

A SYNOPSIS OF ERASERHEAD

CHAPTER ONE - THE MAN IN THE PLANET (6:08)

We open on a horizontal view of Henry floating under, and then over a planet. We close in on the planet, and see the Man within. He works a series of levers which take deformed sperm from Henry and cast them into a dirty pool.

This scene introduces us to Henry, the pityful little man with funny hair, who's subjected to industrial surgery, where his poisoned seed is taken from him and cast into an abyss. Is this Henry's idea of vacation?

CHAPTER TWO - LENOX AVENUE BLUES (2:40)

A flash of light and we enter Henry's world. A wasteland of industrial emptiness and filth.

Henry's walk home is wrought with huge piles of dirt, large forbidding buildings and solitude.

CHAPTER THREE - BEAUTIFUL LADY ACROSS THE HALL (3:14)

Henry's apartment building offers no heaven for Henry. The elevator tests his patience, and then shoots sparks at him from a damaged bulb. Henry trudges his way to his apartment (#26), but before he can go in, a Beautiful Girl Across The Hall, comes out to give him a message. She tells him that his girlfriend, Mary, called on the payphone to invite him to her parent's house for dinner. Henry thanks her and enters his apartment.

CHAPTER FOUR - MESSIN' AROUND WITH THE BLUES (3:58)

Henry's room is just as plain as he is. A bed, a dresser, a desk. Near his bed, hangs a picture of an atomic explosion. A radiator spews out steam as Henry changes a dirty sock. In a drawer he flips a penny into a bowl of water and picks up the torn picture of his girlfriend, Mary. He stares at the picture with sad eyes before straightening his tie and leaving for dinner.

CHAPTER FIVE - MARY (2:55)

Night falls as Henry walks over to Mary's. A chained dog barks at Henry and he picks up his pace.

Mary watches from the door and scolds Henry, when he arrives, for being late. Henry stares at his feet. "Dinner's almost ready," Mary tells him, with a reassuring, but still disturbing smile on her face.

CHAPTER SIX - MR. & MRS. X (3:00)

Henry is introduced to Mary's mother, who speaks angrily, but never tells anyone what's on her mind. Henry tells her that he's on vacation from Lepell's factory.

While they talk, Mary has some sort of seizure, which is dispelled when Mrs. X brushes her hair. Mr. X comes home from work, a lot more cheerier than his wife, and tells them about the great man-made-chicken dinner they're having tonight. "They're smaller than my fist, but they're new!" He says excitedly.

CHAPTER SEVEN - DINNER PREPARATIONS (2:00)

Mrs. X makes salad with the "help" of a comatose grandmother. Mr. X sautes his chickens while the cook. Mary and Henry sit in the living room, not saying a word to each other. You could cut the tension with a chainsaw.

CHAPTER EIGHT - CARVING CHICKENS (3:45)

It's dinner with the Xs and Henry is given the honour of carving up the pint-sized chickens. No sooner did he poke the first one with his fork, that it started to ooze out a thick goo, much to the enjoyment of Mrs. X, who goes into a strange trance while the chick's drumsticks start to gyrate.

After a few moments of drooling, she rises from the table and leaves the room. "She'll be alright in a minute," Mr. X says.

CHAPTER NINE - THE COURTSHIP OF HENRY SPENCER (4:00)

Mrs. X asks to speak to Henry alone. "Did you and Mary have sexual intercourse?" She asks blatantly. Henry gets all nervous, has a nosebleed, and is told that he's fathered a premature child. Not only that, but Henry is told that he will be marrying Mary because the child needs a father.

CHAPTER TEN - THE BABY (1:35)

In Henry's apartment, Mary tries to feed the 'baby', with no success. The baby is best described as a cross between a fetus and a lizard. It has no limbs, only a bundled little body wrapped in bandages with a head sticking out.

CHAPTER ELEVEN - THE SEED (1:07)

Henry leaves the apartment checking his mail slot on the way out. Reaching in he finds a small coiled "seed". He tucks it away and returns to his apartment.

CHAPTER TWELVE - THE RADIATOR (2:35)

Henry enters the apartment and winces at the site of his half-child.

Henry and Mary exchange few words. She asks if there was mail and he replies in the negative. As Henry lies on the bed he stares into the radiator and sees an empty stage and a spotlight.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN - AT THE DREAM DOOR (2:23)

Darkness falls and Henry lies on his side of the bed, listening to the crying of his child. He takes the seed he received in the mail and places it in a small cupboard.

Mary lies huddled on her side of the bed and violently shrugs off Henry's advances of intimacy. Mary, distressed, jumps out of bed and yells at the baby, telling it to shut up.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN - MARY GOES HOME (2:17)

Mary tries to go back to sleep but it's no use. "I'm losing my mind!" She screams as she starts to pack her things and go back to her parent's house. "Why don't you just stay home," Henry snarls, showing the first signs of dignity in the film. "I'll do what I want to do," Mary shoots back. Then, in an act that can only be called Lynchian humour, she gets down on all fours in front of the bed and starts to jerk herself against it. After several moments of this, she pulls out a suitcase that was stuck under the bed. The scene ends with Henry falling back to sleep and dreaming of the Beautiful Girl across the hall.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN - "Oh, you 'are' sick!" (1:47)

Henry wakes up in the middle of the night to find the baby silent. Henry takes its temperature, but it reads normal. Henry turns to go back to bed, when the baby gasps out.

Henry turns back and the baby is covered in spots. "Oh, you 'are' sick", Henry exclaims.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN - TAKING CARE OF BABY (3:50)

Henry stays close as his baby gasps and coughs over a vaporizer. Henry tries to get up and leave, but every time he tries, the baby cries out. Henry sits back down and stares into the radiator.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN - THE LADY IN THE RADIATOR (3:20)

One of the most important scenes of the movie has Henry fantasizing about an ovary-cheeked Lady in the Radiator. She dances to a blues beat, while stepping on Henry's deformed sperm that fall onto her stage.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN - INSIDE MARY X (3:55)

Henry sleeps next to Mary (who, we assume, has come home sometime inbetween) in their bed, when she starts to convulse. This isn't one

of her usual seizures, as Henry soon finds out.

Henry looks under the sheets and starts to pull malformed fetuses out of Mary, while she twitches and chokes. We pan up from the pile of fetuses, to the small cabinet where Henry placed the seed he found in his mailbox. It comes to life and starts to grow.

CHAPTER NINETEEN - THE BEAUTIFUL GIRL RETURNS (4:50)

Henry gets out of bed and goes to the door. The Beautiful Girl emerges from the shadows. "I locked myself out of my apartment," she tells Henry, while walking into his. Henry tries to quiet his child as the Beautiful Girl checks out his place.

"Where's your wife?" She asks. Henry looks around the room, like he's misplaced his car keys, "She must've gone back to her parents house". She smiles, "Can I stay here tonight?"

CHAPTER TWENTY - GARDENBACK (2:05)

Henry and the Beautiful Girl make love on the bed as it turns into a pool of white, milky water.

The Beautiful Girl hears the baby wailing, and is disgusted by its sight.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE - THE RADIATOR LADY'S SONG (1:33)

The Beautiful Girl rejects Henry as she dissolves into the shadows. From the darkness, the Lady in the Radiator emerges and sings a song. "In heaven, everything is fine. You've got your good things, and I've got mine!" She promises.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO - HENRY AND THE LADY IN THE RADIATOR (3:30)

Henry walks onto the Lady in the Radiator's stage. He wants to be with her, but she rejects him as well. He must do something first, before he can escape to his own heaven.

The Lady disappears, and a dead tree rolls onto the stage in a wagon. Suddenly, Henry's head is popped off and his baby's head emerges from his neck. A dark, syrupy liquid flows out of the tree and all around the severed head. Then, in a flash, it is pulled under its dark depths, and out of sight.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE - THE BOY (2:02)

Henry's hand falls out of the sky and lands on the ground with a splat.

A boy grabs it and takes it to a suited-man in a small office. "Hiya, sonny, whatta ya got there?" He asks, pointing to Henry's head. The boy shows him and the man smiles.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR - ERASERHEAD (2:30)

The boy and the suited-man walk into another room where a Pencil Machine Operator, takes a piece of Henry's head and makes erasers for the ends of pencils.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE - MARY GONE AGAIN (0:30)

Henry wakes up to find Mary gone again. He gets dressed and waits by the window.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX - ROW OF DIMES (4:20)

Night falls and Henry is still sitting by the window. He looks out and sees two people fighting outside his building. (For a complete explanation of this scene, look at the Director's Cut section in the F/X page of the Eraserhead site).

Henry goes across the hall and knocks on the Beautiful Girl's door, but there's no answer. He walks back to his room, where his baby starts to laugh maliciously at him, mocking him.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN - MR. ROUNDHEELS (2:00)

Henry hears the Beautiful Girl going into her apartment and springs out of bed. He opens the door, and sees her with another man. She smiles wickedly at Henry. From her perspective, she sees the baby's head, instead of Henry's.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT - LAYING BABY DOWN (5:25)

This is the last straw for Henry. He takes a pair of scissors and cuts through the baby's bandages, exposing its internal organs. The baby convulses and shivers as a thick goo spreads all over its body.

Henry starts to hallucinate and sees a giant baby head moving around the room as the lights flutter.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE - IN HEAVEN... (1:35)

The planet begins to crumble, and the Man in the Planet dies in a sparking envelopment of light.

In the final sequence, we are in a place of light. Henry turns around and sees the Lady in the Radiator. She runs into his arms and they embrace. Henry smiles. He is in heaven.

Scènes coupées :

SCENE ONE - STRANGE MAN & BLACK BOX

In this scene, Henry hears some strange noises coming from a room down the hall from his apartment. He investigates and sees this:

Two women lie bound on a bed, while a man approaches them with two prongs connected to a black box. Hmmm... I'm told that this is Lynch's idea of sexy. Does not surprise me.

The scene ends with Henry being spotted by the women and he takes off back to his apartment.

CATHERINE COULSON: "My friend [V. Phipps-Wilson] and I were lying on a bed, bound by these kind of battery cables. And the guy with the black box walks toward us with these prongs. It wasn't sexy; it was David's [version of] sexy, which is always kind of pristine in a way."

SCENE TWO - HENRY'S DRAWER

In this scene, Henry is looking for the vaporizer to soothe his baby's sickness. He opens a drawer and finds...
A drawer full of vanilla pudding and peas.

CATHERINE COULSON: "The problem was how to make a drawerful of vanilla pudding. Doreen and I went out to the grocery store, and we tried to figure out what kind of vanilla pudding would mix up the fastest. So we hand-beat instant vanilla pudding, filled this drawer with it, and then put these green peas on top of it."

SCENE THREE - ROW OF DIMES

A lengthy scene, cut by Lynch, had Henry sitting in his apartment with his baby. He starts to hear a sort of calling and looks out the window.

DAVID LYNCH: "It's daytime, the wind is blowing dust, and there's this little kid out in the alley. He suddenly sees this shiny thing in the dirt, and he gets down and starts digging, and he finds these rows of dimes. So, he really starts digging, and Henry sees this. Henry runs out of the room, but the baby starts crying; but he's

got a good run going and he makes it to the elevator. He's pushing the button, but the elevator won't come. So he runs down the stairs. He runs into the lobby, and we see the elevator door is propped open with a mop. There's a mop bucket in there, and the landlady has been cleaning. That's why he couldn't get the elevator."

"But because the door's open, the baby's crying is real loud and echoing all through the elevator shaft. So Henry gets frustrated and kicks the couch in the lobby, and the landlady [V. Phipps-Wilson] comes and says, 'Don't kick my wood.' She starts into this landlady-tenant thing. So Henry leaves her and goes back upstairs. He looks out the window, and more people have come, and they're digging, and the dust is blowing. By night there's fighting going on out there."

DID YOU KNOW....?

- ERASERHEAD first appeared on video in 1981 for a pay-TV showing on New Year's Eve.

- Jack Fisk, a friend of Lynch and fellow director, endured painful make-up to become the Man in the Planet, while his wife, Sissy Spacek, took on the duties of the Script Assistant.

Human umbilical cords were used in a scene that called for Henry to pull fetuses from a convulsing Mary.

- Early in the film, Henry's right foot steps in a mud puddle. Later, in his apartment, his left sock is the one that's dirty. A lot of people have tried to read some astral significance into this, but it was really just a mistake in production.

DAVID LYNCH: "We couldn't remember which shoe went in the puddle. It's hard to believe that someone looks at your films so closely."

- Jack Nance (Henry) was drawn to the script for many reasons, but one the more personal ones involved the scene in the end where Henry is haunted by a giant baby head.

JACK NANCE: "I was struck by that because it was describing, in some detail, a sort of hallucination that I had at one time when I was very sick and running a fever."

- Shooting began on the AFI stables on May 29, 1972. It was the scene where Henry comes over for dinner and meets Mrs. X. It was filmed in one take.

Henry Spencer's Eraserhead haircut was styled and maintain over the years by his then-wife, Catherine Coulson.

- Lynch keeps close ties with the people he worked with on Eraserhead. Jack Nance appeared in Dune, Blue Velvet, Twin Peaks and Wild At Heart. Charlotte Stewart (Mary) played Betty Briggs in Twin Peaks, and Catherine Coulson would carry a log as Margaret, the Log Lady.

- In the original script, Henry's world was much darker, and there was no Lady in the Radiator. The film concluded with Henry killing the baby, and then his world disintegrated. This was due to Lynch's own foulness during first year production. It was only after a friend recommended meditation that Lynch mellowed out and took better control of his work.

- Due to their small budget, Lynch and his crew often went to swap meets to buy costumes and props.

DAVID LYNCH: "Henry's whole wardrobe was gotten at Goodwill."

IN CLOSING:

Catherine Coulson sums ERASERHEAD up the best:

"We became like a family. Basically Jack's and my home life became ERASERHEAD, and oftentimes, after we were through shooting, David would come over, and we would eat pancakes at our house."

"Peggy [Lynch's first wife] and Jenny [their daughter] used to come down to the stables, and Jenny would ask David if she could go play with the "baby". I remember spending New Year's Eve at the stables. We

were all drinking champagne and Jack gave Jenny, who was about 4, a couple sips of champagne, so she would go to sleep. We all listened to music and had a real nice time in our little home away from home."