

# Top 10 Vampire Films

Contributed by Trent Daniel  
Wednesday, 25 November 2009

Since, in the wake of *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*, vampires are all the rage, I thought I offer a little list for those who would like to see good vampire films that exist outside of the trappings of the teen romance novel (warning: most of these films listed below are not about “nice” vampires like Edward).

## Nosferatu (Murnau, 1922)

The first notable vampire film is still the best and remains the measuring stick by which all vampire films are measured. Max Schreck's legendary Count Orlok remains a fearsome presence (not romantic, but rat like, which is fitting because the vampire's origins are link to disease and death; the count indeed sleeps in a grave filled with dirt from the graves of those lost to the Plague). Many moments, such as the count's clawing shadow on the wall and his rise from his coffin on a doomed ship, remain frightening.

## Let the Right One In (Alfredson, 2008)

Too soon? I think not. This modern classic infuses a spine of cold Scandinavian steel into the vampire mythos. This story of a budding friendship/romance between a lonely 12-year old boy and a female vampire brilliantly mixes genuine scares with an often moving and painful portrait of adolescence. The setting, in the snow and ice of an isolated Swedish town, enhances the haunting atmosphere.

## Fright Night (Holland, 1985)

Who says a vampire movie can't be funny? Though such vampire comedies as *Love at First Bite* and *The Lost Boys* are worth seeing as well, I feel this one is the best. It features two wonderful performances: Chris Sarandon as the scary yet hypnotic villain and Roddy MacDowell as the seemingly washed up vampire hunter/TV host who is the hero Charlie's last hope. Like Holland's other comedy-horror classic, *Child's Play*, this movie is one of the best at mixing laugh out loud moments with jump-out-of-your-seat scares.

## Vampyr (Dreyer, 1932)

This moody, atmospheric near silent rivals David Lynch's *Eraserhead* in nearly copying the exact rhythms and texture of a nightmare. It perhaps best known for two frightening, unforgettable moments: the hero imagining being trapped in a coffin and attending his own funeral and the heroine Leone's horrific leer when she is overcome with the “sickness” from a vampire's bite.

## Salem's Lot (Hooper, 1979)

Yes, this is a TV movie, but it remains one of the best adaptations ever of a Stephen King novel. The dread created in the small town when night falls is palpable. Furthermore, one of the scariest moments I've ever seen is the image of Danny Glick's bother, Raphie, now infected, emerging from the night fog and tapping on his brother's window.

## Interview with the Vampire (Jordan, 1994)

Tom Cruise might have been miscast as Lestat, yet the film is still a strong adaptation of Anne Rice's cult novel. Most noteworthy are the spectacular sets and scenes set in the Paris sewers and Kristen Dunst's haunting performance as the vampire forever trapped in the body of a 10 year old girl.

## Dracula (Browning, 1931)

Though Bela Lugosi's performance has been copied to the point of being camp, if one sees Browning's classic for the first

time, one can see why the performance made such an impact on our culture. Lugosi is both repellent and mesmerizing, like a cobra. Also features strong work by Dwight Frye as the doomed, laughing Renfield.

#### Shadow of the Vampire (Merhige, 2000)

What if Max Schreck had actually been a vampire? That is the intriguing question posed by this movie about the filming of the original *Nosferatu*. Schreck made such an unforgettable impact in the film, yet all but disappeared afterwards. What if director Murnau had offered him the neck of the leading lady in return for his services? Willem Defoe is magnificent in the role of Schreck (and should have taken home the Oscar).

#### Martin (Romero, 1977)

Is Martin, a lonely young man living in a Pittsburgh suburb who happens to enjoy drugging young women, slitting their wrists with a razor and drinking their blood, simply deranged, or is he actually a vampire? There is surprising depth, as well as a unique twist on vampire mythos, in this low budget shocker. Martin's dreams turn into parodies of vampire clichés, which subtly turn the film into a rather sad portrait of a teenager longing for an identity he will never achieve.

#### The Hunger (Scott, 1983)

Though I flirted with putting Coppola's over the top *Dracula* adaptation here, it is hurt too badly by some poor acting choices, most notably Anthony Hopkins' hammy performance. *The Hunger*, Tony Scott's adaptation of the Whitley Streiber novel is trashy, yet still effectively mixes many frightening moments (David Bowie's rapid aging over the course of one day) to some truly steamy, erotic trysts between Catherine Deneuve and Susan Sarandon. There has always been a highly erotic element to the vampire mythos and *The Hunger* explores this element about as well as any film.