

Fango Flashback: “THE RETURN OF COUNT YORGA”

Written by Tony Timpone

Friday, 10 September 2010 12:03



Just a year after being impaled in the heart and turning to dust, the undead Romanian vampire came back in American International Pictures' THE RETURN OF COUNT YORGA, a largely superior sequel to 1970's COUNT YORGA, VAMPIRE (see Fango Flashback [here](#)). Strangely, no effort is made by the filmmakers (including returning director Bob Kelljan, who co-wrote the follow-up with actress Yvonne Wilder) to explain just how Yorga (Robert Quarry again in his most famous role) actually returns to life; ditto, his ugly valet Brudah (Edward Walsh), who we last saw being stabbed to death in his master's mansion. In RETURN, they just show up for this second go-round of cultured vampire shenanigans.



The previous film's Van Helsing stand-in, actor Roger Perry—who we previously witnessed getting drained by Yorga's hungry brides—also turns up again, but at least as a different character (a psychiatrist, as opposed to the first film's doctor, and now sporting a goatee), though he serves the same function as before—a desperate vampire slayer wannabe. (It would have made more sense to make this a prequel, but I suppose U.S. studios didn't think that way in those days. The Hammer Draculas, by contrast, made a point of showing how the Count could be reanimated after his memorable demises in preceding films.)

So Yorga's back and now ensconced in an antique-laden mansion situated next door to a large orphanage. After he attacks a young boy and his chick posse dig themselves out of their graves NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD-style, Yorga crashes a costume party at the orphanage. He takes an immediate shine to Cynthia (Mariette Hartley, former Spock squeeze and TV pitchwoman), who's engaged to Dr. Baldwin (Perry). In a scene that echoes the then-timely Manson murders in its viciousness, the vampiresses slaughter Cynthia's family during a home invasion and kidnap her for their lovesick master. In his abode, Yorga puts Cynthia under a hypnotic spell, while the slayings at the neighbors' place have been conveniently covered up. The shrink suspects something fishy, however, and brings in a couple of incredulous detectives (Rudy De Luca and POLTERGEIST/COACH star Craig T. Nelson in his movie debut), and

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before long, the humans penetrate the fiend’s lair for a staking jamboree—just like in the first YORGA film, only bigger.

Mirroring today’s overproduced tentpole franchises, everything about this better-produced YORGA sequel is bigger: a bigger cast, more locations, more action and more bloodletting. Kelljan keeps the story bouncing along to a livelier beat than the previous film, while DP Bill Butler (of JAWS fame) lenses several atmospheric death scenes and off-kilter point-of-view shots (one looking up from the ocean floor as Yorga goes in for the kill on a dock). I also love the eerie scenes with Yorga racing down hallways in slow motion, cape flowing, arms outstretched and teeth bared.



RETURN boasts some welcome humor (at the costume bash, a nosy lady asks Yorga where he keeps his fangs, and a Dracula getup wins first place). I’ll bet De Luca ad-libbed some of his funny lines; the actor later graduated to Emmy-winning comedy writing for the likes of Carol Burnett and Mel Brooks (he also co-wrote Brooks’ HIGH ANXIETY—in which he played the strangler with braces—SILENT MOVIE and DRACULA: DEAD AND LOVING IT, and scripted and directed the sorry spoof TRANSYLVANIA 6-5000). Michael Pataki, who played the daddy bloodsucker in 1974’s GRAVE OF THE VAMPIRE (scripted by THE SOPRANOS’ David Chase!), falls prey to Yorga here. And George Macready, who provided the ripe narration in the first movie, earns a cameo for producer son Michael on the sequel, portraying an addled professor who confuses Yorga with yoga! And just like the first movie, RETURN OF COUNT YORGA throws in the requisite California travelogue footage (another exhausting walk by talkative strollers), with San Francisco (cable cars and all) delighting the local tourist board.



To THE RETURN OF COUNT YORGA’S detriment, the movie hews just a little too closely to the 1970 film in its final act, with one of our intrepid heroes trying to distract the suspicious vampire while the others go snooping around his dusty digs. The surprise ending also echoes the first film’s to a T. Still, this is a fun vampfest, and fang fans will find lots to enjoy in both Yorga films. Too bad they didn’t make more of these. Some consider Ray Danton’s 1972 hippie vampire movie DEATHMASTER—in which Quarry played a bloodsucking guru (what other kind?) named Khorda—as an unofficial Yorga movie. AIP reportedly considered pitting Yorga against Vincent Price’s maniac medico in DR. PHIBES RISES AGAIN (what a film that would

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have been!), but instead cast Quarry in the campy 1972 film as the eternal-life seeking Dr. Bierderbeck. After a few further lackluster horror stints (SUGAR HILL, MADHOUSE), Quarry's career stalled in the late '70s. Eventually, exploitation filmmaker and Quarry buff Fred Olen Ray kept the actor busy in his direct-to-video mill in the '80s and '90s (CYCLONE, HAUNTING FEAR, INNER SANCTUM 2, etc.), and the two even fooled around with the idea of doing a third YORGA film. The project never materialized, sadly, and Quarry died in February 2009 at age 83.

{comments on}