

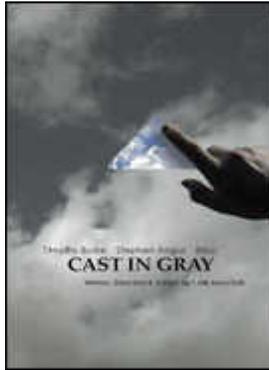


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Case Number 8577: Small Claims Court



Cast In Gray

[Life is a Dream Productions](#) // 2005 // 39 Minutes // Not Rated

Reviewed by Judge George Hatch // February 13th, 2006

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When Judge George Hatch comes to a fork in the road, he invariably steps on it and ruins yet another good pair of shoes.

Scales of Justice

Judgment: 97

Perp Profile

Studio: [Life is a Dream Productions](#)

Video Formats:

- 1.78:1 Non-Anamorphic

Audio Formats:

- Dolby Digital 3.1 Surround (English)

Subtitles:

- None

Running Time: 39 Minutes

Release Year: 2005

MPAA Rating: Not Rated

Genres:

- [Drama](#)
- [Short Films](#)

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The Charge

"I don't like to interfere in anyone's life unless there's something in it for me."—The Man with the Dog

Distinguishing Marks

- None

Accomplices

- [IMDb](#)
- [Official Site](#)

The Case

Cast in Gray is a thought-provoking, deliberately-paced short film written, directed, and edited by I. Michael Toth, who also coordinated the wonderfully ambient and ominous sound design. The premise is simple, but its ramifications are both fundamental and profound. With extraordinary visual and aural flair, Toth scrutinizes the meat and marrow of life, and the decisions we are compelled to make at crucial turning points that will determine our future and individuality.

We're introduced to The Man (Timothy Burke), who is seriously contemplating suicide by taking his hands off his car's steering wheel and accelerating. His livelihood has been jeopardized and his marriage is on the rocks. He reeks of self-pity feeling "trapped by the choices I made. I can't get out! If I don't kill myself, it will only be for the sake of others. But I don't have anyone to care about me." He's been cuckolded to boot, in the cruelest way, "Wouldn't you feel betrayed if your wife is holding you in her arms while savoring the embrace of another man, another man she thought was me?"

The Man passes The Man with The Dog (Stephen Angus) hitchhiking during a torrential downpour, a selfish and inconsiderate act, to be sure. As Fate would have it, The Man's car breaks down and The Man with The



Dog catches up. He tells The Man to "have some faith" and even manages to coax The Man into dropping to his knees and praying in the rain for help—with his car and, unwittingly, his soul. Once inside the car, the men exchange life stories as The Dog (Bibo) listens with a perplexed and inscrutable expression on his furry face. The enigmatic hitchhiker, we learn, travels a lot and is an actor with an impressive curriculum vitae, but he rues the fact that no one ever recognizes him or remembers his face. He's a good listener, as well. "It's useful in my profession."

The Man proceeds to pour out the blood, sweat, and tears of his frustrating plight, and his mention of suicide alerts both the hitchhiker and his Dog to several serious sins being contemplated. The Man with The Dog proposes an outrageous solution. "Let's change places. Get a stack of 8x10 glossies made, attach my resume, and become the new me. The dog stays with you...feed him once a day. He never had a name. I met him on the road, fed him, and he's been with me ever since. Or you can just call him Dog. And then you tell me everything about your wife, family, and friends, give me your wallet and car. I'll drive back to your home and introduce myself to your wife as the new you."

Are there always convenient options and easy ways out of unwieldy and hopeless situations? **Cast in Gray's** tagline, "Life is anything but black and white," suggests not; that is the crux of this short. Toth's screenplay is tightly written. He uses oblique, Pinteresque dialogue packed with philosophical observations about life that contrast with portentous pauses seething with augury, accusation, and admonition. We also become aware of The Man's mental claustrophobia and the kind of passion for desolation, dependency, and despair he's experiencing.

Cast in Gray is a fascinating journey through the mind of a man on the brink of self-destruction, and director Toth makes the most of the premise. Is the Man with The Dog a figment of The Man's imagination, an alter-ego used as a sounding board for his suicidal intentions, or is the hitchhiker some kind of angel, a form of divine intervention deployed at a time of crisis? I have no plans of spoiling your enjoyment by even hinting at how these scenarios pan out.

The first half of **Cast in Gray** is fraught with religious symbolism. The traveler draws a triangle on a foggy window, the sign of The Holy Trinity. He breaks bread with his Dog and The Man; then magically materializes a bottle of wine, a glass goblet and a gold chalice - all of this representing The Last Supper and Holy Communion. The Man with The Dog talks of sin, penance, and redemption. Some have gone so far as to interpret The Dog as being God because, based on that old saw, "dog" spelled backwards is ... Frankly, I don't think it goes to that religious an extreme. But what's wonderful about this short is its lyrical ambiguity, and those areas "cast in gray" that are left open for interpretation.

Cast in Gray was written "specifically for two very talented actors and a dog." Timothy Burke as The Man and Stephen Angus as The Man with the Dog are outstanding in their roles and bring a unique complexity to their

performances. Bibo, The Dog, actually met actor Angus on the streets and they became fast friends; it's evident in their reactions to each other. Bibo, by the way, is an acronym for "breathing in, breathing out"—her version of Method Acting!

Life is a Dream Production's transfer is nothing short of magnificent. Shot on DVCPRO 720p High Definition in 1.78:1 aspect ratio, it features a production design by Slobodan Radovanovic and cinematography by Sasha Rendulic that enhances all aspects the film's title. The unique Dolby Digital 3.1 Stereo soundtrack sharply augments the complex and exotic sound structure designed to keep the viewer ensconced within the dismal and threatening world of the thunderstorm during which the entire film takes place. The dialogue separation remains crisp and clear. There is also an effective but unobtrusive minimalist score by Dr. Dimitry Golemovich.

The film has already won two "Best Narrative Short" awards at the Golden Film Festival and the East Lansing Film Festival, and has been an official selection at several others. Outside of the festival milieu, however, the only thing **Cast in Gray** has against it is its running time. At 39 minutes, it's too long to be included as a bonus feature along with a feature film in theaters. The good news is that I. Michael Toth and crew have plans to include the short with two others yet to be filmed and present them in an omnibus format.

But why wait? Keep in mind, aesthetically, the running time is a blessing for the individual viewer and **Cast in Gray** is a short that you should seek out. I've provided a link to Life is a Dream Productions where you can find out about availability and also more documentation about the making of the piece. There are no Extras on the disc, but the production diaries on the site are a must for fans of independent films.

Not guilty!

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