

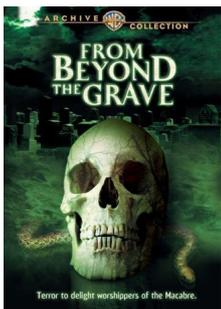
Fango Flashback: “FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE”

Written by Staci Layne Wilson
Thursday, 08 November 2012 16:15



“A big novelty surprise comes with each purchase,” Peter Cushing slyly says as The Proprietor in FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE (1973). If he had a Snidely Whiplash mustache to twirl, he would. Were he a lesser actor, he would rub his palms together with evil glee. But he’s Peter f’n Cushing, and all he needs is a glance. Even from across the decades and, well, beyond the grave, he’s still got gravitas.

The Proprietor runs an overcrowded curiosity shop in London called Temptations Limited, and he’s our Crypt Keeper or Elvira—an interstitial character threading this anthology of horror (available on DVD from Warner Archive) together. FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE was the last of many anthology films from Amicus, and it’s one of the best. (My favorite is 1967’s TORTURE GARDEN starring Burgess Meredith, Jack Palance and...Cushing, but I’m a sucker for any musty, old-fashioned British horror, and this one definitely delivers the shivers.)



The Proprietor’s first customer, who’s unable to resist his reflection in a relic, is mirror miser Edward Charlton (David Warner), who soon finds out what gazing into the abyss is all about. In the second story, Donald Pleasence and his real-life child Angela play a father/daughter team of well-wishers—and it’s true: Be careful what you wish for! Next, Ian Carmichael portrays a well-to-do man who buys a snuff box and comes away with an “elemental” (parasitic spirit) that he must then eradicate through the services of a psychic. Madame Orloff (Margaret Leighton) does the deed, but it turns out the elemental isn’t so easily snuffed out. Lastly, Ian Ogilvy plays a man who purchases a doorway that leads quite literally to hell. While not all of the ill-fated antique collectors are inherently dishonest, they do each somehow shortchange the Proprietor, so this is how their punishments are justified—but in the end, when an outright thief comes

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a-calling, we see the cashier's true colors.

FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE is obviously low-budget, with very few outdoor locations and sets which look like just that. The deaths are not gruesome, and any serious bloodletting takes place off-camera. (In one clever scene, a wedding cake is sliced and red gel pours from the groom's head.) But this bare-bones approach merely adds charm and appeal while allowing the stories and acting to take center stage. The tales are hardly surprising—anyone who's seen a horror movie or three will guess the endings—but they're strong for what they are, and the cast acquit themselves well. Cushing crushes it, of course, as do workhorses Warner, Pleasence and Leighton. Faded sex kitten Diana Dors ("England's answer to Marilyn Monroe!" back in the day) is excellent as a grousing spouse; a very young Lesley-Anne Down is fun to watch as the slightly psychic girlfriend of the doomed doorman; and Marcel Steiner as "The Face" in the mirror segment is delightfully old-school ghostly.