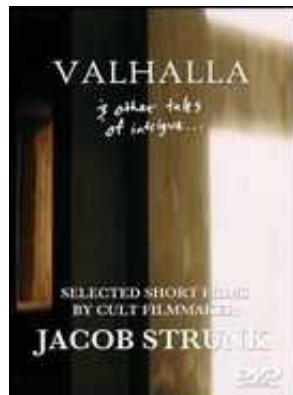


Case Number 7424: Small Claims Court



VALHALLA AND OTHER TALES OF INTRIGUE

[Seven Miles West Productions](#) // 2004 // 72

Minutes // Not Rated

Reviewed by Judge Joel Pearce // August 19th, 2005

- [View Judge Pearce's Dossier](#)
- [E-mail Judge Pearce](#)

INDEPENDENT

SHORT

Scales of Justice

Judgment: 75

Perp Profile

Studio: [Seven Miles West Productions](#)

Video Formats:

- 2.35:1 Non-Anamorphic
- 1.85:1 Non-Anamorphic

Audio Formats:

- Dolby Digital 2.0 Stereo (English)

Subtitles:

- None

Running Time: 72 Minutes

Release Year: 2004

MPAA Rating: Not Rated

Distinguishing Marks

- Trailers
- Production Featurette
- Music Video
- Portrait of the Filmmaker
- Q&A Session
- Outtakes

Accomplices

- [IMDb: Valhalla](#)
- [IMDb: A Shadow Before Sunrise](#)
- [IMDb: Sand Country](#)
- [IMDb: A Day Awake](#)
- [Jacob Strunk Home Page](#)

The Charge

Leave your expectations at the door.

The Case

Jacob Strunk is an independent filmmaker in the truest sense. This DVD set contains four of his short films, and they prove that he has great passion and potential. Unfortunately, most of these segments fail to live up to expectations.

- *Valhalla*

The title film for the anthology, *Valhalla* is a tale of murder that runs about 20 minutes. In it, a man (Glynn Beard) has just murdered a person, and must deal with the aftermath of the violent act. It is Strunk's most famous film, and it certainly demonstrates that he knows how to shoot a picture. It was shot on high-definition video at a 2.35:1 aspect ratio, and looks absolutely stunning. Lighting, camera work, and shot composition are exquisite. Unfortunately, the movie suffers from a frightfully slow pace. Never in my life have I fidgeted so much during such a short film. There are several quick and worthy flashbacks at the beginning, but they're quickly abandoned for long, increasingly dull shots of the man smoking.

- *A Shadow Before Sunrise*

Jacob Strunk's most recent film is his most successful. In it, a man runs a funeral home, but feels trapped by the monotony and sorrow that surrounds him. He is on the verge of a breakdown, and starts to lose grip as his thoughts and actions become more inappropriate. He begins to fantasize about a woman whose husband has just died, but is powerless to do anything about it. He becomes trapped between his desires and the social rules that bind him. Thanks to a longer running time and a more complete narrative, *A Shadow Before Sunrise* is much more watchable than *Valhalla*.

- *Sand Country*

Strictly speaking, I'm not convinced that *Sand Country* is a narrative film. It is a dramatic monologue—like something from a high school drama classes—spoken in one shot (that pans a couple times) by one actor (Rick DeLeon). As a monologue, it is reasonably successful (if a tad dull). As a short film, though, it is sorely lacking.

[Printer Friendly Version](#)

The screen presence of the actor is what makes this sort of monologue meaningful and effective. That kind of screen presence is rare to begin with, and Rick DeLeon doesn't have it.

- *A Day Awake*

The last film in the collection is Strunk's first successful film. Essentially a music video, it is a well-filmed montage over several songs by The Goodboy Suit. It has the same dark tone as the other films, and features some very powerful imagery. This clip makes me wonder if Strunk wouldn't be a far more influential force in the music video industry, where strong imagery and visual interpretation are more important than storytelling.

If a narrative film is analogous to a novel, then short films should work like short stories. There is no space to spare in good short fiction. Every word must contribute to the central point of the story. This is the greatest failure of these short films. *Valhalla* seems to want to come full circle, but when we finally arrive back at the beginning, we've learned nothing that gives our return meaning. *Sand Country's* story has nowhere to go, and *A Day Awake* lacks any real direction. Only *A Shadow Before Sunrise* has any real narrative movement, and an ending that feels like it has something to say. The title of the anthology calls all of these films "tales of intrigue," but this is quite a stretch. I was intrigued at the beginning of *Valhalla*, but lost interest by the end. The others have precious little intrigue, let alone anything to ponder. I have to wonder if *Valhalla* would play better in a theatrical screening, where the audience is completely at the mercy of the filmmaker. At home, we too easily find ourselves reaching for the fast forward button or getting distracted by other things in the room.

I want to be careful how strongly I attack these films. After all, they are obviously very personal works for Strunk, and mean a great deal to him. He has poured much of himself into each of them, and clearly knows how to translate his feelings into visuals. Part of filmmaking, though, is translating personal feelings into something that touches other people as well. Strunk probably knows in his mind what caused the violence in *Valhalla*, but rather than sharing that with the audience, he gives us little more than long, tedious shots of his protagonist. He is using film as a personal outlet and, though his passion shows, it is not very exciting viewing. That said, he seems to be moving towards more watchable films. If *A Shadow Before Sunrise* is a sign of where his film career is taking him, he could have a true independent classic on his hands over the next few years. He has achieved technical mastery over his craft already, and as his budgets and running times increase, hopefully he will start to build on his ability to tell a compelling story.

The DVD has been well produced. All four of the films are shown in letterboxed widescreen, and are reproduced as well as can be expected with such a low budget. The sound is excellent as well, a surprisingly crisp stereo track for such a low budget. There are some extras, too, including trailers for three of the films, and a music video that he has assembled from his *A Shadow Before Sunrise* footage. A short featurette by Nate Ackerman examines the films and style of Strunk, and also doubles as a production featurette. After this, there is a question-and-answer session with Strunk that was held after a showing of *Valhalla*. There isn't much uncovered in his answers, but they do show how naturally the filming comes to Strunk. There is an outtake reel from *A Day Awake*, which looks a lot more like camera tests to me. Finally, there is a 2002 interview with Strunk as well as a photo gallery.

I have no idea what recommendation to make for this anthology. Although it's fascinating to see filmmaking this raw and personal, few people would want to include this in their DVD collections. Aspiring filmmakers may want to check it out for a couple reasons. First, to see how attractive a film can be made on a miniscule

budget. Second, to see how important it is to consider the audience when designing a project. Films shot as catharsis don't necessarily touch an audience with the same intensity as the filmmaker.

Hopefully, we will see more exciting and more accessible works from Jacob Strunk in the future.

Film Acting

Learn to Act for Film at a Hands- on
School for Actors and Filmmakers

Actor Auditions

Acting opportunities now available thru top
agencies nationwide!

Ads by Goooooogle

Review content copyright © 2005 Joel Pearce; Site layout and review format copyright © 1998 - 2005 [HipClick Designs LLC](#)

Share your thoughts on this review in the [Jury Room](#)

Similar Decisions:

- [Pure Pleasure 3-D](#)
- [Courage And Stupidity](#)
- [Summer Thunder](#)
- [Operation Midnight Climax](#)