

TV Review: American Horror Story: Hotel – Episode 4: 'Devil's Night'

[Lauren McNeilage](#) weighs on the latest episode as serial killer James March holds a dinner party from hell in a truly terrifying episode

Sunday 1 November 2015

★★★★★

This review contains spoilers



Image: Suzanne Tenner/FX

If staying at the Hotel Cortez wasn't dangerous enough at the best of times, try checking in on Devil's Night. Every October 30th, original owner James March holds a dinner party for some very special guests, namely Richard Ramirez, John Wayne Gacy, Jeffrey Dahmer, Aileen Wuornos, and the Zodiac Killer. Besides being famous serial killers, what the guests have in common is that they are all protégées of March, whom the group refer to as "The Master".

This year, Detective John Lowe has the dubious honour of being invited along to the meal. Although not a killer himself, the invitation doesn't exactly bode well for what's going to happen to him as the season progresses, especially considering that he's started drinking again. He gets so drunk, in fact, that while sat at the bar he ends up falling for the questionable charms of Wuornos (Lily Rabe), and follows her back to her room, in spite of bartender Liz Taylor's warning that he's too intoxicated to realise "how ugly that woman is". Before things can get heated, however, Wuornos has whacked John over the head with a bottle and tied him to a chair, not planning to let the fact that she's been dead for over ten years get in the way of her claiming another victim. John manages to escape by handcuffing her to the bathroom sink, and, with his judgement impaired from both the alcohol and the blow to the head, makes his way to the party.

Considering that I've complained more than once that *Hotel* is disappointingly lacking in scares compared to prior seasons, I'm delighted to report that 'Devil's Night' is terrifying. In fact, I think it's one of the scariest episodes of *AHS* I've seen. Lily Rabe's horrifyingly accurate impersonation of Aileen Wuornos alone is deeply unsettling, but when the time comes for March's dinner party to begin, things become completely horrifying.

March kicks off the meal with a "customary libation" of absinthe. What else would an undead serial killer with a pencil moustache drink? Before long, John is so drunk he can hardly stay upright. When the starter is brought out, the detective starts to wish he'd never come along, as the "courses" of this meal consist not of plates of food, but of people. His vision increasingly blurry, John is forced to watch as a delighted Dahmer tenderly cradles a young man, before calmly proceeding to drill a hole in his skull. One must be able to get into the minds of one's victims, March casually informs us, turning to the camera with a sinister glint in his eye. Dessert (another young man, this time stabbed to death by the entire group) is too much for John, and he screams, only to find himself in an empty room, wondering if he hallucinated the whole thing.

Once again, Evan Peters is an absolute joy to watch, playing March with the perfect balance of charisma and deranged menace. He's genuinely charming, with his tailored suit and impeccable manners, and it's easy to see why his guests are so awed by him. When he looks into the camera and remarks that he hadn't expected Dahmer to take his advice about getting into victims' heads "so literally", his lips creeping into an eerie smirk, I genuinely felt a chill run down my spine. What 'Devil's Night' makes clear more than anything else, is the extent to which March is still in charge of the Cortez, despite him having been dead for almost a century. Perhaps the most chilling example of this is when Liz Taylor informs serial murderer, and rapist, Ramirez that The Master has left some "treats" on his pillow for him, by which she means a couple of sleeping tourists.

The other major storyline of the episode involves John's (soon to be ex) wife, Alex, who brings her long-missing son home, only to realise that he isn't really hers anymore. Having witnessed Holden kill and feed on the family dog, she reluctantly brings him back to the hotel, where he informs her his "other mommy" lives. Alex angrily confronts the Countess, only to end up agreeing to become a vampire herself if it will allow her to have her son back, and the episode ends with the Countess cradling the other woman as she begins her transformation.

Despite how genuinely horrific the events of the episode are, I thought there was a strange poignancy to making John and Alex the focus. Each, it seems, is about to head down a dark path to a place from which there is no return: in Alex's case, by becoming a vampire, and in John's... I'm not quite sure, but I am certain that it's not going to end well. My money's on it transpiring that the Ten Commandments Killer he's been hunting is none other than himself. Yes, of course it's completely implausible, but this being *AHS*, stranger things have happened.

With next week's episode involving a vengeful alliance between Ramona, Donovan, and the newly vampiric Iris, *Hotel* seems to be heating up. I'm hopeful that 'Devil's Night' marks the end of this season's slow build-up, and a return to what made previous seasons so addictively watchable.



5 comments

Micky

3 Nov '15 at 4:17 am

This episode was utter crap, I'm hugely disappointed with AHS Hotel. The script seems devoid of meaning and each episode seems woefully off kilter, not much hope in store for this once truly great show. Glamorizing serial killers seems so morose that it's not even entertainment, what a gloomy doomy waste of an hour.

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Lauren

3 Nov '15 at 10:27 pm

While I obviously enjoyed the episode a lot more than you did (I'm a sucker for when the show brings

in real people), I'm with you when you say that the season in general has been disappointing. I'm trying to remain hopeful that things are picking up, but, as you say, "Hotel" has felt so off-balance so far that you can't help but feel like the writers don't really know what they're doing. The season is sort of staggering along without any real momentum behind it

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Anonymous

3 Nov '15 at 7:08 pm

It was not a great episode, relative to the others. Didn't I hear the Wuornos character say something about the police being the biggest serial killers? If so, does that suggest that maybe the good detective has more to hide than we think?

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Lauren

3 Nov '15 at 10:32 pm

Yeah, that line from Wuornos is one of several reasons why I reckon John could be the Ten Commandments Killer, as ridiculous as that would be

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Brody

9 Nov '15 at 10:44 pm

I have to say that I agree that John is by far the least interesting thing about the show, I think the writers are a little stuck in the headspace of needing an 'everyman' to get us through the strange happenings.

Each series has it's ups and downs, Freak Show had some incredibly compelling characters, and by far the worst plot. It was really all over the place, but the characters were why I kept watching. Coven was my favourite in terms of plot though there were several loose ends and unanswered questions. Asylum genuinely terrified me, it's the only one I've not rewatched because of how disturbing I found it. Murder House I thought had it's teething problems.

So far in Hotel I find Evan's character of James March and Mare's Miss Evers the most highly enjoyable parts. Any moment with either of them on the screen is pure joy to watch.

I'm interested in what's going to happen with the countess and the millions of vampire kids that Alex seems to have created, but the hotel itself has me very compelled. I want to know what's hidden in the walls, I want to know about March's HH Holmes-style murder palace and find out what secrets it holds. Like Murder House, the building itself is a character and I can't wait to see more about it.

I think it helps the show overall that Matt Bomer is so beautiful it hurts to look at him.

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