

Poverty Row POE

THE BLOODY APE (1997)

Starring Paul Richichi, Christopher Hoskins and George Reis

Directed by Keith J. Crocker

Written by Keith J. Crocker and George Reis

Wild Eye Releasing

I haven't read Edgar Allan Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue" in a while, but I'm pretty sure that "400 Pounds of Fury Hungry for Female Flesh!" – the sleazy tagline for Keith J. Crocker's *The Bloody Ape* – doesn't appear in the "apedunnit" mystery. Sure, Crocker claims that his film is based on Poe's classic tale, but his simian trash epic plays out more like the poverty row programmer *The Devil Bat* or René Cardona's *Night of the Bloody Apes* than an actual gothic chiller.

Filmed in scratchy Super-8 that disguises its recent vintage, *The Bloody Ape's* Paul Richichi appears to have a lot of fun as Lampini, a two-bit carny who only has one friend he can trust – his pet ape Gorto. Lampini's mechanic is a bigoted thief, his girl won't marry him and a crooked jeweller tried to sell him

an engagement ring made of glass. Distraught, Lampini devises an evil plan of revenge: he presents them each with specially treated bananas that attract Gorto's murderous rage. When the violated and eviscerated bodies of his enemies are found by the police, a racist cop (George Reis) tries to pin the murders on a black man (Christopher Hoskins), who must prove his innocence.



When the violated and eviscerated bodies of his enemies are found by the police, a racist cop (George Reis) tries to pin the murders on a black man (Christopher Hoskins), who must prove his innocence.

Film adaptations of Poe's work often diverge from their source material – even the Universal version of *Murders in the Rue Morgue* had Bela Lugosi's mad scientist injecting women with ape blood, but *The Bloody Ape* takes the idea of "loosely based" to a whole new level, complete with tasteless sex scenes and tiresome "edgy" racist humour.

And yet you can't ignore the fun H.G. Lewis vibe that runs through Crocker's Long Island-shot backyard production, even though its attempts at *Blood Feast*-inspired gore lack impact; most of these flesh-pawing, gut-ripping scenes were shot silently, with no screams of horror to heighten the ape's antics. Yet *The Bloody Ape* remains an almost respectable time-waster, even though it falls short of the true terror of Poe's writing or the wild trash films that inspired it.

PAUL CORUPE