*Ash vs. Evil Dead*

Directed by Sam Raimi

Written by Ivan Raimi, Sam Raimi, Tom Spezialy

Starring

Bruce Campbell as Ash

Jill Marie Jones as Amanda Fisher

Dana DeLorenzo as Kelly Maxwell

Ray Santiago as Pablo Simon Bolivar

Lucy Lawless as Ruby

At last. We’ve been waiting for a long time for Ash’s return, and this Halloween, Starz is gonna deliver… and how! The premiere episode is entitled “El Jefe” (meaning “the boss” or “the chief”) and I’ll give you one guess as to who takes on that moniker as the show gets underway.

Ash has been trying to live a normal life and forget about all of the horror in that cabin 30 years ago. I understand from the multi-outlet interview I was a part of with Campbell, Raimi and producer Rob Tapert earlier this year, that the events of *Army of Darkness* will not necessarily be addressed in the series, but that they did happen. Ash has been living in a trailer park, working at the ValuMart, where he’s been for a very long time. He’s looked up to by his co-workers and as is to be expected, still quite the ladies’ man. But through a hysterical flashback reveal, we learn how the Dead-ites have rediscovered Ash and are now on their way back into his uneventful and sad life.

The story has cleverly and thankfully not glossed over the fact that Ash is 30 years older, and only a few years from enjoying some AARP benefits. After one particularly glorious and gory battle, Ash leans into a counter, catches his breath and says, “I’m gonna need to do so some cardio”.

This premiere episode nicely introduces the other characters who will no doubt join Ash in his quest to vanquish the Dead-ites. We’ve got Kelly Maxwell (played by Dana DeLorenzo), one of Ash’s new co-workers. She’s recently lost her mother – and when the skies around ValuMart start to darken and the winds pick up, she puts aside her disgust with the lascivious Ash (let’s face it, Ash is still sexy, but he’s kind of a dirty old man when he’s looking at women young enough to be his daughter) and joins his team. There’s also Pablo (Ray Santiago) – one of Ash’s long-time buddies at the store. When Ash realizes what is about to happen, he decides to get the hell out of Dodge, but Pablo won’t have it. It looks to be an already-established father-son relationship which will be strained and tested as the series continues. And I’m going to venture a guess that this relationship will end up being the most endearing as *Ash vs. Evil Dead* moves on.

Lucy Lawless’ character (known only as Ruby) is only briefly introduced, but her short conversation with Michigan State Trooper Amanda Fisher (played by Jill Marie Jones of *Sleepy Hollow*) certainly instills an air of mystery to her possible role in all of this. It has been revealed that Ruby is on a search for Ash – apparently to settle some score from long ago. Can’t wait to see where this goes. I’m just speculating here, but is Ruby a possible scorned lover? Maybe Ash’s baby mama? I have no proof, just thinking out loud. Being a fan of Lawless from *Battlestar Galactica*, her mini-moment in this first episode, simply left me drooling for more.

Visually, the creature makeup and gore effects are as brilliant as you’d expect. And they’ve perfectly captured the original trilogy’s monsters with their frightening, jerky physicality and hallow eyes.

Along with all of the wackiness we’ve come to love about this franchise, this first episode was also quite frightening. I was reminded of some of my favorite moments out of *Evil Dead 2* (the eye-covering scary parts). The sequence in the premiere episode where we first get to know Amanda Fisher is truly terrifying with impressive lighting (that flashlight!) that will knock your socks off! Incidentally, one of the stars of last year’s Screamfest hit from New Zealand, *I Survived a Zombie Holocaust* – Mike Edward – shows up as Amanda’s partner Carson (the show’s being shot in New Zealand).

There’s definitely a nostalgia factor at play here for the die-hards, but I believe that those coming in blind, with no prior knowledge of what went down in that cabin three decades ago – will still tune in for the over-the-top gore (this isn’t network, folks, so there’s no watering things down) and the weekly re-visit with our beloved Ashley Williams.

What will probably set this apart from the films (in a good way) is the fact that there will be more of a story and a journey. Frankly, in the first two installments of the film franchise, it’s a bunch of kids battling crazy demons and lots of wonderful, wacky special effects. Although we love the films, it’s not until *Army of Darkness*, where more of a story takes center-stage. I feel like the television series is going to allow for further character development and an expansion of not only the Dead-ites universe, but of Ash’s personal life as well.

I had the pleasure of reviewing the pilot episode for MTV’s *Scream* earlier this year (and I really enjoyed it), and at that time, I think I mentioned that I wasn’t totally certain whether I would continue with the series. I didn’t. However, I will say that I am completely on board for a long road trip in that iconic 1973 Oldsmobile Delta 88 – enjoying the company of Ash and his new co-horts. There’s no doubt of that.

Without hesitation, I can say that this will be a monster hit for Starz. And the network’s confidence in the show is clear, as the first episode hasn’t even aired, and yet the big news today is the renewal for a second season! And I’m assuming that many of the corporate big-whigs were drooling and rubbing their hands together at last night’s extremely well-received premiere (at the historic Grauman’s Chinese Theatre in Hollywood). The amount of excited cheering (as Ash kicked butt, as the Dead-ites made their presence known, and especially when Ash pulled out his “boom-stick” and donned his specialized chainsaw) certainly bodes well for the production!

*Ash vs. Evil Dead* will premiere this Halloween night on Starz! Check your local listings for exact times. I promise that you’ll find the show to be as “groovy” as I did! Sorry, couldn’t resist!

Originality: 9

Impact: 10

Scares: 8

Visuals: 10

Story: 9

Script: 9

Category: Campy

Genre: Evil from Hell, Zombies, Monster, Supernatural Thriller

Favorite: 5

Longevity: 0

Overall Freakhead Rating: 4.5