

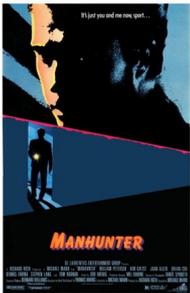
Fango Flashback: “MANHUNTER”

Written by Jorge Solis

Sunday, 05 December 2010 10:42



With the recent passing of Dino De Laurentiis, the opportunity arises to look back at one of the films in his long-lasting legacy. In 1986, the legendary producer backed Michael Mann’s uniquely stylish thriller, **MANHUNTER**, based on **RED DRAGON**, the first Hannibal Lecter novel by Thomas Harris. The focus here is on retired FBI profiler Will Graham, who takes on merciless serial killer Francis Dollarhyde, nicknamed by the tabloids as “The Tooth Fairy.”



William Peterson, later to investigate grisly misdeeds on a weekly basis on TV’s **CSI: CRIME SCENE INVESTIGATION**, plays the moody and intense Graham, a bearded recluse with frazzled hair. His near-fatal confrontation with the psychopathic Lektor (as it’s spelled here) has left him mentally scarred. Though the audience never actually sees what happened, Graham embodies the weariness and emotional toll of having defeated Hannibal “The Cannibal.” His boss, Jack Crawford (Dennis Farina), reluctantly interrupts his isolated private life and requests Graham’s help on his latest case.

Even though Lektor is not the centerpiece, Brian Cox still gives an eerie performance in the role, one that has resonated with audiences as much as Anthony Hopkins’ more celebrated interpretation. In this version, Lektor is immensely clever and deadly serious, never resorting to witty one-liners such as “goody goody” and “okey-dokey.” Behind prison bars, Lektor has been slowly setting up a diabolical plan to murder Graham; seeking revenge against the profiler who

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finally captured him, Lektor has assigned Dollarhyde, his loyal fan, with the task of killing the agent. Tom Noonan is at his creepy best as serial-killer-in-training Dollarhyde, portraying this lonesome character with morbid sadness, speaking in a calm and somber tone.

Dollarhyde has slaughtered two families, each during the night of a full moon. Following a ritual, he places shards of mirrors on his victims' eyes when he is done with their corpses. Graham has to figure out the murderer's pattern and prevent another innocent family from being killed before the next full moon, and as the desperate search for clues leads to dead ends, he realizes he needs the assistance of his old nemesis. Even though they're securely separated from each other in Lektor's cell, Graham is still deathly afraid of the prisoner. Lektor advises the profiler on the case, while leading him directly into a trap. Meanwhile, Dollarhyde is falling in love with a blind woman, Reba McClane (Joan Allen), and struggles to give up his double lifestyle, because he believes Reba is his chance at redemption.



The film's soundtrack makes perfect use of rock and heavy metal music from the '60s through the '80s. At one turning point, Dollarhyde witnesses Reba cheating on him; the scene solely focuses on Noonan's heartbroken performance, without any dialogue, and as the song "Strong As I Am" by the Prime Movers adds atmosphere, Dollarhyde kidnaps Reba and takes her to his secluded hideout. This is where the action-packed climax takes place, where Graham and Dollarhyde finally have their violent and bloody confrontation, with Reba caught in the middle, and the sequence is driven with true intensity by Iron Butterfly's classic "In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida." You will never hear that song the same way after viewing this finale.

Some elements of MANHUNTER may now seem dated to viewers, particularly the synthesizer score and the costumes, and indeed, writer/director Mann made this picture in the wake of the success of his very '80s hit TV series MIAMI VICE. Mann skillfully and successfully managed to conceive a "music video" thriller, a concept that has been imitated countless times by others, but none as successfully. De Laurentiis changed the title from RED DRAGON because he didn't want to mislead potential audiences into thinking they'd be seeing a kung fu movie, but in 2002, in the wake of his success with HANNIBAL, the producer returned to the novel with a reimagined film bearing the original moniker. Cinematographer Dante Spinotti, who shot MANHUNTER, also encored on the remake, with Ted Tally, Oscar-winning screenwriter of SILENCE OF THE LAMBS, handling the new adaptation and Brett Ratner directing. (Actor Frankie Faison has appeared in all the Hannibal movies save HANNIBAL RISING, as Lt. Fisk in MANHUNTER and asylum orderly Barney in the Hopkins pictures).

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Although Ratner and Tally follow Harris' novel much more closely, their film doesn't even come close to Mann's superior version. His collaboration with De Laurentiis and MANHUNTER's cast gave audiences a brilliant example of style and substance working together.

{comments on}