

Fango Flashback: “TALES FROM THE CRYPT: DEMON KNIGHT”

Written by Nick Masercola

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Sometimes you want a horror movie that will make you think—one that makes you question your beliefs, rattles your soul and keeps you wide awake well after the credits roll.

DEMON KNIGHT is not that film. Instead, it's a wild ride of splattering gore, witty one-liners, cool characters, some nasty special FX and one hell of an awesome villain. It's a party horror tour-de-force that's been sadly overlooked since its 1995 release, but remains one of the most purely entertaining films in the genre.



So what's it about? Well, after the requisite introduction by none other than the Crypt Keeper himself, the film opens with a man named Brayker (William Sadler) on the run from someone known only as The Collector (Billy Zane, in what I think is his best performance). After a car chase that ends in a spectacular crash, Brayker escapes the wreckage and heads to the only safe haven he can find—a nigh-abandoned hotel in the middle of the New Mexican desert, unaware that The Collector is still hot on his tail.

If that seems like a rather simple summary, it's because I don't want a lot of the film's great surprises to be revealed. While DEMON KNIGHT isn't CASABLANCA, the beginning of the movie is quite good at playing with your expectations as to what's going on, and the explanation behind the madness is actually pretty interesting—something few party horror films manage to do.



But let's be honest—who cares about the plot when what we came here for was demons and hellish mayhem? On that front, DEMON KNIGHT delivers. Once the bloodshed begins (in an absolutely show-stopping scene of sudden violence that never fails to make an audience yelp), Brayker and the unlucky inhabitants of the hotel are forced to spend the night fending off the

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minions of hell. Arms are ripped off, people are eaten alive, and I lost count of how many eyeballs are destroyed. If it's over-the-top gore and action you want, you came to the right place.



And while that's all well and good, DEMON KNIGHT actually has something you might not expect. It's actually damn funny, with great one-liners and—gasp!—great characters. In most other films of this ilk (NIGHT OF THE DEMONS, EVIL DEAD, THE CONVENT), the supporting players are stock personality types and exist solely to be eaten. In DEMON KNIGHT, every character is well-drawn and endearing, which is quite a feat considering many of them have—ahem—limited screentime. The old, drunken Uncle Willy (Dick Miller) is just as charming and amusing as Irene (CCH Pounder), the shit-talking hotel landlady, and the result is a party horror movie where even when there isn't any bloodshed, the characters' witty banter keeps you interested throughout (just wait until you see the scene where The Collector offers to give a resident one of their appendages back). In fact, that's probably the best reason to watch the film: It straddles the line between horror and comedy perfectly, balancing gut-busting quips with gut-munching violence, often in the same scene (a perfect example being an attack by a headless demon that's both outrageous and grotesque).

Still not sold? Well, damn you're a tough one! The final reason you need to check this flick out is that it makes a great send-off for the TALES FROM THE CRYPT television show, arguably the last good horror anthology series (sorry, but MASTERS OF HORROR was far too hit-or-miss for my taste). And while BORDELLO OF BLOOD (DEMON KNIGHT'S follow-up) sank any film franchise potential the series had, DEMON KNIGHT still offers up one hell of a ride.



To put it succinctly, to this day there is only one movie—in ANY genre—that my family all enjoys watching together. And I'm not kidding when I say my 68-year-old father, 50-year-old mother and 18-year-old sister have all gotten together tons of times to watch this film (yeah, we're an odd bunch). Bottom line: You owe it to yourself to check this flick out.

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