

THE 4TH FLOOR

A François Miron FILM



*"A turbid and delirious love story suspended between
Lynchian atmospheres and Dario Argento influences."*

RAVENNA NIGHTMARE

Atopia

THE 4th LIFE

The 4Th LIFE is the highly anticipated feature film debut from celebrated multiple-award winning experimental filmmaker Francois Miron, who has been creating extraordinary hallucinatory shorts for over 20 years. In this visually-sumptuous neo-noir nightmare, a woman (Janet Lane) runs away from a trauma-ridden life and an equally horrific past, finding herself in the shadowy, far-away town of Darkeville. The "truth" catches up to her in the form of a former female lover, a lover on a mission to defend betrayal and all those who have been hurt by "love." Set against a backdrop of fading dreams, broken aspirations, and the crumbling ruins of a decaying town their separate paths come together with explosive results.

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

François Miron has a strong and respected history spanning over 20 years as a creator of visionary experimental short films (*The Square Root Of Negative Three*, *Resolving Power*, *The Quest*, *Optical Surgery*, *What Ignites Me Extinguishes Me...*). The body of his early work was created using a powerful film image manipulation technique that he has mastered: optical printing, which can best be understood as frame-by-frame re-photography through which varying manors of visual alchemy



employed. His unique brand of psychedelia has won him numerous awards on the international film festival circuit. In 1990 Miron received an MFA in filmmaking from The School Of The Art Institute Of Chicago, where he went under a full merit scholarship. Each of his films

have been screened in festivals, museums and alt venues throughout the world, attaining the filmmaker a unique underground acclaim and considerable cult status. Miron has also directed music videos, designed feature title sequences, and occasionally works as both a photographer and cinematographer. Since 1993 he has been teaching optical printing, filmmaking, and technical aspects of Film at The Mel Hoppenheim School Of Cinema in Montreal. Somewhere in the world, at this very moment, one of his films is likely being projected, either at a festival, behind a psychedelic band playing live, in a classroom, on top of people at a rave, in the back of Art gallery, or on a television set in a damp basement...



A SAPHIC FILM NOIR by Donato Totaro

Montreal-based filmmaker **François Miron** has been making award winning experimental films since the late 1980's. *The 4th Life* marks his entry into narrative feature film, which may seem odd in light of the noted background in experimental film (which were abstract and marked by impressive optical printing work). However, fans of Miron's earlier work can take heart: Miron has not exactly made a commercial feature for the mallrats.

While the film's plot is simple –obsessive love leading to violent revenge– the 'what' (plot) is made fresh and fascinating by the 'how' (style). One of the more striking elements of this 'how' is the montage of the film's elliptical narrative structure, which continually disorients the viewer by cutting to several connected points within the five or so year span of the story. And what is the story?

The 4th Life is a kaleidoscopic exploration of obsessive love detailing the on/off relationship of the dark haired, overly protective, and dangerous, Caz (**Andrea Sheldon**), and the blonde, level-headed tough gal Marie (**Lucky Number Slevin's Janet Lane**). The film is set in a near future where a destitute city named 'Darkeville' is ravaged by 'environmental' terrorists (who routinely set bombs to "starve the machine"), heightened urban crime, and random street violence. Caz, having escaped from an asylum for the criminally insane with a dim witted, mute male accomplice named George continues her earlier life of crime. Marie, who we later learn was a criminal accomplice with Caz and her former lover, is currently tracking down precious objects for her antique dealer/husband John from a rich industrialist named Mr. Farquate (Frederic Smith). We learn that Caz and Marie share a traumatized past at the hand of abusive parents and authority figures; while Caz reacted to her abusive past by turning to a life of violence and crime, Marie now suffers from blurred vision as a result of the internalized psychic pain. Unable to cope with Caz's suffocating love, Marie leaves Caz, which sends her to Darkeville in murderous pursuit of her former lover.

While I've necessarily 'untangled' the plot in my retelling, *The 4th Life* plays completely different, more like a fever dream fragmented across various points along the timeline of the Caz/Marie relationship in a manner reminiscent of the films of **Nicolas Roeg** and **Donald Cammell**. For example, the film begins strikingly with a sustained overhead long take which slowly and sinuously booms up/down from a bed where two nearly nude female lovers (Caz and another brown-haired lover) are entwined in rapturous French-kissing. After this credit sequence the film begins with an extreme close-up of an eye, light flickering and pulsating in unison to **David Kristian's** sonic waves. The eye shot is intercut with moving point of view shots of passing verdant landscape. We then cut to a shot of the face, Marie's, which situates the experience within her subjectivity. This cuts back to another love scene between two women, the image blurred as if seen through a glass; back to the moving point of view

shots, and then to a focused shot of Marie lying with Caz on a red bed cast against a stark black background, and the film's first bits of dialogue, Caz: "You're beautiful Marie. And you're mine. I'm never going to let you go." (I'm sure it must be me, but this theatrical set, with the blood red bed sheets, black background, and overhanging phallic silver beams, reminded me of a set from a **Jesus Franco** film.) This bed scene tryst then cuts abruptly to a close-up of Marie in another time/place, rising quickly and blinking as if waking from a bad dream. Marie, her eyes still flickering, takes in a breath from her inhaler, and then the shot cuts to another distorted POV shot, with Caz's words echoing in Marie's head ("You're beautiful...and you're mine").

In all but a few minutes Miron establishes the film's elliptical, back/forward time line, and the film's primary thematic/visual motif of the eye/perception, which is rendered directly through Marie's psychically-induced blurring spells, and indirectly through visual touches such as the blind Mr. Farquate's egg shell colored eyes, the several extreme close-ups of eyes, and other in-camera visual effects such as prismatic images and wide angle distortions.

The 4th Life is a Sapphic film noir imagined in world where women "take shits" and slap men around like **Humphrey Bogart**, and men are nervous, jittery and timid. There is not one male character in this film who could take a turn in a classic era noir. Caz's accomplice George is mute and is at her beck and call; Mr. Farquate is wheelchair bound and blind; his son Reginald meek and neurotic (and gets slapped by Marie like Bogart's Sam Spade slaps **Peter Lorre's** Joel Cairo in *The Maltese Falcon*); the hotel clerk who serves Marie is clearly intimidated by her mere presence; and even Buzz, who sleeps with Marie, does so on her terms, with Marie on top riding him like a hobby.

In short, Miron takes the traditional high testosterone noir world and cleverly turns it on its phallic head. While blending all the above as part of its noir revisionism, *The 4th Life* also weaves a rich visual tapestry of different textures (black and white, color, grainy, overexposed) and tones (comic, reflexive, poetic, sensual). While all of this might sound dark and sinister, it is equally true that, with the film's sometimes brash music cues, selected over-the-top performances, and intentionally cliché touches, Miron's tongue is never too far from his cheek.

Excerpted from a larger article which originally appeared on Offscreen.com.

"Bewitching... hallucinatory and twisted, stratified on different temporal planes and complex like a dreamlike picture-puzzle with a powerful visual impact. As if a Lynchian echo were superimposed onto a wicked road movie filled with Gregg Araki provocation." - Stefano Coccia, **GLI SPIRTATI**

"Renowned for his mind-bending optical printer work, Francois Miron has been making experimental & live-action homemade images that are festival favorites worldwide."
- Rick Trembles, **MOTION PICTURE PURGATORY**

"No mere plot synopsis can do justice to this film. The 4th Life is a thriller that wholly immerses you in its world, only to alter reality as you know it for the duration of its 90 minutes."
- **BOSTON UNDERGROUND FILM FESTIVAL** program notes

ATOPIA PRESENTS A FILMGRAFIX PRODUCTION 'THE 4TH LIFE' JANET LANE ANDREA SHELDON JOSEPH BELLEROSE
VITALI MAKAROV MICHAEL RIGBY JEAN NICOLAI TOD FENNELL SHILOH SHERAY ALSO STARRING SHAUN BALBAR
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JEAN-CHRISTOPHE VERBERT PRODUCTION DESIGN PIER LEFEBVRE CINEMATOGRAPHY GILLES BLAIS EXECUTIVE PRODUCER PASCAL MAEDER
WRITTEN BY JAMES GALWEY FROM AN ORIGINAL IDEA BY FRANCOIS MIRON PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY FRANCOIS MIRON



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