Written by Freddie Young
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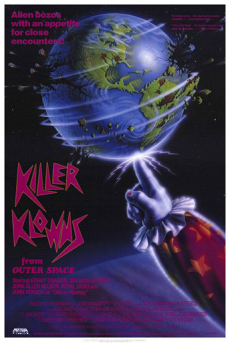
In 1988, my mom took me to the local theater, like she would every month to expose me to films (no matter the rating—I had a cool mom, what can I say?). I remember it was a double feature, as the local theater based its business on showing two movies for one low price, and the main draw for our trip was the now-classic action film DIE HARD. While watching Bruce Willis kick ass was a great way to spend two hours, it was the second film that stuck in my memory and would not leave. I couldn’t wrap my mind around what was on the screen. Weird and scary clowns wielding popcorn guns and sucking blood from cocoons made of cotton candy?

It was bad enough that I was already creeped out by clowns, but watching them kill people on a big screen just made my fear worse. While IT solidified my hatred for clowns, KILLER KLOWNS FROM OUTER SPACE was the beginning.



KILLER KLOWNS FROM OUTER SPACE begins like THE BLOB, as a shooting star flies over a small town and crashes somewhere nearby. Adventurous Mike (Grant Cramer) and his girlfriend Debbie (Suzanne Snyder from WEIRD SCIENCE and RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD PART II) decide to investigate, and find a giant tent among the trees. Walking inside, the couple discover that it belongs to the Killer Klowns, who want to turn humans into liquid food by cocooning them in pink cotton candy. With the use of acid pies and living popcorn, the Klowns set out to take over the town. Mike and Debbie, with the aid of Debbie’s ex-boyfriend/police officer Dave (John Allen Nelson), decide to put a stop to this.

KILLER KLOWNS FROM OUTER SPACE was the brainchild of The Chiodo Brothers (Stephen, Charles and Edward), who had worked behind the scenes as puppeteers on films like CRITTERS. Their movie was originally called just KILLER KLOWNS, but the Chiodos changed

the name because they felt that sounded too much like a slasher film, which wouldn’t have matched their monster-movie concept. Creating a sculpture of what their Klowns would look like, the brothers took it and their idea to Trans World Entertainment, which was immediately sold and gave the Chiodos a $2-million dollar budget to work with. Most of the funds went into physical production costs, including the Klown costumes, the interiors of the giant tent (the setpieces were reused and changed around for each interior), damages to certain props and the creation of the $7,000 popcorn gun (the most expensive prop in the film).

Inspired by films that they grew up on, such as THE BLOB as well as FORBIDDEN PLANET and THE WIZARD OF OZ, the Chiodo Brothers had 36 days to complete their soon-to-be B-movie cult classic. Since the film takes place in the span of a single night, the brothers could only shoot after dark. They lost two nights trying to capture their intended opening sequence; unfortunately, the central stunt didn’t come off as well as it should have, and they had lighting issues as well. They also damaged a rental car, which cost the production team $7,000 to fix. The Klown gags also took a large amount of time and money, but the Chiodos stuck to their guns and made their concept work as they had envisioned it.

KILLER KLOWNS FROM OUTER SPACE had a limited theatrical release in May and June of 1988. It gained a small but loyal cult following that would increase once the film was released on VHS and shown on television. In 2001, MGM released a DVD under their Midnight Movies label that restored both the video and audio, bringing KILLER KLOWNS FROM OUTER SPACE to a new generation of genre fans. It comes with a great audio commentary by the Chiodo Brothers, as well as a ton of special features, making it a must-buy for any horror fan (especially when you can now purchase the disc for less than 10 bucks).

The film inspired websites devoted to KILLER KLOWNS FROM OUTER SPACE as well as The Dickies, who sang the theme song and earned a bigger fan base as a result. Facebook and MySpace have pages dedicated to the film. The Killer Klowns even had their own toy line from SOTA Toys back in 2006, which was sold to Amoktime Toys in 2008. And in 2007, Bump in the Night Productions began making props and masks based on the Klown characters.

Even after 22 years since its initial release, this low-budget monster film still has staying power, and it remains a great film. The Klowns are still creepy, the film is still humorous and the great set designs and pre-CGI visuals really make this inexpensive production stand out. It’s silly and ridiculous while taking itself seriously at the same time; KILLER KLOWNS is never played as satire or parody, but as a classic ’50s B-movie that was made in a 1980s universe, done with love and passion by three New York brothers who wanted to share their love of the movies they grew up on with a younger audience.

There are still talks of a possible sequel, which would be interesting to watch with the new filmmaking technology. But if it never happens, we’ll always have Tiny, JoJo, and Klownzilla on DVD for years to come. I may hate clowns in general, but KILLER KLOWNS FROM OUTER SPACE will always have a cotton-candy place in my heart.

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