into a terrifying dreamstate where reality, like ink-blot, evolves out of what we think is seen.

A drifter with a troubled past (Mola), returns home to settle his grandmother's estate, only to find that her house scheduled for demolition. As he tries to save his legacy from the wrecking ball with the help of some friends (Mangan, Monahan), a series of nightmares threatens to unravel a repressed secret involving a mysterious woman (Brandee Sanders).

Like Tourneur and Spielberg in the early stages of their careers, Weiler has a limited bag of tricks due to a restrictive budget, but uses it well. Having honed his skills well on the cunning shocker *The Last Broadcast*, he shuffles the base aesthetics and a tricked-out soundtrack into a scary-as-hell narrative that seems almost epic, if only because he is playing with our own skewered perception. The fine cast fires on all cylinders, making the tale all the scarier because they look so terrifyingly, well, normal. Weiler learned well: An audience certainly does not need an airbrushed Sarah Michelle Gellar crawling around in leather pants to signify ultimate terror. **Bottom line: A mind-bending Rosharch Test.**

CITY PAGES

Head Trauma Plagued by reoccurring nightmares of a car accident and worn by 20 years of alcoholism and living on the streets, George Walker (Vince Mola) stumbles back into the realm of the living and reclaims his late grandmother's condemned home. Despite the efforts of a conniving neighbor, Walker attempts to resurrect the house before the city can tear it down, while at the same time trying to put together the pieces of his badly fractured life. This moody indie shocker from writer-director Lance Weiler (*The Last Broadcast*) walks a careful line between austerity and excess. Some of its hauntingly understated images--an old army tent erected in the gutted-out living room, a submerged cardboard box bubbling in a flooded basement--clash with nightmare visions dominated by a faceless ghost that pushes Walker to the edge of insanity. Like Neil Marshall (*The Descent*), Weiler is both an impeccable craftsman and a reverent genre fan, his low-lit digital-video interiors, excellent sound design, and rigorous lack of irony breathing life into the somewhat tired concept. Though *Head Trauma* has at its core a dark and shocking secret, the real mystery is why a director as promising and talented as Weiler would be limited, at least for now, to the DVD market. (John Behling)



Head Trauma

Indie fright-fest opens the door on a chilly homecoming

By Devin D. O'Leary

A psychological drama with an emphasis on the "psycho," *Head Trauma* is the second film from ultra-indie auteur Lance Weiler. Weiler's first film was 1998's *The Last Broadcast*. That no-budget horror flick received a brief hiccup of publicity for being: A) the first feature to be shot, edited and screened (via satellite) using solely digital technology, and B) a major influence on 1999's *The Blair Witch Project*. Honestly, the first designation is the more significant. *The Last Broadcast* was assembled on home computers for a mere \$900, making it an impressive precursor to today's rampant digital filmmaking scene. (Both *Last Broadcast* and *Blair Witch* borrowed a healthy dose of inspiration from 1980's *Cannibal Holocaust*, rendering that "who made who" debate a bit moot.)

With his second digital video feature, Weiler steps things up a notch. He's kept the low budget, the video camera and the amateur cast, but he seems unwilling to remain in any direct-to-video ghetto (self-imposed or otherwise). *Head Trauma* is a slick, original, attention-grabbing feature that embraces its DV-ness, while pushing the medium to the edge of its artistic bounds.

With a few well-placed edits, the film shocks us to our senses and introduces us to George Walker (Vince Mola, exuding all the frumpy charm of a no-budget Paul Giamatti). George is a balding, middle-aged drifter who wanders back into his dinky hometown to reclaim his deceased grandmother's abandoned house. Seems George has been missing for the last 20 years, and we as viewers are no more privy to what the guy's been up to than his old neighbors. Is he a homeless alcoholic? Did he just get out of jail? An asylum? What's his story?

Seems granny's decrepit home has been condemned and is in the process of being demolished. Although George does his best to save the building, this looks like a losing battle. The neighbors want the house torn down, the basement is flooded and George isn't exactly Ty Pennington. Of course, home remodeling is the least of George's worries.

On the heels of his return to the old homestead, George is plagued by a series of chilling nightmares. Recurring images of dark hotel rooms, eerie woods, a dead female body and a menacing figure in a fur-lined parka are soon slipping from George's dreams and creeping into his daylight hours. Is George nuts? Is the house haunted? Is he being gaslighted? Is this a multiple choice question?

With his second outing, Weiler proves himself a seriously skilled director. His tone has much in common with the recent spate of Japanese horror films. There's the emphasis on atmosphere, the sad, restless ghosts of the past, the jittery camerawork. It's a wonder Hollywood hasn't snapped him up to helm one of the countless J-horror remakes taking place stateside (*The Ring*, *The Grudge*, *Pulse*). It's almost depressing to think what Weiler could have done with the recent revision of Kiyoshi Kurosawa's 2001 chiller *Pulse*. I can't guarantee it would have been better than director Jim Sonzero's pedantic version, but surely it could have maintained more of Kurosawa's sad and lonely brand of existential horror.

In the years since *The Last Broadcast* came out, Hollywood has caught up to Weiler a bit. It's no longer unusual to see a major release shot on video. (George Lucas and Robert Rodriguez are just a couple of the big-time "all digital" converts.) Weiler seems to know the strengths and

weaknesses of the medium and plays well to both. Perhaps credit should be doled out to director of photography Sam Levy or to production designer Jennifer Nasal. The sets, locations and videography look perfect--dark, eerie and full of isolated dread. Most importantly, the film feels real, never overly "manufactured" like yet another hyper-stylized, mega-Gothic *Se7en* clone.

Head Trauma labors long and hard to build up its mood of menace. Though "jump out of your seat" moments are minimal, the film slowly saturates itself in shades of dread. By the end, we are both fascinated by the mystery surrounding George and a bit frightened to learn the truth. Do we really want to open the closet door and find a monster hiding there, or would we rather just close our eyes and keep whistling in the dark? Whereas most modern "survival horror" films (*Saw*, *Hostel*) are all about showing us the grisly goods, *Head Trauma* nicely plays with the "do we or don't we" quandary.

By the time it reaches its rather logical conclusion, *Head Trauma* has become more hauntingly *sad* than hauntingly *scary* . Those looking for "jump out of your skin" thrills would do better to adjust their expectations. This is more of a moody, old-fashioned "icewater in your veins" fright-fest--and all the better for it.

MAX & MIKE ON THE MOVIES

Head Trauma reviewed by Mike Mayo ★★

This independent production is the best horror movie I've seen in years.

It's built on simple stuff--a frightening house with an even more frightening basement, dark menacing barely seen figures, whispery sounds, standing water, clots of hair--and it's told at a careful pace without a wasted frame.

We know from the beginning that George Walker (Vince Mola) has survived an automobile accident and suffers from terrible headaches. Five years earlier, his grandmother died. Her house has been condemned by the city until he returns and tells anyone who'll listen that he wants to restore it. But it's clear that George doesn't have the resources to do the job. He can't concentrate. He has trouble sleeping. He's plagued by visions or memories or something.

Horror fans will catch hints of Polanski's *Repulsion* and the better new Asian horrors, but the film isn't at all derivative. Compared to filmmaker Lance Weiler's first feature, the underrated *Last Broadcast*, *Head Trauma* is more focused and tighter. It was filmed on a few locations. Acting in the lead roles is excellent. Other reviewers have compared Vince Mola to Paul Giamatti and that's not inaccurate. He's a character who's alternately sympathetic and scary. The key scene where he shares a late-night snack with an old high school friend rings absolutely true.

The film works through a growing sense of dread and so the running time has been cut down to 84 minutes. If it were any longer, the atmosphere would simply become too oppressive. And, most important, where so many horror films these days arrive at murky endings that seem to have been created by a committee, this one is completely logical and satisfying.



By Steve Anderson Aug 30, 2006, 13:18 GMT

If you've ever taken a surprise blow to the head, you know very well how seemingly fragile the nature of reality actually is. Even if you haven't, you may well have had those moments of unreality that cause you to think twice about where you are and what role you play in that particular locale.

"Head Trauma" is going to have you feeling that disconnection all over again, and this time, loving it.

So what we have here plot wise is the story of a drifter, George Walker, who's come back home after a good long while of drifting to stake his claim to his deceased grandmother's abandoned house. Which is probably pretty good for a drifter—chances are he doesn't actually have one yet, and the first two minutes will prove that pretty solidly. Anyway, this new house gives George a shot at the American Dream, and he tries his best to live up to it.

He's fixing up the somewhat rundown and very much boarded up place by day, but by night, he's having some really unpleasant dreams / hallucinations / tequila comas about a hooded figure that he sees on a [comic book](#) left behind in a phone booth, much in the same fashion you occasionally find those Jack Chick tracts lying around. And then, twenty minutes in, you actually discover that it's exactly like a Jack Chick tract.

Now, this is actually a cool little detail, because included in the DVD, just behind the front jacket, is a little kind of mini comic book explaining a bit more about the [movie](#) and its assorted origins.

Inclusion of the comic was definitely a good idea. When you consider the nature of the movie as the whole, the unreality of the whole thing, adding a bit of the movie into reality is definitely a touch that increases the unreality of it all. It would be like watching "Evil Dead II" one day and getting your very own copy of the Kandarian Demon incantations on a CD inside the [DVD](#) jacket.

Plus, the feel of the movie is like half [David Lynch](#) movie, half "This Old House" rerun. It's surrealist with just a touch of home improvement.

Check out the action at twenty-two minutes and fifty-seven seconds—it's that kind of sequence that really makes you question the reality of what's going on here. Which makes sense—we're questioning what's going on just as much as George is. Within the next four minutes, you really start to question the reality of things around here in a truly bone chilling fashion.

Kudos to Weiler and company for a fantastic scary shot at thirty-three minutes and twenty-four seconds. Only rewind and frame advance could prove just what that was, but man, it made me jump. As if that weren't enough, check out the action at the forty-seven minute mark as we get no less than a three-stroke scare sequence. One scary thing that leads into another that leads into a third. It's fantastic work—nothing but.

And of course, the more we see of George's return to his grandmother's old house, the more we begin to wonder how much of what he sees is real, and how much of what we see is the result of his own brain damage. Check out the scene just ahead of the one hour and four minute mark. That one will have you questioning reality left, right and center.

The ending is nothing short of mindblowing, with a couple of really spectacular sequences, and does a surprisingly good job of tying up all the loose ends spawned by the rest of the movie.

The special features include featurettes "Blowing Up a Car," "Shooting in the House", "Johnny Madgic and His Amazing Flying Machines", "S.R. Bissette Discusses the Art of Head Trauma", cast interviews, a piece on the music of "Head Trauma", and trailers for "The Last Broadcast" and "Head Trauma".

All in all, Weiler's "Head Trauma" will leave you scratching yours in the midst of a fantastic, scary ride that leaves no unanswered questions and does its job with the utmost competence and sheer unalloyed glee. Great stuff by any standards and thoroughly worth your time to rent.

Head Trauma is available for pre-order at [Amazon](#) for a September 26th release. As of yet, there is not a release date for the UK. Visit the [DVD database](#) for more information.



What's scarier: a real, tangible horror that can reach out and grab you, or one that's inside your head, terrorizing but never hurting? *Head Trauma*, a moody, atmospheric sojourn into the horrors of the mind bleeding into our reality, seeks to answer this, with entertaining results. Drifter George Walker returns to his deceased grandmother's condemned house to fix it up and fix himself up. He's quiet and a tad creepy, but after a knock on the skull by a well-meaning next-door neighbor, he starts to have distorted images of a figure following him. As he tries to unravel the mystery of the figure, he delves deeper into himself, uncovering a shocking secret in a wonderfully original twist ending. *Head Trauma* is a spooky gem worth a late- night viewing. — **Louis Fowler**



It's tough going into a movie you have high hopes for. More often than not the film will never live up to the expectations in your head. Fortunately, **Head Trauma** erases all fears right from the beginning... throwing you into a nightmare world where you're never sure what's right around the corner. It's the kind of filmmaking that people lament not seeing more of- because it's spooky without resorting to cheap jump scares, well acted, and one hell of a story.

The Film- The Movie- 9/10 The Disc- 9/10

George Walker is coming back home. His grandmother died a few years ago, and her house has been left abandoned and in disrepair. It is soon to be demolished. George isn't exactly the kind of guy who keeps a steady job, so he sees an opportunity in this- to fix up the place real quick and sell it for a few bucks.

He breaks into his childhood home only to discover that in the time since his grandma died it's been inhabited by all manner of squatters and drug addicts. It's no wonder that his neighbors want the house gone. But George still has hope that the inspector will see the hard work he puts into it and will allow it to stay till he can find a buyer.

But it's just not that easy. Besides the enormous amounts of trash around the place, the basement's flooded- and it doesn't exactly look stable. George also starts having strange visions revolving around a hooded figure- nightmares where horrible things happen to him and the people around him. He happens on a comic in the house that seems to be showing exactly what he's going through- is he going nuts? Or is something else going on in the house? His old friends and neighbors worry for him as he tries to figure out what's happening...

The Judgement-

Saying too much about this movie would ruin it. Director Lance Weiler has managed to do something that's pretty impossible nowadays- he's made a film that's genuinely creepy. As a horror junkie, it's insanely hard to get into a film completely- I'm constantly wondering how effects were done or shots were pulled off, all the while looking at the characters as nothing more than actors. It's hard to get completely into a horror movie these days, especially since more than often it seems the filmmakers have no idea of how to scare people. Not so with **Head Trauma**. The film immerses you right from the beginning, with the beautiful shots that make you feel as if you're flying above a forest. And the rest of it creeps you out- big time. I love it when a film makes the hair on the back of my neck stand up.



One important factor in this film (and indeed, something that made me interested in the concept in the first place) is that it was shot in an actual abandoned house. They checked out over 60 empty buildings before finally finding their place. The house is as much of a character as any of the actors- and when you realize that the filth and garbage in the house was actually real- you'll understand why it all feels so grimy.

The relationships between the main characters feel genuine, even as you are just as confused as George at what exactly is going on. The film's more of a personal journey than anything, but that's not saying that you won't get just as scared as him. The scenes with the hooded figure that seems to be stalking the house are truly spooky- the sound effects and music helping to turn a faceless monster into a nightmare...

The one letdown with the film was a somewhat predictable ending. Even so, it's the only way that it could end- anything else would've made the rest of the movie seem ridiculous.

The Packaging-

Awesome looking slipcase that holds an equally cool dvd cover that has an x-ray of a skull. Love that it's different art underneath the slipcase.... it's such a waste when companies put the exact same art twice. The disc is plain black- gotta dig it. Also- the dvd case is clear and has some cryptic messages written in the inside that only become clear after you've seen the film...

The Lowdown-

A must-buy. Anyone who laments not being creeped out by anything but Asian horror flicks lately would do well to check this out- as well as anyone who wants to see how to do a smaller flick effectively.

cinephelia.com

Title: Head Trauma
Director: Lance Weiler
Country: United States
Rating: 10
Reviewer: C Dempsey

I love film and pride myself on being able to look at all film subjectively, no matter if the subject is something that doesn't manage to touch me. With that being said let me open up and be a little honest about I really like for a film to do. I want a film to take me for a ride, I want a film to creep me out and most importantly I want to be pushed to a level of intensity that makes my body tingle. This is why I look for the logo of Heretic Films. These guys try to bring it with every release. Sometimes they hit the mark, a few times they haven't. But with, "Head Trauma" the company managed to meet all of my above needs and really left me terrified in the confines of my own home.

I don't want to retell you the story of the film. I just want to get this out there loud and clear: "Head Trauma" is not your typical horror film. This film takes you to a personal level of fear that is almost unexplainable. Lance Weiler manages dig into our bin of fear and dances without caution as our spines twist around our shoulders. He finds the pure situational fear that our nightmares are made of. I've seen a lot of film and trust me on this; "Head Trauma" actually scared me. The film made me feel trapped and haunted. This was just in the first 30 minutes as my jaw was dropped and the only words I could muster were God and damn. This was only the beginning, what I found as the film rolled a long was the feeling you get during a bad dream where you want to wake up, but you keep pushing through because you have to find out what happens next.

I love Weiler's editing style. Fast...fast...fast...slow...flash...right in your face. Then the film slows down...the disjointed story starts to unfold and out of nowhere the editing comes clinched fist again sudden...fast...fast...fast...slow...flash, your head is left spinning once again. This is how the film rolls along, can you see the brilliance yet. In the day were there are countless cookie cutter horrors that go for cheap fears, Weiler is bringing some much needed new heat. This man has captured pure fear on film, but most importantly he has also managed to tell a perfect story along with it. Yes I used the word perfect. The acting is perfect, the editing is perfect, the score is perfect and the script is more than perfect. I'm going to say it, "Head Trauma" is by far the best American horror I have ever seen. Finally a film comes out that perfectly blends traditional horror with a psychological horror, this is a new breed of horror...let's call it intelligent horror. I'm giving this film my first ever 10 and have to say the hopes and dreams of the great American horror are now on Weiler's shoulders.

Noc[tur]nal admissions

by D.K. Holm



Director Lance Weiler can't stay out of the woods.

You remember Lance Weiler don't you? In 1998 he co-wrote and co-directed *The Last Broadcast*. That was the historic indie film that was simultaneously screened in numerous theaters around the country via then-groundbreaking satellite technology. It seemed to be the techno wave of movie exhibition's future, and though occasionally someone in the movie business predicts that satellite broadcasts will soon supersede celluloid, it hasn't yet come to pass, partially because DVDs and digital home download have edged it out.

The Last Broadcast was also famous for turning out to be a potential inspiration for *The Blair Witch Project*, sort of the way that *City on Fire* popped up surprisingly as a precursor to *Reservoir Dogs*. They tell similar tales. In *The Last Broadcast*, some filmmakers and a "psychic" take to the Pine Barrens in search of the Jersey Devil. The film features some beautiful footage of the woods by day and night *The Last Broadcast* proved to be a true indie film (made for \$900 dollars), that proved to be a well-made and cleverly twisted tale of hubris and insanity.

His latest film, the excellent *Head Trauma*, also shows traces of the lure of the forest (as does his next film, but more about that in a minute), and Weiler, helming and writing alone this time (his cinematic partner, Stefan Avalos, has his own shot-on-and-sent-direct-to video film, [The Ghosts of Edendale](#), from 2003. Those familiar with *Last Broadcast* will see similar themes: mysterious figures in the forest, interpersonal incompetence, hubris, and a narrative twist that takes the center of the film and points it back at itself (if that makes any sense).

Head Trauma tells the story of one George Walker (Vince Mola, a sort of Francis Ford Coppola clone). After living on the road or in the streets for some 20 years, he returns to the home of his late grandmother, now a condemned structure in a lower middle class neighborhood. With the help of Julian (Jamil A.C. Mangan) the African American youth next door, who is also a gifted cartoonist, George attempts to clean up the house and rescind the condemnation, in the face of obstacles from an old high school rival who stands to profit from its destruction. Also impeding George's labors are the bad dreams he has, in which mysterious

images rattle around in his head, among them a small feminine figure whose features are obscured by a large hood (like the running girl in *Don't Look Now*), and some disturbing activity in a wooded field, a hanging and a large sleeping bag being hauled away.



Head Trauma is a psychological thriller of precision and insight. George is a not particularly sympathetic character, it soon turns out, and he tends to destroy potential relationships before they even happen, especially with an old flame from the neighborhood, Mary (Mary Monahan). He doesn't need his old rival to sabotage his house, as George is fully capable of sabotaging himself.



Although at first it seems like Head Trauma is going to be an "old dark house" horror film, it is in reality loosely part of the tradition of thrillers that include *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*, *Jacob's Ladder*, and *Angel Heart*, speaking broadly, but with some of the suspense created by the unseen and by psychological tensions found in the films of Polanski and Roeg. Weiler has a knack for making empty rooms in daylight and the woods in the afternoon feel ominous.

Weiler's script is a lean, mean machine, with no fat on it and with little or anything that can qualify as a subplot. The film is creepy, with additional help from the excellent music and sound production, and — in a phase that I hope will soon disappear from the reviewer's syntax — for a film shot on HD video looks fantastic, very controlled and precise. There are even superb arial shots.



Head Trauma was released theatrically in several markets in mid-August, before its September 26 release on DVD on the Heretic label. Despite Weiler's hectic schedule I managed to extract a brief interview with him about his cinematic past, present, and future. Weiler proved to be an ageless lad who could easily have a career in front of the camera as behind it, and is an articulate, passionate lover of movies of all kinds.

It seems to me that the movie industry is a little short sighted in not taking up the technological breakthroughs established in your first film. Having made the history-making *The Last Broadcast*, did you still find it hard to capitalize on its success to advance to the "next step" of your career, so to speak?

In some respects yes and others no. In a lot of ways we were ahead of the curve in terms of the way we made and distributed TLB. So we found ourselves at a strange place. On one hand people respected what we'd done on the other they had no clue. Sometimes people get hung up on aspects of the work. For instance they'd say TLB - that's a nice documentary but can you do narrative? They miss the point. Sometimes the tech aspects got in the way of the story but I think it's always some type of a struggle to get the work made and to get it seen.

What was the genesis of *Head Trauma*?

HEAD TRAUMA comes out of two life experiences that took me very dark places. The first was a head on collision with a garbage truck that almost killed me. Twelve years ago I was laying in a hospital bed with a severe head injury and my jaw wired shut. I could have died that day, stupidly I wasn't wearing my seatbelt - my jaw snapped the steering wheel and my head busted the windshield and thankfully I lost consciousness. After the accident I was plagued by vivid nightmares of the crash until one day they just stopped.

Flash forward to 2000 and I'm pitching a TV show to some major networks. After a year of pitching we land at a network and after a roller coaster ride that takes another two years of the show being on again / off again we received money to shoot a pilot. Working on the show ranks as one of the worst professional

experiences I've had. At times it really felt like I was a tenant farmer not a co-creator executive of a major network show. In the end we shot a great pilot but it died a slow painful death and I felt like I went through the five stages of grief. So in the winter of 2003 when I was feeling like shit and unsure of what to do a couple simple words change my path. I owe a huge thanks to my wife Jennifer for simply saying "Do what you love just make another movie." It's so simple and obvious but at the time I was out of my head. And that's the series of events that created HEAD TRAUMA.



Why make a "horror" film? Why that genre, rather than another, or just a straightforward drama? What does horror offer you or inspire in you that, at least in this case, creatively you can't get elsewhere?

I love the horror genre. There is something interesting to me about exercising those demons, those dark things that rest in one's mind - it's a way to get them out of your own head and do something productive with them. I've had some dark times in my life. When I was younger I drown and at the age of 14 my house burnt down, and then a number of years ago I was in a horrible car accident. I always like to have some autobiographical element within my films. Water and fire play an important role within HEAD TRAUMA as does the concept of a blow to the head.

Given that it is a lot easier to make movies these days, what remains the most difficult aspect of filmmaking?

By far the most difficult aspect of filmmaking these days isn't a production issue it's a promotion / distribution issue. With over 20,000 feature films being made due to the boom in digital production the chances of a film being seen past a film festival are rare. On top of that releasing a truly independent film into today's market with out millions for P&A can be very difficult. But thanks to the web there are ways to build an audience and get the word out in very effective ways. For instance the web comic for HEAD TRAUMA is not a normal film site <http://headtraumamovie.com> - it is an interactive comic with some twisted stuff hidden under the surface. It becomes an extension of the story. Now more than ever it is important to create extra value for the fans. With HEAD TRAUMA I'm working hard to give a good presentation from start to finish. I've been on the other end and I know what type of things hook me in - that is really the issue

knowing your audience and then the trick is finding a way to get the work to them.

Can you give us a hint about what you might be working on next?

Yeah it's a really dark and twisted flick set in the remote wilderness. It's based on an actual experience of my life that occurred while I hiked a part of the Application Trail called the "Wilderness." The AT is a wild place and being alone for 10 to 12 days with no civilization in sight can be a very creepy.



Here's a preview of the supplements on the Head Trauma disc. Not only is there a detailed audio commentary track with Weiler, but there are several relatively short but informative makings ofs, one about how the crew blew up a car, another on the man who help shot the ariel shots, an interview with comic book artist S. R. Bissette and his son on the comics they created for the film, some cast interviews, and a piece on the film's music. Bissette will be very familiar to readers of QuickStopEntertainment as one of the artists on Swamp Thing and numerous other comics, including some independent work in recent years.

As with the extras on The Last Broadcast, the supplements are uninhibited, and Weiler and his collaborators are articulate raconteurs. Finally, there are trailers for both Head Trauma and The Last Broadcast.



Head Trauma

The Movie "Wow man. You sit through a whole lot of crappy horror movies. Why?" Well, I'm glad you asked, because Lance Weiler's *Head Trauma* is a big part of the reason why I sit through so many potentially crappy horror movies. (The other reasons should be obvious: fake violence and frequent female nudity.)

Now, I'm not about to call *Head Trauma* the next big cult classic or a stunning little indie masterpiece -- but the flick IS a whole lot more intelligent and compelling than I expected it to be. And yes, creepy.

George Walker is a sad-sack drifter-type who returns to his late grandmother's old house in the hopes of refurbishing the place into an actual home. Aimless, friendless, and clearly hanging on by a few skinny threads, George is the sort of sympathetic loser we begin to feel for almost immediately. (It's a big help that the actor playing George is pretty excellent. His name is Vince Mola and he reminded me of a bulkier, less amusing version of David Cross. The guy's got some serious acting skills.)

Anyway, it looks like the local neighbors are none too happy about George's return. They'd prefer the house get destroyed, since it's a withering eyesore that's long been the squatting place of various unsavory characters. Local jerk Chet has his eye on the location, and he's not real shy about telling George to hit the road. There's also the matter of a local bartender who earns some unwanted attention from George, as well as a good-intentioned teenager who aims to help the guy fix his house up.

But what's with the ridiculously flooded basement, the creepy night-time noises, and the frequent nightmares that bounce around George's head? Is the guy nuts? Is granny's old house haunted? Are the neighbors trying to shock George out of the neighborhood?

Hell, maybe it's all of the above. All I can tell you is that, after a few moments on Act I skepticism, I was pretty darn wrapped up in poor Georgie's story. And for such an obviously low-budget feature, *Head Trauma* boasts an impressively wide array of quality components: the supporting actors, though raw and inexperienced, do a fine job throughout (particularly Jamal Mangan as the helpful kid from next door); the "real life" narrative flows smoothly into the quietly effective "nightmare moments," although the director doesn't over-rely on the dream sequence gimmick; and the sound design (yep, the sound) is really quite excellent.

All in all, a quality piece of indie filmmaking from Lance Weiler, who did *The Last Broadcast* seven years ago and not much since. Here's hoping we don't have to wait another seven years for the guy's next project. And that someone gives this guy a solid budget the next time out.

The DVD

Video: The widescreen format is a little sketchy in spots, but overall it looks quite good for such a low-budget film.

Audio: Dolby Digital 5.1 Surround audio, and it's one of the disc's highlights, frankly.

Extras

First up is a feature-length audio commentary with director Lance Weiler, which is chock-full of indie filmmaking tips, personal anecdotes, and various little tidbits. Quality track. Blowing Up a Car is an 8-minute look at the flick's formative framing sequence. Shooting in the House runs about the same length and focuses on the central setting. Johnny Magdic (2:40) shows off the nifty way the filmmakers got their aerial shots. S.R. Bissette is a 4-minute interview with the Swamp Thing artist/cartoonist who provided Head Trauma with some integral pieces of artwork.

You'll also find an 8-minute reel of cast interviews, a 3-minute piece on the music of Head Trauma, and trailers for Head Trauma and The Last Broadcast.

Final Thoughts

Quiet, unassuming, and surprisingly satisfying, Head Trauma is a solid piece of indie horror filmmaking. Just goes to show you that good actors, hard-working crew members, and a nifty idea can be breed success on any budget -- if there's talent involved.



For all the horrible horror films that come out every year (that would be the majority of them), there are few titles that really stand out and become something worth showing others.

Returning to his grandmother's house with hopes of refurbishing it, loser George Walker is trying to find some meaning to his life. The neighbor's aren't happy with George's plans as they would rather see the dilapidated domicile torn down. Leading the complaining is local Chet, who wants the land for his own. Once George moves in he notices creepy noises, a flooded budget and horrible nightmares. Is George going crazy or are the neighbors trying to scare him off?

The low budget indie film does an excellent job maximizing his budget to the scariest effect. Like his other film, *The Last Broadcast*, director Lance Weiler shows real potential as a horror director. It's been seven years since his first film and that's a real shame. Lance got the short end of the stick after *The Blair Witch Project* was released. *The Last Broadcast* is every bit as good as *Blair Witch* but got none of the accolades. Hopefully he'll director something else soon.

Lance graces us with a very insightful audio commentary that goes into indie filmmaking tips and production stories. It's a must listen to if you are looking into making an low budget horror film. "Blowing Up a Car" and "Shooting in the House" are short pieces that show off some of the making of the film. "Johnny Magdic" shows how to get some nifty aerial shots on no budget. "S.R. Bissette" features an interview with Swamp Thing artist who provides art work seen in the film.

Proving that you can produce effective horror on almost no budget, *Head Trauma* is a horror film worth searching out for. Director Weiler has crafted an edgy horror film that will make you want to turn the lights on before it's over.



REVIEW BY-STEVE GENIER

Recent history is but a blur, set in bits and pieces and hampering George Walker's better judgement. For he is on his way home, well at least what was a home to him at one point in his distant past. Staking claim to his deceased grandmother's house which lay in abandonment. The recent victim of condemnation, George arrives and so does his nightmares of a hooded figure that crept behind in him lurking in his shadows. Falling and hitting his head, George's life gets even worse as his visions and nightmares intensify.

Destined to clean the house up so it can be saved from the wrecking ball, not only do the secrets of the house slow him down, but so do the visions of a familiar terror. Though the days go by quickly, it is the nights that bring visions of horror to the George's weary mind. A hooded figure killing his female victim over and over, never changing only becoming clearer and clearer. With the help of an unlikely source, George continues on, his march to better himself and the house he once called home. Only thing is, the nightmares and visions have a more detailed future for both.

Drenched in complete darkness, the atmosphere generated by HEAD TRAUMA and all its aspects are just the beginning of a traumatic torrent ride through a masterful vision directed by Lance Weiler (THE LAST BROADCAST). Vince Mola walking in George Walker's shoes is one of the most extremely acted out roles I have witnessed in quite awhile. You feel the drained, washed out feeling that is painted not only in George's face, but his total being. His beard a symbol of his travels in an almost lost like purgatory. His energy being sucked until there is nothing left but the bones. This is the performance staged by both the brilliant direction on Lance Weiler's half and the acting ability of Mola.

The hollowed out presence of George coupled with the evil drenched feel and look of his grandmother's house are the perfect ingredients for the right supernatural thriller of sorts. A stagnate storyline pacing just right, only stopping to give you a sense of nervousness much like the torture George's character has to endure. Battered and beaten by his nightmare and visions, you truly get first hand involvement. You aren't just a viewer, but a participant. You can actually relate HEAD TRAUMA to some of you most terrifying nightmares and fears. Folks, this is what a true horror film is all about.

The Heretic Films DVD releases also lives up to the main feature of HEAD TRAUMA. Chalked full of extras ranging from several interview with various cast members. Featurettes on everything from the special effects to the scouting of the house. Trailers, behind the music and even little mini comic book adaptation. Remember this is in addition to the main feature, presented in widescreen ratio, picture very clear. The audio is equally as clear. Yet another great offering from Heretic, who continue to pump out some of the greatest fringe or low budget offerings out there.



The Movie - While Hollywood plays it safe with a diet of remakes, re-imaginings and rehashes of classic horror movies it's down to independent filmmakers to give horror fans what they really want – original, thought-provoking films that stay with you long after the credits have ended. Lance Weiler's second feature *Head Trauma* is just such a beast.

The basics are simple enough. After a 20-year absence, George Walker returns to his late grandmother's home in the hope of saving the condemned building. Late one night he finds an intruder in the house. The ensuing struggle leads to George taking a blow to the head, and that's when the fun starts.

George begins to experience dreams full of nightmarish imagery, including a mysterious hooded figure. Soon the lines between reality and imagination start to blur as the dreams bleed through into his waking world.

To go into more detail about the plot would be to do the film a disservice; one of its pleasures is the way the story slowly unfolds, giving us bits of information that we have to unravel in much the same way George does. Almost the entire film is told from George's perspective and this gives the viewer a front row seat as George's psyche becomes increasingly fractured.

While George Walker is the centre of the movie, he has two important relationships that help add depth both to his character and the film as a whole. Julian Thompson is a young African American who gets enlisted to help him clean up the house and while he at first resents it, he gradually builds up a relationship with George that allows the viewer some insight into what the man was like before he disappeared 20 years before.

Equally important although having far less screen time, is Mary Sherman, an old flame from George's past. It's clear from his scenes with Mary that George is trying to save more than just his grandmother's house; he's also trying to turn the clock back on their relationship. But, like the Moody Blues said "You can never go home" and Mary's ultimate rejection acts as a sort of catalyst for the film's climax.

These three central performances are the cornerstones of the film and thankfully all the actors acquit themselves well. Jamil A.C. Mangan as Julian appears relaxed on camera, giving his scenes a natural feel, most notably when he bonds with George. Equally good is Mary Monahan as Walker's old girlfriend, a character who goes from being initially welcoming when George arrives back in town to severing relations when it becomes clear just how unbalanced he is becoming.

Such is the nature of the film that it stands or falls on the strength of its central performance. Vince Mola clearly relishes his role, immersing himself in true method actor fashion. To see just how much of a transformation he underwent for the part, just check out the interview with the guy in the DVD's extra features; it's not just a physical

transformation but a mental one as well, with Mola in real life being extremely animated and enthusiastic — the opposite of George Walker.

Still, good as the performances are, the real star here is Lance Weiler. With *The Last Broadcast* he created an excellent pseudo-documentary that not only preceded the similarly themed *Blair Witch Project* but surpassed it in every way. This time he shows he can handle a regular narrative structure, hooking the viewer from the get-go and immersing them in Walker's hallucinatory world.

It's with George's nightmares that Weiler gets to show how inventive he can be on a minuscule budget. These sequences have much in common with Japanese horror cinema and show how to use other films as a springboard for your own ideas in a way Hollywood could never imagine with its *Ring* and *Grudge* remakes. The movie contains at least one scene as effective as anything you'll see in a modern horror film and one can only imagine what Weiler could do with a bigger budget.

Enhancing the film's sense of dread is the score by Brian McTear and Amy Morrissey. Music and sound effects blend perfectly to create an oppressive atmosphere that will make the hairs on the back of your neck stand on end. Sound is often underused by the genre but all concerned here clearly realise its importance and the sound design is one of the most impressive I've heard on a DVD.

The film may cover similar ground to such films as Polanski's *Repulsion* and even Abel Ferrara's *Driller Killer* but whereas those films offered no hope for the central protagonist, Weiler's is far less bleak, giving us at least some hope of redemption for George.

If all you're looking for is a high body count you'd better look elsewhere; this isn't your usual dumb genre movie. It requires the audience to have a brain and rewards them for using it, yet doesn't skimp on the scares.

I can't wait to see what Mr Weiler comes up with next.

FATALLY YOURS HORROR REVIEWS

HEAD TRAUMA

One of the creepiest films I've seen in a long time, independent or otherwise. It truly keeps you guessing with its surreal, dreamlike atmosphere and haunting images.

Drifter George (Vince Mola) returns to his hometown after a long absence to lay claim to his deceased grandmother's condemned house. The house is boarded up and has been trashed by squatters. Bits of trash, clothes, furniture and nasty bits of strange goo are scattered throughout the house. As George sets about cleaning the place, he has a run-in with his neighbor, Julian (Jamil A.C. Mangan). A misunderstanding leads to a scuffle in which George hits his head. After his head trauma, George begins having disturbing visions of a hooded figure, a girl who has been hung, a strangling in a hotel room, scribbled drawings and a car crash. George's dreams start to melt into his reality and he

starts to question what is real and what isn't. After reconciling with his neighbor, they both continue cleaning the house, including the flooded basement which may be hiding the house's dark secret.

The film's dark, dream-like atmosphere adds to the horror and like George, we are confused and disoriented. The hooded figure that stalks George is definitely creepy, as is his grandmother's house full of dark corners and dark past. The filmmakers' use of camera angles, lighting and direction all make for a foreboding and scary mood. I haven't jumped so much watching a movie in a while! The actors are also excellent...the acting alone is worthy of a big-budget picture, if not significantly better, especially the leads of George and Julian.

The end of the film wraps up all the loose ends and gives us an explanation of the events, though some is left open for interpretation. The ending reminded me of a David Lynch film, while the rest of the movie played sorta like **Ringu** or **Dark Water** (the originals, mind you!), but without the predictable scares. There is no gore in the film, but this doesn't affect its spook factor. The images alone in the movie will haunt you for days to come!

cinemaeulogies.com

Head Trauma

"A psychological journey like none other"

George Walker is a drifter who returns home after many years. His grandmother has passed on, and he returns to claim her house. After arriving, he finds the house in total disarray and condemned, scheduled for demolition. In his attempts to clean up and save the house, he gets into a scuffle with the neighbor boy, Julian, and falls, receiving a blow to his head. He is now plagued by nightmares of a hooded figure. At first he thinks nothing of it, until his nightmares crosses paths with his reality. When his nightmares become real, George is now paranoid that this hooded figure is trying to kill him. Filled with bone-chilling suspense, this is a psychological journey like none other. Will George discover the true secrets that lie within the house? Will George find out who or what the hooded figure is? You have to experience this psychological puzzle to find out.

Hats off to Lance Weiler (The Last Broadcast). Once again he proves to be a genius behind the camera. A true pioneer filmmaker, he has created a psychological thriller that will have you guessing around every turn. Never have I seen a film such as this. It's as if you are in the mind of our nightmare plagued, George Walker, trying to claw your way out. We know as much about George as George knows about himself. We learn as George learns. It's almost as if you get the feeling that you are the character, and George is just a symbol. You get the eerie feeling that this character is you. It takes a lot of balls to try to attempt to make a film on that level.

But it's a whole different thing to try this filming style and make it work. Lance Weiler does just that. He makes the film work perfectly. No stone is left unturned. By the end of the film, all loose ties come together. The viewer is not left with any unanswered questions. For this, I give Lance Weiler another standing ovation.

Although this is a low budget film, the acting was spot on. Especially that of George Walker, played by Vince Mola. You are totally drawn in by his character, making you feel as if this were happening to you. Never once do you second guess his thoughts or his visions. He is able to pull you straight into his own psychological hell. Another notable performance is the character Julian, played by Jamil A. C. Mangan. He plays the neighbor boy of George, who offers help with the clean up of the house, and, in a sense, unlocks the key to the hidden secrets inside George's mind, helping George to figure out what secrets lie within the house's walls.

This is a true psychological thriller. What I mean is, do not expect this to be a gore fest. In fact, there is hardly any blood what-so-ever, which definitely makes the film work. You are taken on a roller coaster ride through George's mind. I believe that if there were gallons of blood in this film, it would deter the film and only serve as a distraction. Very, very rarely will you here me say this, but I'm very happy that there was no blood in this film. Instead, there are chills which will make you jump more than once.

I must say, I loved this film, and definitely recommend this. Watch this at night with the lights out. By the time the film is finished, you will be left with a very uncomfortable and unnerving feeling. I give this an 8 out of 10 nightmares that go bump in the night.