Written by Philip Mathew Castor
Wednesday, 02 May 2012 11:47

Years ago, I used to watch the old USA Network show UP ALL NIGHT, which showcased some of the most bizarre, eclectic, off-the-wall—and also original and highly entertaining—films ever. Unlike the major Hollywood flicks, these B-movies took chances and got away with plenty of sex, nudity, violence and absurdity. Take, for example, director Donald G. Jackson’s 1988 cult item HELL COMES TO FROGTOWN, starring former WWE wrestler “Rowdy” Roddy Piper and Sandahl Bergman.

In the radioactive, postapocalyptic future (during the 1980s, the Cold War between the U.S. and Russia was still going, thus many films played on the public’s fear of nuclear annihilation), Sam Hell (Piper) is one of the last fertile men on Earth. He is seized by a female military organization called Mech Tech, which plans to use Sam for their ultimate mission: to rescue (and impregnate) a group of fertile virgins who are being held captive by the evil amphibian ruler of Frogtown. Accompanying Sam on this deadly mission are team leader Spangle (Bergman) and Centinella (Cec Verrell), but unbeknownst to our heroes, they are being followed by a mysterious being known as Count Sodom (William Smith), who plans to sabotage their mission and settle an old score with Sam.

The screenplay was written by Randall Frakes, whom Jackson met while at New World Pictures and who also produced FROGTOWN with him, and R.J. Kizer and Jackson directed. The film marked the screen acting debut for Piper, who was famous for wrestling colorful characters like “Superfly” Jimmy Snuka and Mr. T. Jackson assigned an acting coach for Piper, and while he doesn’t have that many lines, his bad-ass persona is felt in every frame of the film (and would make him a cult favorite himself a few years later with the release of John

Carpenter’s THEY LIVE). Bergman brings intelligence and sexiness to Spangle, along with some very nice lingerie. Yep, things were a lot simpler back in the ’80s…

While in high school, Jackson desired to be a comic-book artist, but during a football game, he was given a movie camera and asked to film it. As a result, he switched career goals and directed a total of 35 features (including 1986’s popular direct-to-video title ROLLER BLADE) and shorts, with his original career goal coming in handy when it came to drawing his storyboards. In FROGTOWN, Jackson’s directing is very smooth, precise and polished, and he went on to helm three FROGTOWN sequels. Then, in 1995, Jackson was diagnosed with leukemia. His doctor told him he had anywhere from six months to six years to live. He beat the odds and lived for the next eight years, all the while making more films; he eventually lost his battle with the disease and passed away on October 20, 2003.

New World released HELL COMES TO FROGTOWN to theaters January 29, 1988, and on VHS not long thereafter. The film received a new lease on life via Anchor Bay Entertainment’s 2001 widescreen DVD, which contains a terrific audio commentary by Jackson and Frakes. In September 2011, Anchor Bay discontinued a number of their horror and cult titles, with HELL COMES TO FROGTOWN being one of them, but Image Entertainment scooped up the majority of these flicks and began reissuing them last year, putting out FROGTOWN this past December on a double-feature disc with DEF-CON 4. However, these editions lack any of Anchor Bay’s special features, and the transfers are very poor and do not deserve your money. Anchor Bay’s editions are now out of print, but they’re not that expensive and are worth your time and money. For this reviewer, it was great to hear Jackson on the FROGTOWN commentary, offering awesome trivia about the making of the film, how he got his start and how he come up with the idea for the movie. Trust me when I say that this is the DVD version to own and cherish; just make sure there are no frogs watching it with you.