

## Fango Flashback: "DON'T OPEN TILL CHRISTMAS" (1984)

Written by Kris King

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The tradition of the Christmas horror movie is a long and storied one, a yule tide storybook that's marked with half-realized nightmares, a shallow talent pool and, just, terrible judgment. From snowmen possessed by serial killers to murderous Saint Nicks, there's no tradition too treasured or figure too holy for horror movies to tear apart and mock for our collective enjoyment.

The best of the bunch, Bob Clark's *BLACK CHRISTMAS* and Ladbrooke Black's *CHRISTMAS EVIL*, largely use the holiday's serene, still aesthetic as a backdrop for unspeakable crimes and perversion. Others take on a more fun approach, which is where your *SILENT NIGHT*, *DEADLY NIGHT* and *GINGER DEAD MAN*'s come in to play; movies that are vaguely disturbing, yes, but lean heavily on camp to let the audience know that the filmmakers aren't taking this insanity too seriously.

Then there's *DON'T OPEN TILL CHRISTMAS*.

A British... slasher—I guess—released in 1984, *DON'T OPEN TILL CHRISTMAS* (playing [Nit ehawk Cinema's VHS Vault](#)

) follows a serial killer who spends his nights prowling London and hacking up men and women dressed as Santa Claus. His exploits draw the ire of Scotland Yard and, after a string of killings, the police start taking in bystanders and collecting clues to find out the killer's identity (even though it is really, really obvious the entire time).

The product of a troubled shoot that changed directors *twice* and took two years to produce, *DON'T OPEN TILL CHRISTMAS* was mired with re-shoots and script changes that left the movie with no sense of coherence or consistency, at all. Central characters phase in and out, or disappear altogether. There are red herrings left and right, and most of the movie is dominated by victims walking around warehouses with nothing happening, as if that's supposed to be frightening in and of itself.

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A violent, strange and oddly spiteful Christmas horror film, DON'T OPEN TILL CHRISTMAS spends much of its running time slagging off Western culture's favorite holiday. There's no clever subversion of tradition or a neat twist of myth, it's just 101 Ways to Kill a Santa Claus and then roll credits.

And kill Santa Claus, it does. This is one movie that has no affinity for Saint Nick, whatsoever. DON'T OPEN TILL CHRISTMAS wants to cut off Santa Claus's genitals while he's going to the bathroom. And you know what? It does. It does it with a razor blade, and Santa shoots blood all over a urinal like some sort of malfunctioning fountain out of your worst nightmares.

Despite a lack of general competence, though, the movie is not utterly irredeemable. When they're not being killed, maimed and butchered, the Santa Clauses of DON'T OPEN TILL CHRISTMAS are depicted as the ultimate in bottom of the barrel scum, like cartoon hobos who traded in their bindles for sacks of toys. The level of deviance that defines the lives of these sad, drunk men and the amount of unwarranted violence that's rained down on them is absolutely incredible.

These sauced Kris Kringles are drunks, vagrants, peepers, adulterers, sex show addicts, and pornographers. With their beards half-hanging off their faces, these men get kicked out of pubs and then set out to find a nice gutter to sleep in. Really, only one out of the nearly endless stream of murdered Santas in this film seems like a halfway decent person, and he gets stabbed through the mouth five minutes in.

DON'T OPEN TILL CHRISTMAS is cheap, low rent, bottom-shelf sleaze with no regard for its characters, its audience or its story. It exists solely to offend, and it tries its hardest to push every button in the book. It fails, largely, but you've got to respect a movie that derives so much joy out of punching Santa in the face until his eyeballs fall out.

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