

George Mihalka's  
**The Blue Man**

**G**eorge Mihalka's *The Blue Man* seems to be Canada's answer to such American films as Paul Schrader's remake of *Cat People* and Tony Scott's *The Hunger*. Instead of the vampires or menacing felines featured in the earlier films, this story deals with astral travellers who become spiritual vampires in order to continue their timeless existence.

At the center of the story is Paul Sharpe (Winston Rekert), a director of TV commercials who is fed up with both his work and his family, and only finds pleasure in his experiments with astral projection — the ability, we are told, to leave the confines of the body and enter the free world of the soul. Things, however, start going wrong when both Paul's doctor and father-in-law are killed in a most gruesome way as a result of Paul's flights of fancy. The worst part of it though, is that Paul isn't able to remember the dreams which caused the deaths and doesn't seem able to control the destination of his astral form during sleep.

Perplexed and confused, Paul goes to see Janus (Karen Black), a mysterious dancer and ex-junkie who had first introduced him to the wonderful world of astral projection. She tells him that he is just confused by his new-found powers, and that everything will turn out just fine.

Obviously, everything isn't "just fine" and Kauffman (John Novak), the police detective assigned to the case, knows it. Kauffman has a strong feeling that Paul is somehow connected to the mysterious deaths, and starts looking into his past. He discovers that seven years earlier, Paul had made a documentary called *Wandering Souls*, a film which told the story of two supposed astral travellers who, periodically, are in search of new host bodies.

At this point, Paul doesn't really know what's going on, Kauffman (although justifiably confused) has been able to put most of the clues into place, and the audience has the whole thing already figured out. If the real point of a thriller is to keep you on your toes until the closing credits, then one during which you can predict the ending two thirds of the way through cannot be considered entirely successful.

Certain sequences in *The Blue Man*, especially at the beginning, are quite effective and enshroud those sections of the film in a suitably chilling atmosphere. But as the plot thickens (or more accurately, coagulates), the stylish effects, which are too few and far between in the first place, do little to help thaw out the proceedings.

The premise of the film is of course a silly one, but a certain amount of tension and intelligence would have gone a long way to make the film more effective. Certainly, the stiff dialogue between many of the minor characters can largely be excused, but the lack of

urgency in every major character's portrayal points to the general ineptness at work here. After all, if none of these people have the appearance of caring in the least whether they live or die, there isn't much reason why we should either.

Greg Clarke •

**THE BLUE MAN** New Century Productions Ltd. Buck Houghton p. Pieter Kroonenburg exec. p. Nicolas Clermont, David J. Patterson special asst. to P. K. Julie Allan d. George Mihalka prod. man. Luc Campeau prod. co-ord Patricia Cahill unit man. Jeffrey S. Bessner 1st a.d. Mike Williams 2nd a.d. Nick Rose cont. Joanne Harwood prod asst. Jean-Pierre Fautoux, Ken Banks, Jean-Marin Basley acbe Manon Bougie-Boyer art d. John Meighen set dresser Skip Hobbs prop buyer Donna Noonan set props François Gascon art dept prod. asst. André Guimond store master Maurice Tremblay painter Ross MacKay cost. design Paul-André Guerin ward mist. Claire Garneau make-up Charles Carter hair Henri Khouzam d.o.p. Paul Van der Linden cam op. Christian Duguay 1st a.d. Paul Gravel 2nd a.d. Maarten Kroonenburg sd. mix. Gabor Vadnay boom Pierre Blain key grip André Ouellette grip Philippe Palu gaffer Jean-Paul Houle best boy Luc Marineau elec. Yvan Bénéard, Steven Hunt spfx Jacques Godbout spfx make-up Edward French spfx - rigging Matt Vogel ed. Nick Rotundo asst. ed. Peter Cooke casting Elite Casting storyboard artist Jean-François Kelahear stills photog Piroshka Mihalka books Lilian Partheniou, Nancy Partheniou Nathalie Laporte comp. op. Ronald Gilbert Jr. dog trainer Jane Conway asst. to Hane Conway George Martin colour 35mm running time 87 min.

Danièle J. Suissa's  
**The Morning Man**

**D**anièle J. Suissa's *The Morning Man* is based on a true story. Paul Nadeau, a young criminal convicted on 22 charges of armed robbery,

escapes from jail to prove to himself that he can walk the straight and narrow path. He then becomes a successful morning man for a radio station in Lennoxville, Quebec, and on the first anniversary of his escape, turns himself in. Unfortunately, though the story is ripe with cinematic possibilities, they remain unrealized.

The major problem with *The Morning Man* lies in the way the title role is written. According to the film, Nadeau, a nice middle-class boy, turned to armed robbery for the thrill. Why he chose armed robbery instead of sex, drugs or aerobic exercise, more common middle-class stimulants, is never explained. The way Nadeau is depicted — strong, smart, motivated and oh-so-nice — they could all have been interchangeable choices.

His criminal past aside, Nadeau has no flaws of character. Obstacles are laid in his path only to be surmounted. The same discipline and sureness that made him an excellent bank robber now make him a model of self-rehabilitation. Nadeau's Achilles' heel is supposed to be his circle of friends, a sure lure back into a life of crime. But it is presented as helpful (they give him money, a new social insurance number, time) and no more than a minor nuisance (they are total failures in their attempts to seduce or pressure him). Since Nadeau has no weaknesses to confront, nothing can swerve him from the path to righteousness. Frankly, he's a bore.

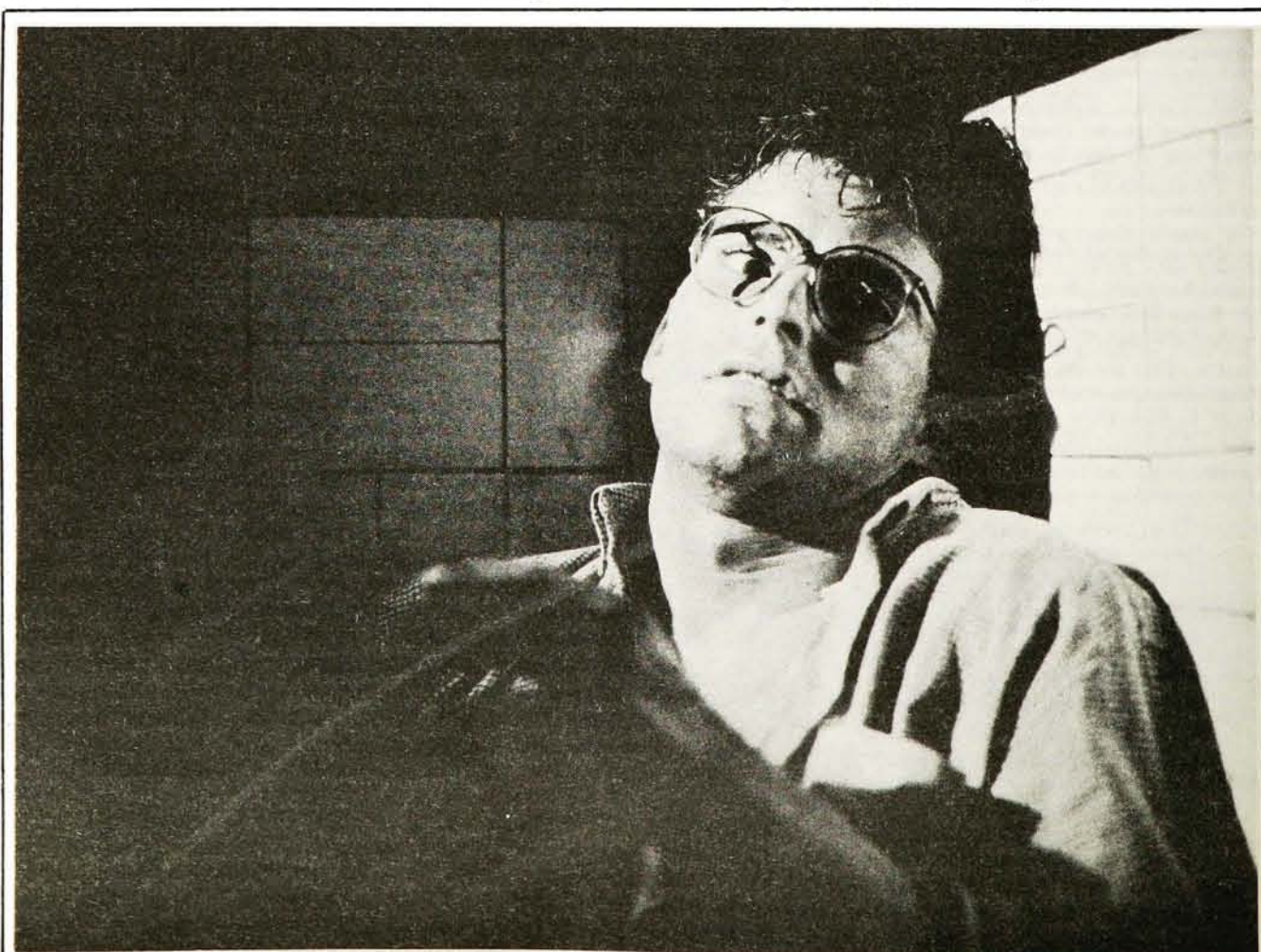
Danièle J. Suissa, the director, is widely experienced in theatre and television but *The Morning Man* is her first theatrical feature. And it shows. Shot mostly in close-ups and medium long shots, *The Morning Man* looks like a TV movie. One is also very conscious that everything in the film has been 'staged'. The action takes place

mostly in interiors, whether it be inside jails, apartments, or cars. Places are used as mere settings in which the actors can exchange dialogue.

The film really begs for a sense of milieu that is just not there. This may have something to do with the weird hybridization that occurs when one shoots a modern-day Quebecois folk story in English. The language, the turn of phrase, the distinctness of place, all these things that immediately create a background for characters in Québecois films are missing. Nothing is made of Nadeau (played by Bruno Doyon with a heavily accented English that doesn't help his line readings) falling in love with Kate Johnson, a WASP doctor played by Kerrie Keane. The film feels strangely dislocated.

Suissa uses no 'establishing shots'. Though a more experienced director could have turned this into an asset, she just leaves the audience disoriented. We get a very limited sense of where the characters are, where they want to go or where they are actually heading. A good example is the escape scene at the beginning of the film. Suissa does not give us a longshot of the jail the convicts are escaping. Thus we don't know if it's difficult, if they're heading in the right direction, or what their chances of making it are. The scene lacks tension. Though it's clear that Suissa is more interested in the psychology of her characters than in suspense, I don't see any reason for mucking up scenes like this one — not fully exploiting action scenes that are dictated by the story do not make us better understand the characters.

René Verzier, (who's justly been nominated for a Genie as best cinematographer for his work here), has shot *The Morning Man* in pastel blues, greys and dirty whites and it looks



•Bruno Doyon as Paul Nadeau, *The Morning Man*

photo: Piroshka Mihalka