Devilman Crybaby is Netflix's horniest, most shockingly violent show yet

Near the end of the first episode of Netflix's new anime *Devilman Crybaby*, high schooler Akira Fudo and his best friend, Ryo Asuka, find themselves in a rave-lit orgy full of neon and nude characters whose body parts flap wildly. The party spirals into a bloodbath when Ryo begins attacking strangers. As the scent of blood and debauchery attracts demons, people are ripped into pieces or transformed into hellions themselves.

It's impossible to look away from, and a perfect table-setter for the unflinching horror to come. Netflix's last original anime about demon hunting, *Neo Yokio*, may have told its story through jokes about personal brands and fashion, but *Devilman Crybaby* is more interested in the apocalyptic implications.

Devilman Crybaby, which is directed by Masaaki Yuasa, is a Netflix original adaptation of the 1970s manga *Devilman*. Its premise is as outlandish as its name. The world is under attack by a race of deadly demons, and Ryo believes the only way to defeat them is to expose them — in part, by allowing a human to bond with one and become a supernaturally powerful "devilman." His pure-hearted friend Akira does exactly that, and becomes an important weapon in the war against demons.

Despite his newfound penchant for graphic violence and sudden good looks (everyone is inexplicably hotter after they become possessed), Akira retains much of his original personality; he's still overly sensitive and prone to bursting into tears.

Becoming a devilman gives Akira greater inner and outer strength, but he remains a compassionate soul wounded by the injustice he sees in the world. Empathy, kindness, and sensitivity are often seen as weaknesses in men, but for Akira, they are his strength. His good nature and pure heart allow him to balance the darker impulses of his demon, Amon, rather than being swallowed by them entirely.

Devilman Crybaby can be hard to stomach, and you should proceed at your own risk. The show isn't squeamish about body horror and bare flesh — depicted in an animation style reminiscent of an old Flash cartoon — and the show abounds with graphic sex scenes, shocking violence, or a combination of both. A bare-chested woman transforms into a demon whose breasts bloat and flop before sprouting angry mouths in place of her nipples; coitus often ends in someone being cleaved in two. Watching the bloodbath at the club in the first episode is an easy way figure out if you'll be a fan or not.

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Its lurid use of sex and violence are not simply gratuitous, however; they're a tool used to demonstrate the overindulgent, sometimes disgusting nature of being human. The show also uses them to play with your expectations, veering from over-the-top sexual images of bouncing breasts and moments of humor to shocking scenes of someone getting devoured by a demon. And though it has buckets of blood to spill, *Devilman Crybaby* never stops being shocking, and it's willing to go pretty far to prove its points about how needlessly violent and cruel people can be.

There's also more to *Devilman Crybaby* than its flesh ripping and frenetic fucking. The show drives hard into a deeper allegory about the cost of persecuting those we don't understand. Humankind begins to turn on those it believes to be devils or even devilmen, attacking anyone they perceive as different — a clear comparison to modern-day bigotry. It's sometimes heavy-handed in its message to prove a broader story

that humans might be the real devils, but its unwavering acceptance of storylines like queer romance is refreshing. A character mourning the death of his boyfriend, for example, is depicted as a traumatic, sympathetic event, rather than a reason to other him.

There’s also a gentleness in the love between Akira and Ryo, two long-time friends — or maybe more. Akira may be the soft one, and Ryo his ice-cold, suave counterpart, but their emotional need for each other makes their relationship compelling to watch. The show has room for many examples of how we not only crave love and friendship, but understanding. Akira’s friends, Miki and Miko, are given the same treatment to a lesser degree; what starts as a friendship stained by jealousy ends with professions of love from them both.

Devilman Crybaby is easy to scoff at, thanks to its wonky animation and extremely NSFW story. But it flies in the face of expectations of what a Netflix cartoon can be, whether it’s subverting toxic masculinity and traditional story arcs about how heroes will always triumph, or openly embracing queer stories, rather than leaving them as subtext. It moves from jawdropping to heartbreaking at a moment’s notice, but it never strays from being unforgettable.

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