

Fango Flashback: "THE EXORCIST III"

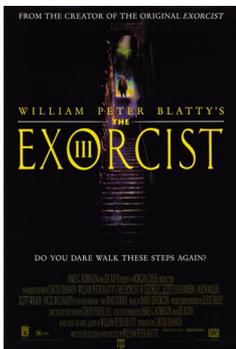
Written by Nick Masercola
Saturday, 31 July 2010 13:14



Creating a sequel to THE EXORCIST is a job I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy. Famous for being one of the highest-grossing horror films ever made, scaring the ever-loving shit out of everyone who saw it, containing some of the best special FX ever created in the genre and responsible for a whole generation's worth of nightmares and Catholic outrage, William Friedkin's film isn't just a tough act to follow—it's like doing standup comedy right after Richard Pryor when all you've got is a knock-knock joke.

In short, you'd have a better chance of getting struck by lightning—multiple times—than making a worthy sequel.

Which is why to this day, I'm still shocked that, against all odds (and the monstrosity that is EXORCIST II: THE HERETIC), THE EXORCIST III matches the original pound for pound, in a completely different and far more cerebral way. It's a phenomenal movie that stands as one of the most underrated and underviewed horror films ever created.



After the cesspool of excrement that was EXORCIST II, William Peter Blatty (writer of both the original book and film) stepped up to direct this adaptation of his follow-up novel LEGION. It's the story of Detective Kinderman (a towering performance by George C. Scott), who's on the trail of a vicious serial killer who uses religion as the basis for his murders. The trail seems to be turning up cold until a chance encounter in a hospital makes Kinderman investigate Patient X (Brad Dourif), a man in the psych ward who hasn't left his cell in years, but can recall details of the murders only known by the police. Is he somehow the killer? Or is something else going on? As things tick forward and the killing spree slowly progresses to claiming those around him, Kinderman must solve the case before it's too late.

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If that scenario sounds completely different than the original, that's because it is. While it contains similar themes and mentions of certain previous characters, this movie can pretty much stand on its own two legs, especially due to the great writing.

Blatty's script is absolutely fantastic, loaded with some of the cleverest dialogue in all of horror, with nearly every line being quoteworthy. The mystery behind the murders is solid and intriguing, and the ending (while tampered with by the studio, 20th Century Fox) caps it off well. Meanwhile, the acting is superb, with Scott and Dourif truly impressing with their riveting performances (man, can these guys sell a monologue!).

But the film isn't just all talk—it also contains some of the creepiest imagery outside of the original film (statues of Jesus will always be scary), and has one of the flat-out craziest jump-scares ever put on celluloid, one that never fails to make first-time viewers fall out of their seats. The murders, while never shown, are some of the grisliest one could imagine, such as a woman being forcibly paralyzed, emptied of all her internal organs, and then stuffed with rosary beads and sewn back up. (And believe it or not, that's by far the least of the slayings.)

Are there any blemishes on this hidden classic? Two. There's an incredibly out-of-place dream sequence early in the film that adds nothing to the story and serves only to take you out of the proceedings, and then there's the issue of the special-FX-heavy ending. As opposed to the simple, downbeat conclusion of *LEGION* (a great read), Fox forced Blatty to come up with an exorcism sequence in order to tie the movie more directly to the original. It shows, coming off very forced and gimmicky considering the subdued nature of what has come before.

Some people find *THE EXORCIST III* too talky. I will admit that those looking for pea-soup vomitings, head-twistings and lovely scenes of a little girl masturbating with a crucifix will find little enjoyment here. However, for those looking for a taut, interesting horror film with good characters, writing, and scares to spare are sure to fall in love with this one.

{comments on}