vampire

Vampire Films

The Fearless Vampire Killers
Daughters of Darkness
The Addiction
Little Vampire
Mr Vampire
Nosferatu
Dracula
Nadja
Blade
Vampyr
Near Dark
Night Watch
The Hunger
Razorblade Smile
From Dusk Till Dawn
Buffy the Vampire Slayer

The Pocket Essential
VAMPIRE FILMS

Colin Odell and Michelle Le Blanc

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Vampire Films

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For Mum and Dad, with much love.

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And finally Azumi, who sleeps like the undead from dusk till dawn till dusk again.

Contents

Pleasures and Wayward Distractions

I felt the hot molten pierce of the stare, the whirlpool of the eyes. The veins in my neck strained to be near those pearly harbingers of death, that hungry tongue, the ruby lips. Trembling in anticipation, bursting with desire, I submitted myself to the warm embrace of oblivion…

Sex and death. These are the most primordial, the most arresting, of themes. The allure of the vampire film lies with its succinct distillation of these elements, wrapped in a fantasy context that allows for an easier discussion of the taboo and forbidden. The multifaceted undead continue to hypnotise audiences the world over, reinvented and rediscovered by each generation to mirror their own fears and desires. As perennial movie monsters, vampires are, above all, adaptable, because they reflect and amplify human passions and greed. The zombie repels; its lack of personality leaves little room for exposition, so its role is to represent fear of death and the faceless mass. The werewolf, a staple of folklore like the vampire, represents a lack of control over man's predatory nature – its horror lies in the loss of free will, of submission to uncontrollable urges. The vampire, on the other hand, is a far more malleable creature. As 'supernatural' beings, vampires offer escape from reality and an opportunity to encounter evil in the safe environment of the cinema.

Not, of course, that all vampires are evil – some are cursed, tragic, funny, or just different. It is their exaggeration and extension of human feelings and abilities that allows them to be reinterpreted. Although vampire films are often viewed as a guilty pleasure, they also serve to confront taboo desires in a way that absolves the viewer of personal guilt – the vampire can be an avatar for our darkest wishes.

As long as there has been cinema, there has been censorship and vampire cinema has, for a large part, existed on the borders of acceptability. The vampire provides an ideal forum for exploring taboo subjects in a metaphorical context, allowing situations that would be considered unacceptable if one or more of the participants were not nosferatu. To this end, the more successful vampire films have often been made in oppressive or puritanical social environments. The cinematic evolution of the vampire takes on the issues and mores of its time, even if the film is a period piece. You will have no difficulty spotting the difference between *Brides of Dracula*, 1960, and *Countess Dracula*, 1971, despite the fact they were made at the same location by the same company. The contemporary concerns and attitudes of the audience change the perception of both the vampire and its slayer.

Themes

Although the vampire film is often a breaker of taboos, its many themes can appear contradictory, but therein lies its strength. The viewer can engage with the filmmaker in any number of metaphysical or social discourses within the relative comfort of a traditional narrative form. This is not to say that the majority of vampire films are worthy philosophical texts, but their versatility allows for additional nuances that lie beneath the surface,

even in the most basic film. With such a long and rich history it should come as no surprise that these arguments can often work both ways – one filmmaker's 'vampire as fear of fascism' is another's 'vampire as fear of communism'. These are just a few of the key themes; there are many, many more.

Disease

Vampirism is transmittable through the exchange of blood or bodily fluids. You can become 'contaminated' with it. The relationship between the vampire and the plague carrier is a complex one. Vampires can be seen as bestowing the disease, or gift, of immortality. If the victim is turned through the mutual exchange of fluids, they become complicit in their own downfall. The vampire may also contaminate just because of its feeding habits, although this is not conducive to the overall survival of the species, due to the exponential rise in its population and the inevitable decline in foodstock. The relationship between vampires and disease is prevalent in folklore as well as literature. Dracula is associated with rats in the novel and some film versions, most explicitly in *Nosferatu*. The town in *Vampire Circus* is isolated by the plague – its appearance is a precursor for vampiric revenge. A metaphor which relates vampirism with AIDS (*Sucker the Vampire*, *The Forsaken*) has become more prevalent in modern films, also because of its connotations with sexuality.

Sexuality

British and American audiences' continued fascination with vampires has a lot to do with the repression of sexuality within these cultures. In times when even married couples

were denied onscreen embraces, it was still possible to see a seductive vampire break into the bedroom of a swooning woman. The act of biting and sucking bodily fluids is extremely sexual, but is usually depicted with implication, subtlety and ritual. Once again, taboos can be addressed in a safe environment – the act of penetration and violation rendered metaphorically sexual rather than literally. Films like *Dracula's Daughter* were surprisingly frank in their depiction of lesbian seduction for the time and any of Dracula's nocturnal visits could be considered fantasies about extramarital sex. Later films toyed with further concepts of more adventurous sexual practices. What sets these apart from pornography is that their perversions are implied, or at least restrained. Despite the delirious fetishism and rampant nudity of many European vampire films in the 1960s and 1970s, the genre declined significantly with the brief mainstream acceptance of hardcore pornography. For all their confrontation of taboo sexuality, the vampire seemed antiquated and even, heaven forbid, wholesome. The erotic appeal of the vampire lies in the danger and the promise of sex, not the act itself. This explains why the vampire film, even at its most explicit, is often sensual or even romantic, while traditional pornography is reactionary and unsubtle.

The Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat

Dracula/Vlad and Erzsébet Báthory (Elizabeth Bathory) represent nobility. Powerful and aristocratic, they are vampire royalty who command their subjects to do their bidding. No one cared when pretty virgin girls disappeared for Bathory's vanity, or when Vlad dined among the corpses of his enemies,

as these victims were either peasants or foreigners. The decadence of vampires is legendary; their appeal lies in the wish-fulfilment of a lifestyle free from moral constraint or financial insecurity. When these ways are challenged, though, they reflect the impetuosity of youth against bourgeois conservatism. In *Blade*, the young vampires seek to overthrow those of pure lineage – they are the mob against the nobility. In this example, the new is seen, paradoxically, as bad, in that the Elders have survived by limiting numbers and remaining withdrawn from general view, preferring to manipulate events from afar. In Abel Ferrera's *The Addiction*, there is a vein of grunge Nazism running through the vampire circle; this left-wing approach to filmmaking sees the undead as bourgeois fascists.

The opposite side of the same coin is the fear of the communist takeover, although this is less common in the vampire film and more prevalent in the zombie picture. *Blade* sees both groups represented, with the ultimate goal for the new nosferatu being to introduce vampirism to the entire world. In *The Omega Man,* the last man on earth stakes vampires by day and retreats by night – he is the outsider, the individual facing the horde.

Fear of Ageing and Death

Death is a central theme of the genre: fear of death, longing for death, fear of growing old and immortality make the vampire's connection with the afterlife complex and manifold. From a Christian perspective, vampires are damned – not alive, but as yet unjudged – and their every move takes them further from Heaven and closer to Hell. For others, the promise of eternal youth sees vampirism as an elixir – *The*

Lost Boys embraces this Peter Pan concept. But eternal life has its own problems, for example life on the move, watching loved ones grow old and die (*The Hunger*), until the very thing you avoided becomes your only wish (*Requiem for a Vampire*). Some vampire films come to terms with death by offering a worse alternative, such as eternal slavery without love or redemption.

Age is something that troubles most of us at some time. The vampire offers a solution to this by remaining ever young. However, this creates its own problems. In *Countess Dracula*, Ingrid Pitt's Countess Elizabeth needs to kill virgins to stay looking beautiful. The same character in Harry Kümel's *Daughters of Darkness* preys on the young to become her companion. She never suffers the inevitable ravages of age. But, not only do vampires cheat death, they also cheat the effects of life. In both *Interview With the Vampire* and *Near Dark*, vampires turned as children become frustrated, as hundreds of years of wisdom and experience remain trapped in the shell of a fragile youngster.

Nemeses

Where there are vampires, there are usually vampire hunters. These can be as amoral (James Woods in *Vampires*) or sadistic (Peter Cushing in *Twins of Evil*) as their prey – often hiding behind religious fanaticism as an excuse for their excesses and violations. Often their sadism is a sign of repressed sexuality or fascistic devotion. With few exceptions (Buffy, Captain Kronos), they are far more pompous and dull than their adversaries. Puritanism generally relies on the exorcism of the vampire by the film's close; it is the resumption of order that affords the audience the opportunity to have their cake and

eat it. They can identify with the free sexuality and ego of the monster, but be safe walking home knowing that they are not going to become the victim of what they desire to be. To this end, the vampire hunter must necessarily be dull and represent authority if this moral closure is to be accepted.

Vampire Cinema's Heritage

'How graves give up their dead,
And how the night air hideous grows
With shrieks!'
Varney the Vampire

The origins of vampires and bloodsuckers stretch far back in time, but can be seen as antecedents of the modern vampire film. There are three main sources of precedence: folklore/religion, historical and literary.

According to Jewish legend, Lilith, Adam's first wife, was cast out from Eden because of her refusal to be subservient to her husband. Cursed, she preyed upon the blood of babies. There are countless versions of the Lilith legend; some see her as a form of succubus or as a demon in the shape of a bird, and her role in literature and esoteric culture is constantly being reappraised. In Greek legend, Lamia is similarly a threat to children. The mistress of Zeus, Lamia had her children stolen from her by Hera and, after gouging out her own eyes, was granted the ability to steal other peoples' babies. Legends of bloodsuckers abound in many cultures. The *penanggalan* in Malaysia, *rakshasa* and *baital* of India, as well as species from Romania and Bulgaria can all contend that they are the origins of the vampire. Perhaps they all are. Belief in vampires in their various forms has been used to

warn children of the dangers of venturing out alone, or to provide folk-tale morality for centuries. The vampire's connection with disease is not just metaphorical. During times of plague and famine, the gaunt, anaemic figures of victims of disease became associated with the living dead, even down to the methods of disposing of their corpses by incineration.

The origin of Bram Stoker's Dracula is commonly thought to be Vlad Tepeş, the ruler of Romania in the mid-fifteenth century. Tepeş is a controversial figure, for, while legends of his incredible acts of cruelty are rife – his *nom de vampire*, The Impaler, derives from his preferred method of torture and execution by impaling tens of thousands of his victims – he is nevertheless seen as something of a hero in his home country as he helped defeat the Ottoman Empire. The legendary Erzsébet Báthory of Hungary bathed in the blood of virgins in order to maintain her youth, allegedly killing some 600 young girls. She has been represented many times on film either directly (*Countess Dracula*, *Immoral Tales*), or through association (*Daughters of Darkness*).

More recent examples can be seen in serial killer cases where the murderer is connected with drinking the victims' blood or devouring them – most infamously Peter Kürten, 'the Vampire of Düsseldorf', who was sexually gratified by his victims' bloodletting and was apparently enthusiastic about hearing the blood gush from his own neck when executed by guillotine in July 1931.

Much of the inspiration behind vampire films derives directly from literature. Polidori's *The Vampyre* was only a short story, but its protagonist, Lord Ruthven (allegedly modelled on Lord Byron), created a template for the dark, compelling and yet strangely attractive aristocrat, upon

whom so many screen vampires have fashioned themselves. Similarly, J Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* has had a huge impact on the way female vampires have featured on screen; the beautiful, mysterious but deadly seductress is a direct inspiration for *Blood and Roses* and *The Vampire Lovers*. In Victorian England an increase in basic literacy and a general accessibility of printed material resulted in the scandalous 'Penny Dreadfuls' – salacious tales of blood and violence, the most famous of which, *Varney the Vampire*, ran for more than 200 episodes and proved a pulp influence on more famously acknowledged works. However, of all the myths and stories from which vampire films have drawn, the most influential is undoubtedly Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

Dracula

There have been literally hundreds of films that can claim at least some tangential relationship to Stoker's iconic character. Of the many actors that have depicted the Count, two have become inextricably linked with the role – Béla Lugosi and Christopher Lee, who, despite being enormously talented actors on both screen and stage, became famous simply for being Dracula. Lugosi, who was responsible for creating the classic swishing cape and slicked-back hair, first appeared in Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931), having already played the role in the theatre. Lugosi's Dracula was compelling – his hand gestures would hypnotise and draw his victims to him, his accent was exotic and tempting. It is no wonder that he received sackfuls of fan mail from adoring women. However, the studios did not know how to handle his talents, eventually rejecting him. His subsequent spiral into drug addiction and debt was nothing short of tragic. Christopher Lee, tall

and imposing, is best known for his role in Hammer films, but he also played the Count in *Uncle Was a Vampire* (1959), *El Conde Dracula* (1970) and *Dracula and Son* (1976), amongst others.

John Carradine appeared in hundreds of films; his horror work was but a small portion of his lengthy career. He too depicted Dracula on several occasions, as a white-haired and moustached individual sporting top hat and tails in *House of Frankenstein* (1944) and *House of Dracula* (1945). He went on to appear in *Billy the Kid vs Dracula* (1965) and many more, including *Nocturna, Granddaughter of Dracula* (1979). Other Counts have included a dapper Lon Chaney Jr in *Son of Dracula* (1943) and Francis Lederer in *The Return of Count Dracula* (1958). Everyone's favourite Van Helsing, Peter Cushing, turned nosferatu in *Tendre Dracula* (1973) and even donned a Béla Lugosi cape. Frank Langella continued as a suave Count in the 1979 version. Klaus Kinski was *Nosferatu* in 1979, all bald horror and sharp incisors, reprising Max Schreck's seminal performance in Murnau's classic. Gary Oldman gave yet another interpretation in 1992's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* and tried to emphasise the tragic nature of the Count's existence as well as linking him with Vlad Tepeş. *Dracula 2001* (2000) saw Gerard Butler bring the Count right up to date by setting the story in a contemporary environment. Perhaps the most unusual Count who remains true to the spirit of the book is the ballet dancer Wei-Qiang Zhang in *Dracula*, *Pages from a Virgin's Diary* (2002), a remarkably physical, terrifying and sensual performance.

There have been too many films based on Dracula to mention them all. Like all vampires, he is highly adaptable, hence these derivatives. Be warned, we offer absolutely no

guarantees about quality: *Count Erotica, Vampire* (1971), *Dragula* (1973), *Spermula* (1975), *Deafula* (1975) in sign language, *Gayracula* (1983), *Trampire* (1987), *Rockula* (1990).

Early Risers

Vampires in Europe

Despite its many literary precedents, the effect of *Dracula* on the history of vampire films is indisputable, so it is fitting that the birth of Stoker's tome coincided with that of cinema itself. The first film that can loosely be termed a vampire film was Georges Méliès' *Le Manoir du diable* (1896). Méliès was cinema's pioneering magician, relying heavily on in-camera special effects to show the impossible to his astonished audiences. Running at just two minutes, *Le Manoir du diable* features a flying bat transforming into a demonic figure, played by Méliès himself. It is appropriate that cinema's first showman was also its first vampire. Sadly, many early films have been lost, disappearing in a wisp of nitrate, or through neglect or war. *Les Vampires* (1915), a sensationalist crime serial directed by the prolific Louis Feuillade, parades a menagerie of bizarre characters (including the all-seeing Grand Vampire and the sinister Satanas), with its convoluted plotting featuring a succession of shocking abductions. The series is best remembered for its black-suited anti-heroine Irma Vep, portrayed with melodramatic intensity by Musidora – the character name being an anagram of 'vampire' – a sultry, slinky schemer of nefarious underworld deeds. Eschewing what we now understand as narrative

cinema for free-form association and meticulous tableau framing, the series proved to be a huge influence on the surrealist directors of the 1920s and, years later, on filmmakers such as Jean Rollin and Olivier Assayas. However, the often scandalous immorality of Feuillade's serials saw later films facing increasing scrutiny by the French censors.

France was not alone in vampire film production. Britain's *The Great London Mystery* (1920) featured the intriguingly named Froggie the Vampire. Hungary had been producing horror films for some time, with *Drakula* (1921) believed to be the first adaptation of the book, but now sadly lost. The following year saw the release of FW Murnau's German landmark *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens* (1922).

Nosferatu defiantly became one of vampire cinema's most influential films. Murnau's company did not obtain the rights to film the book and Stoker's widow successfully sued the production company, ordering all prints to be destroyed. Fortunately, some survived. Young solicitor Hutter sets off for Graf Orlok's castle to negotiate a property deal in Bremen for the mysterious Count. Orlok notices Hutter's portrait of his wife Ellen and, obsessed with her beauty, sets off to find her, causing pestilence and death in his wake. Reunited with Ellen and armed with a book detailing the behaviour of nosferatu, Hutter prepares to deal with the escalating undead menace. From the mad Carpathian peasants to the spooky carriage and the marvellous use of shadows, *Nosferatu* established the conventions upon which many future films would rely, with one exception – that of Dracula himself. Played by Max Schreck, this Count is a monster. When we first encounter him, he appears to be a thin, wizened old man in a black suit and hat. However, as his true nature is revealed his appearance becomes increasingly grotesque – tall, thin,

bald with bat-like ears, enormous claw-like hands and sharp-pointed incisors. Very few subsequent vampires followed this model (the 1979 remake and *Salem's Lot* being notable examples). However, despite his shocking appearance and creepy mannerisms, he awakens some degree of sympathy in the viewer as he gazes longingly at Ellen, or slouches about, a hunched figure of shame. The film's visual style reflects much of the German Expressionist movement of the time, with menacing shadows, close-ups of rats wriggling free from coffins and glimpses of Dracula's teeth through panels of rotting wood. The film still has the power to unnerve.

Nosferatu's eventual success led to Murnau becoming one of Europe's most celebrated directors, but the vampire genre proved to be a poisoned chalice to Carl Dreyer, an already established powerhouse of world cinema. *Vampyr: Der Traum des Allan Grey* (1931) was considered career suicide for the respected director because the established opinion was that horror films were not art. Dreyer, however, thought differently and set about adapting Le Fanu's *In a Glass Darkly* as a dreamlike tale of madness and dark brooding horror. Anthropologist David Grey (despite the film's title card) arrives at the town of Courtempierre and is given a package by a babbling old man which pleads for him to 'free us from our affliction'. Leone, the girl in the bedroom above him, appears very sick and David is called in to give blood for a transfusion by a strangely nocturnal doctor, but he begins to suffer intense hallucinations. Worrying for his sanity and his soul, he begins to connect these events to the infamous witch Marguerite Chopin, buried in an unhallowed grave. *Vampyr* was a far cry from accepted Hollywood conventions of linear narrative and coherent structured dialogue. Dreyer's world is one of half-heard words, whispers, changes of

language, animal yelps, children crying and uncertainty. Structurally and conceptually, the film seeks to represent surrealist and psychoanalytical ideals, but *Vampyr* excels with its outstanding imagery, each shot adding psychological depth and heightened unease to the proceedings. Shadows of bats are cast behind characters, cruciform beams of light pick out details, scythe-wielding peasants meander in half-light and the whole piece has such an air of putrefied menace that it is easy to see why the film was witch-hunted. Hollywood was producing little more than fairy tales in comparison. Chief source of outrage was reserved for the astonishing dream sequence, in which David finds himself in a glass-topped coffin, unable even to scream. We follow his journey from the undertakers to burial in chilling point of view, helpless as his perverse fate is dragged out. Sadly, most surviving prints are of very poor quality – an unfortunate fate for an unconventional and daring work.

The USA and Universal

Like Europe, America was also making weekly serials to ensure repeat audience attendance in the early days of cinema. *The Exploits of Elaine* (1914) features a character called The Clutching Hand, who tries to consume the heroine's blood by attacking her with a hypodermic needle, predating George A Romero's *Martin* by some 60 years. Director Tod Browning, once a 'Living Hypnotic Corpse' circus sideshow attraction, understood the power of the thrill picture through his collaborations with Lon Chaney, 'The Man of a Thousand Faces'. *London After Midnight* (1927) saw Chaney's vampire fitted with excruciatingly painful incisors that almost threaten to bisect his head. The early days of

sound cinema witnessed Hollywood's rise as the *de facto* centre for filmmaking. Browning was charged with producing *Dracula* (1930), considered a risky move for Universal Studios at the time. Stoker's epistolary novel had proved difficult to adapt, but in many ways this is what makes it so open for reinterpretation – at times, downright liberties have been taken with the text. Browning's *Dracula* is no exception, being adapted from the stage play of the novel. Renfield, not Harker, travels to Transylvania to sell Carfax Abbey to the upwardly mobile Count Dracula. Terrorised by three ghostly brides, he turns quite mad and is incarcerated in Dr Seward's home, where he develops a taste for animal blood. Dr Seward and his daughter Mina meet Dracula at the opera, unaware that he has an unusual attraction to necks and uncommon feeding practices – facts later borne out by Mina's friend Lucy's sudden death. Attacks on children by a woman in white and nocturnal visitations threaten the community and attract the attention of stake-wielding, no-nonsense slayer Abraham Van Helsing.

The success and influence of Browning's *Dracula* is so immense that it can be difficult to view with real objectivity. Béla Lugosi, who played the lead in the play, wasn't the first choice for the film. He was quite a way down a list that included Conrad Veidt and, Browning's choice, Lon Chaney, but ultimately the Hungarian actor was made for the part. Lugosi draws the eye with raw power and considerable charm – when he attacks men he is a savage, with women he is a passionate lover. *Dracula* was filmed prior to the onslaught of the Hays Code, a morality code which restricted much of what could be depicted on screen – Lugosi's bedroom antics would have been significantly toned down otherwise. What remains remarkable is the attention to set detail, particularly

in the earlier scenes at Dracula's Castle, which show a huge cathedral-like hall with streaming light, a dizzying staircase, gargantuan spiders' webs and Lugosi intoning 'I am Dracula'. There are so many ideas at the start – the bat leading the coach, the diffusely lit brides stalking Renfield, the unexpected appearance of the armadillos – that Browning has run out of steam by the time they take the Vesta to England and only Renfield delivers any chills in the next hour.

Browning's *Dracula*, along with its stablemate *Frankenstein* (1931), proved so lucrative to Universal that they became synonymous with their horror output. It also meant other companies jumped upon the horror bandwagon. Frank Strayer's *The Vampire Bat* (1933) was an early example featuring genre stalwart Lionel Atwill and the incomparable Fay Wray. Kleinschloss is a 'village in terror' because another blood-drained corpse has been discovered. Karl and Ruth suspect the deaths are the result of a murderer, but the village folk think differently. The suspect is clear – the retarded Herman has been seen at the bedsides of the victims and, what's more, he collects bats. Incensed by Herman's oddness, the town form a posse, chase him and stake him, just to be on the safe side. But will this drastic action halt the appalling killings, or is there a more chilling solution to the mystery? *The Vampire Bat* is a film of two halves, which, unfortunately, are jumbled up. There is the invasive and impressive prowling camerawork that glides like a dreaming bat, but it feels incongruous compared with the static, stagy dialogue scenes that are starkly lit and flat. The film's message is that ignorance can be a dangerous thing, leading to mass hysteria. Herman may well be unbalanced, but his fascination with the huge bats that dominate the exterior shots is understandable – quite simply, they are furry. His ultimate demise

is moving and futile. Science is shown to be the pursuit of knowledge at the expense of others, as blind as it is coldly logical. The final revelations are unexpected, the ideas surprisingly literate, but the film feels obliged to end it all on a Nayland Smith/Fu Manchu note with elaborate torture/medical set-ups and a few pulp blazing guns. *The Vampire Bat* is a tight thriller with a flowery but likeable script that never outlives its welcome.

Another convoluted thriller, MGM's *Mark of the Vampire* (1935), sees the reuniting of Browning and Lugosi. In a creepy Czechoslovakian village, the herb bat-thorn keeps the creatures of the night at bay. When Sir Karell shuffles of his mortal coil, found with two puncture wounds in his neck and a surprisingly low plasma count, his sceptical daughter and son-in-law-to-be are understandably concerned. With the servants running all over the house like mad things and nocturnal visits from Count Mora and his bride, they are clearly in need of professional help. As luck would have it, Inspector Neumann is on the case, aided and abetted by a hypnotist known as 'The Professor'. Effectively a remake of *London After Midnight, Mark of the Vampire* saw Browning return to the fray after the disastrous reaction to his masterpiece *Freaks* and Lugosi at the height of his powers prior to a sad decline into morphine addiction. Although some of the dialogue scenes are a little staid, the sheer bravura of the visual realisation is breathtaking. From the opening shot of a crucifix church top bleeding light to the eerie graveyards and tombs, you can cut the atmosphere with a knife. What the Count's castle lacks in physical dimensions, it more than makes up for in decor. Huge spiders scuttle along the walls, insects scurry around the drapes and vampire bats flutter all around. It is incredible, even more so because of Wong

Howe's sumptuous cinematography and some quite remarkable special effects. In one sequence, we see Count Mora's marble-white bride drift slowly to the ground, her outstretched arms the wings of a giant bat – awe inspiring and beautiful. These 'demons of the castle' that are 'spewed up from the grave' manage to terrorise effortlessly and silently. The mood would be perfect were it not for a couple of niggling points – first off, any character named Otto is bound to be shifty; and, secondly, whilst the final revelations are unexpected and inventive, they do end matters on a sensible note, dispelling the film's wonderful phantasmagorical air.

The success of *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) led Universal to produce a *Dracula* sequel, *Dracula's Daughter* (1936), but with a different cast and crew. Dracula is dead and Van Helsing up on a murder rap, facing either the gallows or the asylum for staking the Count. Dracula's corpse is purloined by the beautiful Marya Zaleska, who believes it to have a power over her, giving her nocturnal yearnings for human blood. She cremates the body to release her from the curse, to no avail. Seeking psychiatric help, she must return to Transylvania to confront the roots of her addiction. *Dracula's Daughter* is a satisfying and low-key affair, with a script that crackles with such pace and energy there's hardly room to breathe. It is also one of the earlier examples of knowingly Freudian mainstream cinema, at once embracing psychoanalytic ideas and pointing out their weaknesses or, as Marya paraphrases, 'There are more things in Heaven and Earth than are dreamt of in your psychiatry.' Dr Garth's attempt to prevent Marya's 'horrible impulses' by putting them in a psychological context, and the authority's treatment of Van Helsing as a murderer rather than hero, place the film squarely in reality. Also surprising are the distinctly lesbian overtones that accompany Marya's feeding on Lili and

her subsequent responsibility for the girl. The offering of eternal life to the object of her affection rather than her faithful but facetious servant speaks volumes about her love. Marya is a tragic and complex figure who does not want to feed. As such, she is a precursor for Jean Rollin's *The Living Dead Girl*; someone whose primitive instincts displace their conscience. *Dracula's Daughter* has worn the ravages of time very well, with uniformly excellent acting and rich dialogue carrying it through some of the occasionally static camera-work.

Universal would sporadically return to vampire films. In Robert Siodmak's *Son of Dracula* (1943), Lon Chaney Jr played the 'subtly' named Count Alucard, tricked by a rich heiress and her boyfriend into giving them eternal life when they suspect he is a relative of Count Dracula. Even though the film was successful, Universal was showing signs that its monster factory was waning and so began pairing up popular franchise monsters, with varying results. *House of Frankenstein* (1944) saw Boris Karloff resuscitate Frankenstein's monster and revive Dracula, now played by prolific actor John Carradine. Carradine returned in *House of Dracula* (1945), seeking a cure for his vampirism to little avail. Universal turned to parody in the shape of *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948), which saw Lugosi return to be a stooge to the two bumbling comics. Lugosi had also featured in the bizarre *blitzkrieg* horror, *The Return of the Vampire* (1943). Twenty-three years after Lady Jane put a sharp end to Armand Tesla's reign of terror, freeing wolfman servant Andreas and saving little Nicki, the German *blitzkrieg* disturbs the graves in Priory cemetery and Tesla rises again. Preparing for her engagement party, Nicki is threatened once more and Lady Jane must save the day, as the authori-

ties believe none of that supernatural gobbledegook. The poignant backdrop of war-ravaged London with the stiff-upper-lip Britishness contrasts neatly with the absurdity of the main premise. The cemetery design is wonderful, as is the fog spilling into the bedrooms of Tesla's victims, mirroring his macabre resting places. Sadly, though, Andreas the wolfman looks like a cross between the lion in *The Wizard of Oz* and Chewbacca, presumably to make him more sympathetic. There's ample comic relief provided by two 'luv-a-duck' gravediggers, although, in the end, *The Return of the Vampire* is a competent film, but little more.

The US would continue to produce horror films, but these were predominantly lower budget pictures, although vampires would rise again in Hollywood some years later. Stephen Sommers briefly resurrected the Universal monster pantheon punch-up in *Van Helsing* (2004) (*The Monster Squad*, a gentle homage to the 'Famous Monsters of Filmland' was actually made by Tri-Star), but, for the English-speaking world, the launch of a new wave of vampire films would come from the other side of the pond.

It's Hammer Time

The Horror of Dracula

Hammer Studios is inexorably linked with the British horror film. The company started in 1937, initially distributing films but soon moving into production, seeking inspiration in radio shows such as *Dick Barton: Special Agent*. It wasn't long before the company turned towards television adaptations. Nigel Kneale's *The Quatermass Experiment* had been a successful science fiction BBC series with a vampiric twist. Hammer released it cinematically, honing it to the bone and emphasising the 'X' in the title to show how 'horrific' the content was. The film was an unqualified success and paved the way for the studio's golden age. *The Curse of Frankenstein*'s (1957) period setting allowed far more freedom to portray horror than a contemporary one would have done and audiences responded enthusiastically, pushing the film's stars, Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing, into the limelight.

To consolidate the success, Hammer looked for another classic text to film and found *Dracula*. Teaming Cushing and Lee allowed for greater audience association, although no one was prepared for Lee's sexually charged and dominating Count. Jimmy Sangster's dynamic script takes liberties with its source, but does so in order to make the material intrinsically cinematic. Jonathan Harker, vampire slayer, has taken

up a position as librarian at Dracula's castle. However, before he can fulfil his mission, he is turned nosferatu and his colleague Dr Van Helsing has to put him to rest. Dracula escapes. Jonathan's fiancée Lucy is informed of his sad demise, but she herself is gravely ill and Van Helsing begins to suspect that Dracula's influence is spreading. From the very opening – the castle in the woods, Lee's dramatic entrance as Dracula and Cushing's no-nonsense Van Helsing – *Dracula* (*Horror of Dracula,* 1958) contains all the ingredients of the studio's classic films. Taking the horrific and erotic elements to extremes, *Dracula* nevertheless remains rooted in the restraints of 1950s Britain. Jonathan staking Dracula's consort, filmed as a dramatic shadow against the wall, depicts nothing explicit, but still has the power to shock through implication. Lucy, in her sickbed, tended by her sister-in-law, is the very image of virtue and humility. As soon as everyone has gone, though, her expression changes to one of wanton wickedness as she opens the windows and removes her crucifix to await the vampire's kiss. Director Terence Fisher is a master of pacing and the final duel between Cushing and Lee is charged with energy – their expressions those of sheer hatred as they battle to the death. Dracula's demise is shocking, his remains crumbling to dust before our very eyes.

Dracula was box-office dynamite and Hammer was keen to cash in on the success. Lee, however, was concerned about being typecast, so resisted the calls to reprise his role, leaving the studio to expand its horror base and also produce non-Dracula vampire films such as the (misleadingly titled) *Brides of Dracula*. Eventually, Lee did return in Fisher's *Dracula: Prince of Darkness* (1965). Two English couples on a tour of Europe wish to visit the picturesque Carlsbad. The local townspeople are a twitchy, superstitious lot who stake and burn anyone

'just in case', but even the towering, cynical priest Father Shandor agrees that they really shouldn't visit the castle. Do they listen? Of course not. Dumped by Eastern Europe's only cockney cabbie, they complete their journey by driverless carriage and are greeted by the butler, Clove. 'Is your master indisposed?' asks Charles. 'No, he's dead.' Not for long, though, as Alan's death revives the Count and Helen receives a serious hicky, forcing Charles and Diana to attempt an escape. Fisher's film is a real tease from start to finish; Dracula himself does not appear until the second half, but this is all part of the plan. British to the hilt, the trappings of a horror film are used to depict the allegorical effects of extramarital liaison and repressed sexuality. Helen is a frumpy wimp with an irritating husband – how much better she is when freed of the shackles of matrimony and heaving in a negligee for her demonic lover. Diana is bubbly enough only to contemplate an affair with the undead. Charles is required to be macho but is essentially impotent, the real saviour coming in the shape of Father Shandor, who is one of Hammer's finest characters – a rumbustious cleric devoid of social graces. Think Friar Tuck on steroids with a big gun. Fisher can do no wrong, his use of widescreen Technicolor accentuating the period feel, sweeping from costume drama to comic strip.

Hammer's *Dracula* series did attempt to link the first films by resurrecting their Count from his fate in the previous entry – but eventually they abandoned this and instead became increasingly inventive with their methods of dispatch. *Dracula Has Risen from the Grave* (Freddie Francis, 1968), like its predecessor, keeps the Count under wraps for most of the running time, with the arch-vampire acting more as a commander than a proactive bloodsucker, getting

his minions to enact his revenge on the man who cleansed his castle. As such, the film works more as a metaphor for turning to Satan and again pushes forward the bounds of sexual wantonness at a time when censorship was becoming a serious issue for filmmakers. Although they may seem relatively coy today, the Hammer films did, at one time, test the limits of British screen sex and violence, although ultimately this would prove untenable.

In *Taste the Blood of Dracula* (Peter Sasdy, 1970), chubby salesman Weller (Roy Kinnear) possesses an urn containing the dried blood of Count Dracula, which he obtained surreptitiously in a reprise of the previous film's climax. He peddles it to Lord Courtley, an impudent fellow bored with the endless stream of orgies and debauchery his position demands. Courtley tastes the blood, something his fellow scallywags are unimpressed by, so they duly kick him in. But wait! He turns into Dracula and seeks bloody vengeance on the hypocritical bunch and their families. Upholding the moral high ground whilst enjoying the excesses of sin reflects both the hypocrisy of *Taste the Blood*'s town officials but also that of Hammer films. Alice is repressed because her father, one of Courtley's former chums, doesn't want her to have sex or even go out, while he's free to poke as many prostitutes as he fancies. That Alice does venture out is punishable by being seduced and turned vampire by Dracula. It's a horror film cliché, but if you want a fighting chance of making it to the final credits then don't have sex. *Taste the Blood of Dracula* succeeds because of its delirious casting – it's like a grotesque pantomime with Ralph Bates in particular giving an outstanding over-the-top performance that makes even the excesses of the cast of TV familiars seem positively tame. Although Dracula is accompanied by gratuitous lava

red and orange back projections and some almost avant-garde pixilation, really Lee has little to do. But what, you may ask, of the titular corpuscular fluid and its potential culinary properties? Sadly, the film was never released in Flavourama, but visually it begins akin to red poster paint powder, develops into a crimson bubbling froth and ends up with unrivalled depth of body and achingly intense scarlet highlights. Viscosity high. Realism low. An apt metaphor for this camp, gothic and occasionally gory film.

Following this, Hammer ditched the series' continuity but not the campness or the gore. In *Scars of Dracula* (Roy Ward Baker, 1970), we are led to believe that Dracula can be reanimated by bat puppets vomiting pillar-box red non-drip gloss onto his ashes. Local villager Matthew is in trouble for dallying with the local ladies, but is conveniently whisked off in a mist-clad coach for a meeting at Dracula's castle. Soon he is fending off the rapacious Tanya before meeting an untimely end. His brother Simon and girlfriend Sarah try to search for him and you can guess where they end up looking... By the late 1960s, the halcyon days of Hammer were over. Unable to compete with the rising relaxation in censorship and burdened, it seemed, with the ability to create only period horror tales, the company began to flounder. *Scars of Dracula* saw the studio move into more violent territory, with the remarkably gory opening massacre at the church setting the tone for much of the decade to come. However, the effects are overblown and the histrionics of the cast border on parody. Christopher Lee's contact lenses now make him look like he's had a heavy drinking session the night before, but despite this he's still a commanding figure. Not that it's all bad; the scene where Dennis Waterman has to escape from a mountain-top castle's window features a

great forced-perspective glass painting, even if the whole effect is pinched from *Black Narcissus*.

In a futile attempt to shake off its heritage brand, Hammer turned to contemporary London in *Dracula AD 1972* (Alan Gibson, 1972). The ludicrously named Johnny Alucard and his gang of ageing 'yoofs' raise the Count in a disused London church. But look, one of the swinging kids is Jessica Van Helsing and the Count wants her for his bride. This atrociously misguided attempt to create a hip-cat-Count for the *Hair* generation suffers from bland direction, an appalling script and gratuitous fashion. That said, we do get to see Christopher Neame take a shower when he's a vampire, with hilarious results.

Matters are improved in the final film of the series, the loopy *The Satanic Rites of Dracula* (Alan Gibson, 1974). A rather ineffectual Civil Service agent escapes from Pelham House with tales of Satanic rituals attended by the country's most powerful men. Worse, there are a multitude of hippie snipers silencing anyone who gets in the way. Van Helsing and his intelligent but patronised granddaughter Jessica help a clandestine investigation, uncovering a conspiracy to unleash a hyper-virulent form of the bubonic plague. Only one mind could be behind such a diabolically fiendish plan – Count Dracula – but surely he died two years ago? Well, as chance would have it, the Denham conglomerate have pitched their multinational business on the site of Dracula's last resting place and Mr Denham is not famous for his daytime charity work. Soon Dracula is dead and well and living in London (as one print of the film was called). It's a pity really, as, while *The Satanic Rites* contains some nice ideas and the odd interesting sequence (the brides dying in a sprinkler haze is incongruous but looks great and Dracula's

final demise, while heavily signposted, is nonetheless different), it lacks sustaining power. The premise that Dracula may be fed-up with constant resurrections and just wants peace is entirely appropriate.

The Karnstein Trilogy

Dracula may be the most famous literary source for the vampire film, but another inspirational tale preceded it in the shape of J Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*. It is to this that screenplay writer Tudor Gates nominally turned when penning *The Vampire Lovers* (1970) in order to test the limits of acceptance by the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC) of sexually explicit material. The state censors still had a script approval stage at this time and it was felt that period pieces or fantasy films could be more explicit due to their detachment from day-to-day life. Because this was a potentially risky venture, Hammer spread the cost of production with American International Pictures, the drive-in exploitation film specialists. The company need not have worried; the film is as British as afternoon tea and nearly as prudish. Baron Hartog avenges the death of his sister by killing the undead Karnsteins in the province of Styria. But he overlooks Mircalla, who reappears years later at the home of the general and his daughter Laura. Laura is seduced by Mircalla, under the eyes of her fiancé Carl and eventually dies. Mircalla moves to the home of Morton and his daughter Emma, seducing virtually everyone there, whilst also dealing with the savvy doctor who tries to deck the halls with boughs of garlic. The only way to stop the salacious siren is by the teaming of Morton, Carl and the 'bloody' Baron. The combination of lesbianism and vampires was hardly new, but

Hammer overhyped its new super sexy cinema, causing a backlash among some critics for being overly reactionary. That Ingrid Pitt is decapitated has been seen by some writers as punishment for her lesbianism (as decapitation is often seen as a castration complex and Pitt's character is associated with the predatory male), but really it is no different to the fate of any screen vampire – they are punished for the threat that they pose to 'decent' society, regardless of sexual orientation. The dreamlike sequences of misty graveyards are evocative and atmospheric, a point emphasised by eerie use of sound, but they sit uneasily with the 'BBC Jane Austin adaptation' sequences that bind the minimal plot together.

The film's success led to an outrageously kitsch sequel, *Lust for a Vampire* (Jimmy Sangster, 1971). An innocent serving wench has her throat slit to resurrect the delectable Mircalla, who takes residence in a finishing school under the shadow of her ancestral castle. Visiting pervert writer Lestrange deceives his way into a teaching position at the school so that he can ogle the lasses. Soon everyone is falling for Mircalla's charms and local girls go missing. Lestrange uses the most outrageous chat-up lines to indulge in some lurve with Mircalla, but his infatuation cannot prevent the rise of peasant power to overthrow the Karnstein curse. Ralph Bates nominally stars in the weakest but most entertaining of the Karnstein Trilogy – his character fluctuating wildly from Will Hay schoolmaster to slobbering 'servant of the devil'. He is not alone – all men desire Mircalla and so does any woman under 30 with nice breasts (bit convenient that). When Lestrange finally gets to make love (although he remains suspiciously well adorned), we are 'treated' to a playing of *Strange Love*, which further drags the film towards turkey status. The opening is fairly effective as we see a veiled

skeleton slowly turn into the blood-drenched Mircalla and there's a lovely shot of a body being dumped into a dried-out well, but ultimately this is one to watch for the cheese factor.

Surprisingly, *Twins of Evil* (John Hough, 1971) remains not only the best of the Karnstein Trilogy, but also one of Hammer's most thought-provoking and socially critical films. It still provides the bodice-ripping and bloodletting we've come to know and love, but there's a message in there too. Twins Maria and Frieda (played by the Collinson twins – *Playboy*'s first twin centrefolds) have come to stay with Uncle Gustav and Aunt Kathy. Gustav is head of a group of religious fanatics who burn accused witches, but can't quite work up the nerve to eliminate the promiscuous but powerful Count Karnstein. Karnstein's decadent lifestyle is becoming tedious, so he is grateful for the resurrection of long-dead relative Mircalla and, soon after, turns the mischievous Frieda into a vampire. Uncle Gustav happens upon a feeding Frieda in the forest and locks up this 'twin of evil', but Karnstein does the switcheroony routine with goody-two-shoes Maria. By the time everyone figures out what's happening, the vamps have regrouped for a final showdown. The hunter is often a vampire film's dullest character, but Cushing gives his all as the grotesquely misguided Gustav, who uses the Bible as a means of justifying the torture and murder of young girls. Karnstein may be evil but at least he knows it. Gustav's gleeful adoption of capital punishment makes for far less easy viewing than the Count's supernatural dalliances, perhaps because Gustav is a believable evil while Karnstein is a decadent, fantasy bogeyman. Regardless, *Twins of Evil* is the unexpected high note of the series, a lean enjoyable romp with a plea for tolerance.

Hammer's Other Vampire Films

Hammer rejigged a proposed sequel to *Dracula* to make the inaptly named *Brides of Dracula* (1960) because Christopher Lee was unavailable to reprise the role. Marianne Danielle has been given shelter by Baroness Meinster. She takes pity on the Baroness's son, who has been chained in the castle grounds like an animal, and releases him. However, she soon realises her mistake when she later discovers the drained corpse of the Baroness. The Baron and his slaughtered brides return from the grave to terrorise the living and only Van Helsing can save the day. Part thriller, with an outrageously Oedipal subtext, and part swashbuckling gung-ho action flick, *Brides of Dracula* switches pace for an exhilarating climax once the initial premise begins to run out of steam. The handsome, aristocratic Baron, incarcerated by a cackling hag, twists both character and audience expectations with the revelation that it is he who is the monster. The languid pace of these revelations creates a sense of Grimm folk-tale escalation, but when Van Helsing arrives on the scene events gallop away – Cushing has never been more dramatic. Whatever the ludicrous premise of the conclusion, it is undeniably energetic and exciting. See Van Helsing poisoned by the vampire's penetrating kiss! Watch him cauterise the wound with a brand! Wince as holy water bubbles on the Baron's face! Gasp at Van Helsing leaping at the deadly flapping windmill sails! Cracking stuff with a beguiling plot and luscious brides makes this a classy fantasy.

Less energetic but more inventive was Don Sharp's rarely screened *Kiss of the Vampire* (1962). Newly-weds Gerald and Marianne, stranded and out of petrol, seek refuge at a local hotel. They are delighted to receive an invitation to dine at

Dr Ravner's sumptuous home and meet his charming family. But why does the innkeeper's wife cry all the time and why is batty Professor Zemmer always drunk? From Zemmer 'staking' a coffin with a shovel, a groan reverberating and blood oozing through, it is clear that Hammer (still in the early days of its horror output) was becoming more daring. The couple are even allowed to kiss before being interrupted for tea. Ravner appears to be a wholesome family man, but behind the façade he is the head of a rancid vampire cult. The aristocracy harbouring evil intentions is a common Hammer theme. The final denouement's astonishing depiction of thousands upon thousands of bats destroying the cult is a masterpiece of effects work, which makes the film's obscurity all the more beguiling.

Hammer's increased nervousness in the 1970s led to wild differences in the kind of genre films the company was producing. Once notorious for the publicity shot of Ingrid Pitt climbing naked out of a bath of virgin's blood, *Countess Dracula* (Peter Sasdy, 1971) has all the ingredients for either a serious or exploitation film, or both. Sadly, leaden direction, insipid cinematography, average score, plodding script and bad pacing conspire to make this a deeply dull experience. Her husband dead and with the estate split between herself and daughter Ilona, Countess Elizabeth also has to contend with ageing wrinkles and a poor complexion. A chance discovery whilst beating her servant reveals that blood does more wonders for the skin than conventional moisturiser, so she instigates a strictly sticky bathing policy, has her daughter kidnapped by a mute Mongol with limited culinary skills and poses as the now lascivious Ilona. The rejuvenated Countess seeks younger flesh in the shape of Imre, whom she plans to marry. With the effects of the blood short-lived and

the revelation that only virgins can supply Elizabeth's unusual beauty treatment, it gets increasingly difficult to hide the bodies as the wedding day approaches. How Sasdy can take such an eminently filmable tale and turn it into 90 minutes of tedium is a mystery. Despite a spirited performance, Ingrid Pitt spends most of the film pouting or looking distraught because her face is covered in flesh-coloured plasticine. Too literary in intent but not in quality, it lacks in suspense and, crucially, is devoid of all but a modicum of gratuitous sex and violence to compensate.

Almost the polar opposite, *Vampire Circus* (1972), with a budget small even by Hammer standards, a tight shooting schedule and loopy plot, doesn't seem to promise a great deal. But before the opening credits are over you know you are in for a treat. Count Mitterhaus likes nothing better than to dine on small children and roll around naked with the bürgermeister's wife. He is therefore somewhat perturbed when the townsfolk decide to interrupt his frolickings, torch his pad and ram a hunk of wood in his chest. He vows death to the children. Years pass and the plague is taking its toll. What the villagers need is some cheering up, which is why the appearance of the Circus of Nights is most welcome. However, all is not what it seems and the children soon start disappearing. Novice director Robert Young keeps everything moving at a cracking pace, mixing a potent cocktail of sex, violence and surreal imagery. There are boy and girl vampire twins who seduce young children through mirrors. There is Emil, a Romany panther lycanthrope with a sideline in seducing the bürgermeister's daughter. Or how about barrel-organ-playing silent strongman Dave Prowse? There's a cavern full of bats and chained-up decomposing corpses, a catchy steam-organ soundtrack, shock body discoveries and

the wanton slaughter of yuppie students. This is all made even more appealing by the audacious use of in-camera special effects and careful editing. The circus performers slink around like the animals they portray and ooze sexual promise. There are too many enjoyable moments to mention; the only blemish on an otherwise squeaky clean slate is Count Mitterhaus himself – the supposedly irresistible aristocrat is horribly unkind on the eye, but he's not in it for long and gets a highly entertaining death scene.

Brimming with clever ideas and bizarre touches, *Captain Kronos: Vampire Hunter* (1974) bears all the hallmarks of director Brian Clemens' remarkable work on *The Avengers* – outré characterisation, accentuated deep-focus camerawork and ridiculously convoluted plotting. Cap'n Kronos, dashing sword-swinging vampire hunter, travels with his hunch-backed friend Grost: 'What he doesn't know about vampires wouldn't fill a flea's codpiece.' This is fortunate, as they are going to need every trick in the book to free Durward from its curse. Local girls are being found drained of their youth, but who is responsible? Is it hereditary combo Paul and Sarah, whose close-cropped dyed hair was all the rage in the eighteenth century? Is it mild-mannered Dr Marcus, who invited the hunters over, perhaps in a double-bluff manoeuvre? Or the wizened bedridden widow, who couldn't be related to the Karnsteins, oh no? It comes as some surprise that *Captain Kronos* is so unremittingly dull. Caroline Munroe's Carla saved from the stocks at the film's opening just hangs around, looking sultry and providing the good Cap'n with some hay-rolling relief, only to be discarded at the end. Grost, a potentially interesting character, gets two lines of introspection about his appearance, while Kronos himself is too busy playing the swashbuckling

hero to evoke sympathy. It was intended that the film would be the precursor for a television franchise; despite its taut running time, you get the feeling this is a 50-minute TV show dragged to feature length.

By the 1970s, Hammer was really floundering, just staying above water with British-appeal-only successes such as *Mutiny on the Buses* and the lamentable *Love Thy Neighbour*. *The Legend of the Seven Golden Vampires* (Roy Ward Baker, 1974) was a bizarre Hammer/Shaw Brothers crossover designed to stave off the financial pressures of both companies by producing a hybrid kung fu/vampire film. It is a guilty pleasure. Count Dracula travels to China where, as luck would have it, Van Helsing is on a lecture tour, telling academics about the Seven Golden Vampires. Van Helsing fears that a remote village is still terrorised by vampires and launches an expedition, protected by the Hsi brothers and sister Mai Kwei, to overthrow the evil. Unfortunately, director Baker's inexperience regarding Hong Kong filming practices resulted in a rushed production that doesn't fully exploit his talented cast. It's all good fun to watch though and never flags as you are assaulted with a barrage of occasionally breathtaking images. The shambling armies of the dead, commanded by the mounted golden vampires, make for an unforgettable sight. Admittedly, Cushing looks bemused a great deal of the time, but this is a great, messy, exciting romp which never allows coherence to interfere with a jolly good fight. Sadly, though, the film revived the fortunes of neither company.

European Sauce

European cinema has traditionally been viewed as racier than its Hollywood cousin, more liberal and laid back. The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) was formed partly in response to 'art' films becoming acceptable fodder for both the intelligentsia and raincoat brigade and there needed to be a clearer distinction between art and smut. The vampire films of the late 1960s and early 1970s are often associated with the latter, but really they have their roots in the free-thinking liberal art movements of Europe rather than the grindhouse sensibilities of the American exploitation circuit – a possible exception being Richard Blackburn's *Lemora: A Child's Tale of the Supernatural* (1973). At least until their downfall. An early figure who challenged the notions of erotica versus pornography was Roger Vadim, who first scandalised America with *And God Created Woman* (1956), launching Brigitte Bardot onto the international scene. In 1960 he set the foundations, albeit coyly, for the European lesbian vampire film with *Blood and Roses,* a lyrical art film based on *Carmilla*.

This was not the only influence that Italian cinema had on the genre; the early 1960s were a period of frenetic activity in the film industry. Mario Bava's *Mask of Satan* (1961) featured genre icon Barbara Steele as a vengeful witch, back from the grave, seeking the blood of the kindred of her tormentors.

Steele returned in *L'Horrible Secreto del Dr Hitchcock* (Riccardo Freda, 1963), a Sadean tale of necrophilia and unnatural love that replaces *Mask of Satan*'s stark black and white photography with lurid pulp colour. These films helped to provide the basis for an emerging subgenre that mixed sexuality with violence and pulp sensibilities with artistic intention. *L'Ultima preda del vampiro* (*Playgirls and the Vampire,* 1962) was a low-budget black and white example of the genre in the wake of Hammer's worldwide success. When five 'showgirls', their larcenous manager and effete driver are lost in a rainstorm flitting from unpaid hotel bill to unpaid hotel bill, they take refuge, despite clear warnings from the locals, in a remote castle. Excited by the prospect of being in a real castle, they pay no attention to requests that they stay in their rooms at night. By morning, one of them is dead, having apparently fallen from the window – but by night she rises, naked, from the grave to feed on the blood of the living. Imaginative use of limited resources coupled with cheesecake models in skimpy negligées make for a goofily enjoyable romp that is surprisingly explicit for the time. Moody interiors are offset by salacious dance numbers clearly influenced by Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (1960) as our heroine Vera wanders through cobwebbed crypts, laboratories and twisted staircases. There's a family curse to contend with and plenty of pseudo science, but the main focus is on the racier aspects of vampire lore. Still, a surprisingly shocking staking with a flaming torch means that the more horrific aspects of the vampire's curse have not been ignored. *L'Ultima preda del vampiro*, like many films of its time, was marketed in the US as a titillating art picture.

No film so expertly treads the line between art and exploitation than Harry Kümel's sublime contemporising of

the Elizabeth Bathory story *Daughters of Darkness* (*Les Lèvres rouge,* 1971). Ostensibly, the plot is paper thin – newly-weds Valerie and Stefan stop at a hotel in Ostend en route to revealing their secret wedding to Stefan's domineering 'mother'. The only other guests are the glamorous Countess Elizabeth and her companion Ilona. The Countess seems more than smitten with Valerie, while Stefan appears to take a shine to petite Ilona and develops an unhealthy fascination with a spate of brutal murders that have plagued the town. What sets *Daughters of Darkness* apart is the way in which the basic plot reveals subtle nuances on each subsequent viewing, weaving a delicate web of interlinking stories and events. Visually, though, this is a *tour de force* of design and cinematic aesthetics, a ravishing feast for the eyes, with careful composition and symbolism. At the centre of the film lies the ageless Countess Elizabeth, played with aristocratic charm by arthouse favourite Delphine Seyrig (*Last Year at Marienbad*), resplendent in a dazzling array of opulent dresses that glitter and sparkle their way across the screen. The art-deco hotel backdrop adds to the feeling of decadence and never-ending nights of abandon that await any companion to the immortal Countess. Poor Stefan doesn't stand a chance, his marriage unconsummated (there are hints that he may be homosexual), the only fumbling attempts at sex with the beautiful Ilona end in death by flowing water. A lyrical, magical and intellectual delight from start to finish, *Daughters of Darkness* remains one of the most alluring and satisfying vampire films committed to celluloid.

In Joseph de Lacy's (José María Elorietta) *The Curse of the Vampyr* (1971), Carl von Rysselbert invites Dr Materlick and her glamorous assistant Erika to look after his father, the Baron, and help allay the superstitions of the local towns-

people who had staked the delectable Margaret years earlier. But Margaret's death was a short-lived affair and a reversal of the staking process brings her back to enjoy naked lesbian romps with nibbles to go. Right from the extreme wide-angle opening staking this is a marvellously tacky treat, with good pacing, moody atmospherics and surprisingly effective lighting. Even if the plot lurches into unfathomable surrealism at times, this merely adds to its camp charm – it even includes mad hippies on Raleigh chopper bikes! All the vampiric elements are present and correct: ominous warnings, swirly dramatic capes, candles and some surprisingly impressive teeth. The softcore fumblings are as erotic as the flu, but somehow this makes the suggestive scenes far more sensual. Enjoyable, unashamedly low-budget, mild sleaze, which is also full of memorably quotable dialogue – 'Erika! Don't go in there, the lake's full of quicksand!'

Jesus Franco's astonishingly prolific output takes in virtually every genre, but he is predominantly recognised as a director of exploitation films, a number of which are vampire-related, notable for extended scenes of sex, jazz and pubic zooms. With *Vampiros Lesbos* (1971), Franco is in familiar stylistic territory – a repetitive score, fetishism, a longing for eternal love and the essential erotic stage show. Linda feels the calling of Countess Carody (Soledad Miranda) – a performer in Pygmalion style lesbian stage shows. Her psychiatrist thinks she just needs a better lover than the terminally dull Omar. She takes a job with the Countess and, before long, is carried comatose to a bedroom by the bug-eyed jittery Memmet and is visited by the delectable Carody, a relative of the Draculas. Sultry Soledad Miranda starred in several Franco films before tragically dying in a car accident; her role here sizzles with sexuality

and confidence. Unlike some of Franco's output, the tight budget actually improves the film by forcing an insular perspective on proceedings and making for an intensely stylish experience. From the outset, the viewer is assaulted by outrageously wide lenses shooting garishly lit abstractions of sexual violence, with mood-enhancing scorpions and insects edited in to give a detachment from reality. The normally present Franco jazz is replaced by a psychedelic swirl of Hammond organs and sitars to evoke an otherworldly hallucinogenic quality – it remains a defining cult soundtrack and was even used in Tarantino's *Jackie Brown*.

Unfortunately, *Vampiros Lesbos* proved to be a blip on Franco's vampire film output. *El Conde Dracula* (*Bram Stoker's Count Dracula,* 1971), despite claiming to be the most accurate of Dracula adaptations, is also one of the poorest. Christopher Lee had wanted to play Dracula by the book, so the opportunity to be in a true adaptation of Stoker's work must have seemed like a good one. It wasn't. Lee had already worked for Franco, notably on some quickie Fu Manchu films, so perhaps he should have known what he was letting himself in for. The camerawork is all over the place, panning and zooming like a home-video nightmare. The normally reliable Klaus Kinski (excellent in Franco's *Jack the Ripper*) spends a great deal of the film in a straightjacket, presumably to prevent him running off set, and Herbert Lom's performance as Van Helsing is nearly as poor as Franco's own atrocious cameo. Only Lee and Soledad Miranda seem to be making any effort at all, but she is hampered by poor make-up and he by a dazzling array of appalling false moustaches. If you have the stamina, you might just get as far as the menacing stuffed ferret and giraffe scene, by which point you'll be either comatose or in stitches. Completely devoid

of tension or artistic merit, there is no reason to watch this at all.

Nor is there any reason to endure the dreary pornographic nightmare of *Female Vampire* (*The Bare Breasted Countess*, *Erotikill,* 1973), a film that begins with near-naked mute aristocrat, Countess Irina Karlstein (Lina Romay), fellating a grimly attired farmhand to death on some chicken-wire and goes rapidly downhill thereafter. Irina just wants 'an end to this bloody race... the curse of the Karlsteins', but can't help draining the bodily fluids of pretty much anyone, including Anna, an unsympathetic journalist and bad judge of acceptable footware. Even her own bed is not safe from her rapacious sexual appetite. Just when matters threaten to go flaccid, Dr Roberts and Dr Orloff pop up to talk garbled nonsense at each other and find a solution to her interminable problems. No matter how fetishistic or deranged, the allure of the vampire film lies with its implication, sensuality and embracing of the forbidden. There is a sense that perhaps Franco is concerned with questions of loneliness, longing and the pitfalls of immortality – the repetition of the feed, the sexual nature of devouring, the pain in love. However, one more turgid bout of pornographic couplings later and you're left in no doubt that this is merely squalid, depressing and unforgivably dull. Undeterred, Franco is still producing vampire films to this day, including such delights as the *Killer Barbys* films and *Vampire Junction* (2001).

The Blood Spattered Bride (*La Novia ensangrentada*, Vicente Aranda, 1972), does at least acknowledge its primary source as Le Fanu's *Carmilla* in a haunting and claustrophobic story of sexual frustrations and dark passions. Virginal Susan, still in her bridal dress, is nervous about her honeymoon. Afraid of her new husband's predatory sexuality, she imagines a savage

rape and the couple seek alternative accommodation. Big mistake, for they move to Karnstein territory, where Carmilla, descendant of Mircalla Karnstein, offers solace to the nervous newly-weds. Soon, Susan's husband becomes suspicious of the pair and begins to demand his conjugal rights. The languid pace of *The Blood Spattered Bride* can lull the viewer into a false sense of security, but sudden scenes of intense violence, including an extended and bloody multiple stabbing with added cannibalism, punctuate the slowly played-out drama and plot revelations. By imbuing the film with what appear to be hallucinations, the simplistic narrative develops added layers of ambiguity that are denied in more straightforward versions of the story, such as *The Vampire Lovers*. A minor gem of a film that, unfortunately, survives in a number of different prints of varying quality and length. Though the film does contain substantial nudity and gore, its lyrical nature keeps it the right side of being purely exploitative.

Short cuts make long delays in *La Orgía nocturna de los vampiros* (*The Vampires' Night Orgy,* 1973), when a bus full of oddballs decide to cut their losses, following the sudden death of their driver, and hitch up for the night at Tolnia, a village suspiciously absent from the map. Big mistake. Tolnia seems hospitable, but strangely deserted. However, the villagers are not hiding, they are vampires, who emerge the next day to ensure that the visitors stay in town long enough for the delectable Countess to drink her fill. Director León Klimovsky is no stranger to the vampire genre nor to extremely limited finances (occasionally teaming with Spain's top horror star Paul Naschy) and *La Orgía nocturna de los vampiros* makes inventive use of camera perspective to tell its slightly warped twist on vampire archetypes. The

Countess's hospitality extends as far as sacrificing her loyal servants' limbs in order to provide meat for the table, getting her lumbering assistant to hack off the occasional leg with a rather tiny axe. Admittedly, the cast is made up of Euro-sleaze clichés (the voyeur, the doctor, the author, the sexy good girl, the cannon fodder), but the original twists on a well-worn tale make for an unexpected surprise.

In José Larraz's *Vampyres* (1974), the luscious Fran and Miriam lounge around their impressive house and spend the days in the company of their excellent collection of vintage wines. Posing as hitchhikers, they pick up guys, invite them to the mansion, drink their blood and dump the corpses. But Fran becomes inexplicably attached to Ted, keeping him like a living larder, which threatens her relationship with Miriam. The power of *Vampyres* lies with the utmost simplicity of the plot, which unfolds like an adult parable. Larraz manages to make a surprisingly atmospheric job of lighting the house, particularly the cellar when the pair kill off an odious wine snob. Fran and Miriam make a charming couple and are extremely accommodating hostesses; it's just the company they choose to keep that lets them down. The lack of explanation, the beguiling pre-credit sequence and the subtle conclusion do a lot to offset the clearly limited budget.

After the mid-1970s, the European vampire film, with its blend of art and smut, became less prevalent. Eschewing any erotica was Werner Herzog's unnecessary remake of *Nosferatu*. Herzog was one of the many star auteurs of New German Cinema. A towering madman who would drag his cast through jungles and over mountains to realise his grandiose visions, his love/hate relationship with Klaus Kinski produced some of that movement's most astonishing films. *Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht* (1979) is not one of them.

Herzog's version of Murnau's classic is concerned with decay and the prolonged agonies of suffering, something that is drummed home in every scene. When Dracula moves into town he brings plague and pestilence with him. He has amorous attentions on local resident Lucy, but her fiancé Jonathan seems unconcerned due to a slight case of vampirism. Rather than being 'as profound as a thousand nights', this film is a soporific, enlivened only by some monumentally pretentious and unintentionally hilarious dialogue. Kinski looks like Gary Numan in a beanie, turning Max Schreck's outstandingly creepy performance into one that lurches from horror to stupidity. Herzog's inspiration for the camerawork seems to come from Franco's miserable *El Conde Dracula*, although, to be fair, the painterly use of light in some murky interiors does recall the Grand Masters. Matters are not improved by a ghastly, morbid requiem accompanying even a pleasant walk in the mountains. Only the charming rats that litter the coffins lighten things up – they are so adorable and fluffy you want to cuddle each and every one of them – probably not the reaction Herzog had in mind. Unforgivably ponderous, pompous and dismal, by the time you reach the startling shot of a dead horse in the market square you have the distinct impression that Herzog has been flogging it. Kinski returned, with hair, in *Vampire in Venice* (1988).

Only Partly Reality – The King of the Vampires

In the world of vampire cinema one person reigns supreme. Jean Rollin's persistence has made him the world's premier producer of vampire films over the last four decades, yet many people have not heard of him and some of those who have wish they hadn't! Rollin's is not a world of action, dynamics and quick editing – it is slow, languid and mood-drenched. His detractors point to dull, plotless non-narratives with naked people talking gibberish, pointless focus on ornaments and too many beaches. His admirers appreciate the visual poetry, the expressive use of light and form, the bravura lack of concern for bland linear narrative structures and the total cinematic experience rendered on horrendously small budgets.

Such an intense style is not generated in a vacuum; Rollin's influences include surrealism, pulp serials and underground comics. His visual flair reflects works by painters such as Delvaux and the collages of Clovis Trouille. Much of his cinematic style derives from Feuillade's *Les Vampires* and shares the same love of crime novels and free-form expression. Rollin's first short, *Les Amours jaunes* (1958), was made when the director was just 20 years old. His debut feature, *Le Viol du vampire* (1968), 'a melodrama in two parts', was an unexpected scandal on its release, a black and white

poem of exaggerated expressions and penny-dreadful emotions. Part one tells of four vampire sisters living in their château, surrounded by intolerance and wary of strangers who purport to be able to cure their affliction. Part two shows the Queen of the Vampires overseeing the case of the four sisters, who had died at the end of part one, arranging a Great Blood Wedding that will see the vampires rise triumphant once more. *Le Viol du vampire* was greeted with incredulity by a violent audience at its Paris premiere during the heady student riots in May 1968. The aftermath of the riots would see fevered output from the *nouvelle vague* directors, but for Rollin his debut would prove as much a curse as a blessing. All his preoccupations are laid bare: a love of the beach, châteaux, naked women and, of course, vampires. Filmed in a style that recalls Cocteau or the early Expressionists, *Viol* mocks the viewer with half-grasped narrative turns and fragmented ideas. Characters die, relive and die again, in an audacious move that enabled Rollin to produce a feature-length film out of two shorts. With Felliniesque parades and theatre, medical experiments, Sax Rohmer style tortures and blind beach skittles, *Viol* paved the way for Rollin's subsequent work.

In contrast to the black and white artiness of *Viol*, *La Vampire nue* (1969) is a searingly colourful pulp melodrama. Pierre inadvertently becomes embroiled in a bizarre blue-hooded suicide cult with exotic rituals involving a captured girl. Told that she suffers from a rare blood disorder, Pierre resolves to free the poor thing. Featuring medical experiments with colour-coded hooded doctors, animal masks, rhythmic dancing, stunning fetish costumes and blazing guns, *La Vampire nue* comes from a distinctly European school of science fiction. The vampires here are immortal, calm and

socially minded, existing in a different dimension and offering hope, not death. Rollin creates a wonderful sense of mystery and revelation, with beautiful symmetries in the cinematography matched by the structured yet fragile plot of this sumptuous, decadent and bizarre film.

In *Le Frisson des vampires* (1970), Isa and Antoine spend their wedding night at the castle of Isa's recently deceased cousins. Looked after by two nubile servants, Isa's grief leads her to reject her husband and she sleeps alone. At the stroke of midnight she is whisked away by a seductress crawling from the innards of a grandfather clock. Her cousins, it seems, are not quite dead – vampire hunters of the highest calibre, they have been turned into the very beasts they sought to destroy, living on the blood of their hypnotised servants (non-identical twins, a recurring motif of Rollin's) to prevent needless slaughter. Stylistically, this is one of Rollin's most astonishing films, where narrative is secondary to emotion. The camera employs dizzying 360-degree pans and tightly framed close-ups which complement his harsh but impressive use of sound – animal screeches, portentous groans and an aggressive soundtrack by Acanthus, which all add to the sense of unease.

Probably Rollin's most infamous film, *Requiem for a Vampire* (1971) is a lyrical blend of longing and brutal sexuality set against a backdrop of sado-masochism and crime. Marie and Michelle, dressed as clowns, are on the run, seeking shelter at a remote château. The castle is the refuge of the last vampire, a mournful figure who resides in his ostentatious mausoleum. One of his companions, Erica, is undergoing the change from human to vampire, a fate that awaits Marie and Michelle. From the opening shot of clowns brandishing a gun through a car window, you know this is

going to be an audacious and pulpy ride. Rollin has the impertinence to tell his tale almost entirely visually, for the first 40 minutes there are three lines of dialogue and all of them irrelevant. In the château, Marie and Michelle come across the sumptuously androgynous Erica playing requiem organ music to a congregation of robed skeletons. Despite the lyrical and illogical juxtaposition of shots this is one of Rollin's more coherent narratives, a lament for a dying race. Locked up with Erica for all eternity, the last vampire is a monster by nature, amoral but sympathetic – his final incarceration inevitable and strangely moving. To enhance the agelessness, Rollin shoots the château with as much care and attention as he lavishes on his heroines, the stones becoming another character in this intensely visual poem.

Requiem does, at times, threaten to stray into the realm of pornography, a genre that Rollin would pursue during leaner periods in his career under a variety of pseudonyms. His more personal and idiosyncratic films, despite their quality, never really set the box office on fire. *La Rose de fer* (1973) marked a departure from his previous vampire films, a surreal tale of two people lost and scared, overlooked by a cold landscape and the chill of stone. *Les Demoniacs* (1974) is an exceptional film, a comic book come to life; replete with beaches, twins and cruel sexuality. *Lèvres de sang* (*Lips of Blood,* 1974) is an elegiac fable about memory and loss in which, as in *Le Vampire nue,* the beach represents happiness and sanctuary as opposed to *Les Demoniacs* where it is the scene for forced shipwrecks and rape.

Rollin's refusal to tone down his personal films to appeal to a wider market or stray into hardcore meant that subsequent vampire output would be sporadic. Rollin moved into zombie territory with the enjoyable *Les Raisins de la mort*

(*The Grapes of Death,* 1978), but returned to vampires in *Fascination* (1979). Eva and Elisabeth enjoy a glass of fresh blood at the local abattoir while they plan a big party at their spacious château, but find themselves held hostage by Mark, a red-coated, gun-toting scallywag blaggard. A series of cat and mouse games follow, where the captives become captors. Guns blaze, dapper criminals make off with stolen gold and non-identical twins sup blood and frolic. A fairy tale for adults dripping with decadence, *Fascination* unravels, like a puzzle, towards its ceremonious conclusion. Rollin places the film in a half-glimpsed Edwardian setting, in which the two girls waltz to a wind-up gramophone. Seeing Eva, cloaked in black, cutting through the gang with a scythe is a difficult image to forget, but even more so as she returns to the fold of her home, mist on the lake, instrument of death in her hands. Less intense than his previous films *Fascination* looks forward to a more commercial style but one that does not compromise the integrity of Rollin's vision.

Following the sporadically shocking *La Nuit des traquées* (*Night of the Hunted,* 1980) and the shot-in-a-weekend Nazi zombie flick, *Zombie Lake* (1981), Rollin produced his masterpiece, *La Morte vivante* (*The Living Dead Girl*, 1982). Catherine Valmont is raised from the dead after toxic waste is dumped near her tomb. Hélène, Catherine's blood-sister from childhood, rushes to the château when she realises that her friend is alive. There she finds the bodies of Catherine's victims, their throats ripped out to feed her hunger, but she vows nonetheless to look after her dear, no-longer departed, friend. Combining the lyrical poetry of his other works with a strong script and exceptional acting, *La Morte vivante* provides the perfect balance of eroticism, blood-letting and art. What sets it apart from Rollin's earlier work is the almost

commercial coherence to proceedings – you sympathise with both characters, for a situation which is both tragic and horrific. Rollin's effortless mixing of past and present is never confusing and always relevant. His camera is slow and restrained. Truly an emotional, sad, beautiful work of rare maturity. It would be 13 years before Rollin would make another vampire film.

Les Deux orphelines vampires (*Two Orphan Vampires,* 1995), a wry twist on the popular nineteenth-century book *Les Deux orphelines,* which Rollin adapted from his own petite novel, came at a time when there was a resurgence of interest in his work. As the title suggests, Rollin's fascination with non-identical twins had not diminished – the two vampire orphans tip-tap their way through the cobbled streets, white sticks in hand, only able to see at night. The film has the qualities of a contemporary fairy tale through its juxtaposition of the mundane of everyday life with the fabulously designed costumes of the two vampires. There is, however, a sense of emotional detachment that renders the film slightly cold but perfectly decorative.

La Fiancée de Dracula (2002) is a near timeless piece of filmmaking, a paean to an older generation of free association and tight composition. Perhaps his most ritualistic of films, it is the perfect distillation of Rollin's exacting school of direction. His characters, some from a parallel dimension, have lost none of their sense of the bizarre or the surreal; of particular note are the nuns who puff on oversized cigars or Sherlock Holmes style pipes. The final extended scene of sacrifice – the near-naked bride tied to a groyne on a beach as the tide laps around her body – is both beautiful and cruel.

Jean Rollin's idiosyncratic cinema of erotic vampire twins, beaches, sado-masochism and poetic longing mark him as a

true auteur of vampire cinema. He has declared *La Nuit des horloges* (2007) to be the last film he will make, a summation of the themes and images that have typified his remarkable oeuvre.

East Is Blood Red

Stay Away, the Dead is Coming – Chinese Vampires

Supernatural happenings and stirrings from beyond the grave have made regular contributions to the wonderful world of Hong Kong cinema since its inception. Ghost stories have always been an important part of Chinese folklore, so it was inevitable that cinema would turn to these for inspiration. Despite occasional forays into the world of vampire-like spirits, such as the demonic closing of the achingly beautiful *Enchanting Shadow* (1958), the Chinese hopping vampire film began to emerge as a genre in its own right in the 1970s, partly in response to the Shaw Brothers' *The Legend of the Seven Golden Vampires*. The Chinese term for these is *jiangshi dianying*, or 'corpse film', the term 'vampire' being coined later to relate it to Western concepts of vampirism.

Many films use the term 'zombie' or 'vampire' interchangeably, but generally the vampire tends to appear as a more singular entity, like its Western counterpart. The key figure in the development of Hong Kong action genres was the hugely influential Sammo Hung. In 1982 he starred in the jet-black horror comedy *The Dead and the Deadly* (Wu Ma), a macabre tale about marital infidelity, inheritance and greed. Our hapless hero Wah Li (Hung) ends up fighting for

his life and afterlife when a devious con trick gets out of hand. With a droll and sudden ending, *The Dead and the Deadly* works like an insular cousin for the earlier, more ambitious, though less tightly structured, *Close Encounters of the Spooky Kind* (1980). In this film, Hung plays Brave Cheung, an amiable buffoon who is encouraged to spend nights in haunted houses by his money-pinching friends, who set up ghoulish special effects to con him. All too soon, though, genuine spirits emerge. One key sequence sees Hung spend the night in the company of a recently deceased, inanimate corpse. It doesn't stay that way – folklore dictates that should a black cat jump over a dead body the corpse will become a vampire! One leaping pussy later and Cheung's quiet night is seriously disturbed by the relentless, bloodthirsty, hopping menace. Much remarkable kung fu mayhem ensues.

The success of *Close Encounters of the Spooky Kind* left a slew of horror comedies in its wake, but Sammo was well ahead of the game. His production company, BoHo Films, negotiated a relatively large budget for what would become the quintessential hopping vampire film – *Mr Vampire* (Ricky Lau, 1985). Kau and his two useless assistants are minding the boss's mortuary business. In three days' time they need to re-bury Mr Yam because of a bad interment, the corpse currently being held in a high-security coffin. But it bursts free and terrorises the community. If that were not enough, Kau has other problems to contend with; he is left with one assistant slowly turning into a vampire and the other hopelessly devoted to a demon lover with electric hair and a detachable head. A milestone in Hong Kong cinema, *Mr Vampire* launched a seemingly endless stream of sequels, spin-offs and imitators and its star Lam Ching-Ying would

become forever linked with the grey-haired dynamic vampire hunter. *Mr Vampire* holds true to the edict 'the original and still the best', with its effortless blend of genuine scares, slapstick and acrobatics. Mr Vampire himself is a towering, gruesome hopping vampire whose every jump shudders the earth – a truly awe-inspiring figure of fear. But, crucially, the film offsets his menace with 'Three Stooges' style kung fu capers and mad special effects. After a manic opening, *Mr Vampire* bombards the audience with a bewildering array of myths, customs and weapons used in the control of the living dead. There is the chicken-blood-soaked twine that can be used to bind a corpse to its coffin or create a shield, the flying sword of coins, incantations made with hastily precise calligraphy to curtail the corpse's movement and the inevitable sticky rice. Sticky rice has a number of uses: it can be sprinkled liberally around to dissuade the casual hopping corpse; can draw out the poison in an infected wound; or a single grain can be ignited for use in complex and dexterous spell casting. But sticky rice is more expensive than the ordinary type, so inevitably some unscrupulous merchant will mix in some of the regular variety – with catastrophic and often hilarious results. The seamless blend of martial arts, Hammer horror and *Carry On* style humour is infectious and exhilarating.

This perfect blend of screams of laughter and screams of horror was going to be a tough act to follow. *Mr Vampire II* (1986) is played far more for laughs than its predecessor, though it still offers a jolt or two during the journey. One scene involves our heroes, trapped in a basement with a deadly hopping vampire… and slow-motion gas. Slow-motion gas does exactly what it says on the canister, but, in a stroke of sheer genius, director Ricky Lau elected not to

film the chase in slow-mo, oh no, he gets everyone to overact slooooowly, greatly enhancing the humour of the scene due to its total lunacy. While not in the same league as its forerunner, there is still an awful lot to enjoy in *Mr Vampire II*. Further episodes in the series followed. *Magic Cop* (aka *Mr Vampire V*) was a modern-day tale of traditional ghostbusting set in bustling Hong Kong with Michiko Nishiwaki as a gorgeously gowned Japanese ghost and Lam Ching-Ying as a spell-casting cop. Away from the series, others cashed in on the films' successes – for example, *New Mr Vampire* (*Kung Fu Vampire Buster,* 1986) is an unconnected film that was released before the official *Mr Vampire* sequel.

Lam Ching-Ying reappeared in all manner of vampire films, from *The Ultimate Vampire* (1991) to the successful TV series *Vampire Expert*, but perhaps one of his more bizarre outings (despite its formulaic structure) was *The Musical Vampire* (1990). Two apprentice mortuary assistants Ah-Hoo and Ah-Keung, under the watchful eye of their incompetent nose-picking master, like nothing better than to play games with the recently deceased. Ah-Hoo is charged with taking the corpse of Yam Ting-Tong to the village so that they can afford him proper burial rights, but, as so often happens, Yam is corpse-napped and sold to a Nobel Prize-seeking French anatomist who creates a rampaging monster. As the body count rises, Police Captain Tsao is given the task of capturing the errant vampire, so fits his sergeants with fang-proof collars and bright yellow curse sticks, to no avail. But Yam's granddaughter Chu-Chu has a musical watch which pacifies her deceased relative by endlessly repeating *London Bridge is Falling Down* – until it breaks, that is. The only thing to do is to hire an ex-police orchestra of blind musicians to play the tune. Obvious really. That still leaves the problem of how to

kill Yam for good – Taoist yellow umbrella merry go-rounds and huge slabs of stone dropped from a great height have no effect, which leaves only acupuncture as a solution. But do you know all the pressure points, including the, ahem, naughty bits? *The Musical Vampire* is an utterly bonkers addition to the genre, but manages to be scary as well as very funny. It reaches its zenith in the scenes where Lam Ching-Ying sneakily tries every trick in the book to dispatch the hysterically whiny vampire. Everyone seems to be enjoying themselves immensely, hamming it uproariously and even managing to fit in a Benny Hill style chase and a Monty Python 16-ton weight gag. The final encounter is a real scream – even decapitation proves useless as Yam's disgruntled head frowns disapprovingly at his astonished assailant. When set up like an undead porcupine with acupuncture needles he looks genuinely pitiful, but the *coup de grâce* is truly wince-inducing and very funny.

The differences and similarities between the Western and Eastern vampire are explored in the supremely silly *Doctor Vampire* (1991). In England Dr Chiang's car breaks down and he seeks shelter in a nearby castle, in fact a vampire brothel. He loses his virginity and blood to Alice, and then returns home. Alice is tasked by her master to retrieve the doctor because of the exceptional quality of his plasma. Chiang brags about his sexual exploits to colleagues, being careful not to let his girlfriend, Nurse May, overhear. Chiang begins to turn, although he hasn't yet tasted human blood. May suspects that he is sleeping with sexy vamp Alice (he is, in his coffin-like wardrobe!), so she concocts a love potion from her blood and feeds it to Chiang with disastrous results. *Doctor Vampire* is laughter medicine, available without prescription. Hong Kong's 'Carry On Vamping' misses

nothing in its deconstruction of both the Western and Eastern vampire film, gleefully embracing all genres. Chiang's vampirism is Western and he wastes no time posing like Béla Lugosi, but he also wants to maintain his cultural identity, so is delighted to receive a traditional Chinese outfit from his colleagues and to hop around for effect. Loopy for all the right reasons – the hospital has a strict operation quota, so the doctors give a Triad boss needless surgery: 'You circumcised me because of a cold, now you want to remove my appendix because of a headache!' Featuring an undead boy scout staked with a broom, elephantine syringes of green acid, psychic blood transfusions and a battle between a medical laser and the laser-like stare of the master vampire, *Doctor Vampire* is messy medical mayhem.

If *Doctor Vampire* is a *Carry On* film, then *Vampires Settle on Police Camp* (1990) plays more like *Police Academy*. Inspector Chan killed a family in a previous life and now they are cursed to be vampires until they can drag him to the King of Hell. They attempt this by terrorising the police training camp where Chan works with Officer Tong and the newly transferred brothel-buster Madame Lee. To break the curse, Chan must find nine people of the same birth year. Unfortunately his only hope lies with a wild bunch of partying lecherous reprobates nominally intended to be police recruits. 'It's a mess!' screams Madame Lee and you find yourself agreeing with her assertion. The *Police Academy* formula is 'enhanced' by the addition of a family of vampires and a deluge of kung fu. It's truly awful but livened up by some acrobatic wire-work and lots of people being smacked through doors. The vampires start with an horrific attack on the camp but are powerless against the raw stupidity of the recruits. The only one with any chance is kid vamp, who

breakdances, gets drunk and surreally rides around the girls' dormitory on a stuffed giraffe, but suffers humiliation when two men urinate glitter into his face. Don't ask. Madness on a budget, it seems as though the whole thing was made up on the spot, with speeded-up chases, sudden jump edits and excruciating sound. Not without its campy charms though.

Vampires also crop up in the sidelines of other, more fantasy-based productions such as Ching Siu-Tung's visually inventive *A Chinese Ghost Story* trilogy, as well as other period dramas and indescribable quickies such as the deranged Jackie Chan vehicle *Fantasy Mission Force* (1982), which features a brief sequence in a house of vampires who offer toilet paper to the unsuspecting visitors! In *Tsui Hark's Vampire Hunters* (Wellson Chin, 2002) Chin gives the period drama a modern sheen in an energetic fantasy of fast edits and dizzying camera angles. Four monks trained in vampire hunting seek the destruction of the Vampire King, who is raising his minions to decimate the countryside. At the King's residence the family specialises in preserving their long line of relatives using a combination of drying techniques and wax, not a sensible collection of ornaments to have around when the local zombie wrangler has been employed to cause maximum undead chaos. Harsh blue and red lighting makes the film seem like a gothic comic book come to life. A single vampire can decimate a team of martial artists – breaking free of heavy chains, it flies through bamboo forests with an appetite for blood and pandemonium. Able to burrow through the earth at frightening speeds or burst from a grave to annihilate the opposition, the King Vampire is a formidable foe. The vampires' breath can suck the very life from their victims – it drains from their eyes and mouths in a fog of blood until a pool of sludge and bone splash indecorously

to the ground. The mix of traditional Chinese vampire films and *John Carpenter's Vampires* provides an enjoyable blend of styles mixed with a sprinkling of comedy and romance to offset the occasionally extreme comic-book gore. Yes, it's incongruous but it's also a whole lot of martial-arts, vampire-busting fun.

The influence of *Blade* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* can be seen in *The Twins Effect* (2003), an enjoyable action adventure that combines martial arts and wire-work with CGI. Reeve and Gypsy are vampire slayers, defeating their foes by a combination of kung fu, special potions, gadget-laden weaponry and good luck. Arch bad-boy vampire The Duke wants to rule over the human world, something he believes he can do by opening the book of *Day for Night*. In order to do this, he must drain the blood of the six vampire princes. The remaining vamp on his sanguinal wish list is Kazaf, a good vampire who just happens to be in love with Reeve's sister, Helen. The opening is remarkable as we see the vampire-hunter team take on a trainload of undead. A cloud of bats swarm through the carriage as Reeve stumbles across recently devoured bodies that begin to turn, bursting through the windows in a shower of glass. Gypsy fights off a snarling tattooed vampire, ripping off his earring, pile-driving his crotch and kicking him down a flight of stairs. With multi-purpose extendable swords they dispatch as many of the beasts as they can, exploding them into wisps of floating ash that lazily dissipate in the night-time breeze. A melange of different styles, along with comedy relief from a brief Jackie Chan cameo, means that while the film engages, it occasionally feels incongruous. Gillian Chung (Gypsy) and Charlene Choi (Helen), known as pop sensation 'Twins', put in admirable performances, returning in the unrelated period

martial-arts effects extravaganza *The Twins Effect 2* (*The Huadu Chronicles: Blade of the Rose,* 2004).

In Clarence Fok and Wong Jing's *Dating a Vampire* (2006), two medical students move into a soon-to-be demolished apartment block in order to get some peace and quiet in the run-up to their exams. Unfortunately for them, room 666 is occupied by two vampiric succubi and their vampire slave Jade. Having fed on the blood of 999 bad men they need one good one to allow them to walk unscathed in the light of day. Pervert student Cheun is half turned into a vampire (his left side!), so the desperate medics team up with their girlfriends and cash-starved TV psychic Mister M to get to the root of the problem. *Dating a Vampire* shows Fok's predilection for extreme lighting, particularly in the vampires' Tardis-like apartment suite that appears to have been turned into a disco brothel, complete with glitterball. The plot veers wildly from comedy to tragedy via horror as the restless camerawork, strobe effects and flashy editing try to disguise the film's limited budget to little avail. However, the focus on the sympathetic Jade and the likeable Eric makes this a passable addition to the contemporary vampire film.

Vamping All Over the World

Myths and folklore about bloodsuckers are prevalent in most world cultures and, by extension, in most world cinema. Sadly, a book this size cannot be exhaustive, so what follows in this chapter is a selection of entrées, bite-sized samples of world vampire film production.

Mexico is well-known for its love of horror movies. Indeed, Universal shot a Spanish language version of *Dracula* (1931) back-to-back with the Tod Browning adaptation to tap into the burgeoning Mexican market. In the 1950s, Fernando Méndez directed the imaginative *El Vampiro* (1957), starring Germán Robles as the impeccably suave Count Karol de Lavud. Marta returns to the family hacienda, but finds herself under the eye of neighbour Mr Duvel, in fact Count Karol on a mission to turn her, like her aunt, into a creature of the night. The crisp black and white photography and inventive use of in-camera effects makes *El Vampiro* a compelling addition to the genre. Although many of the trappings are familiar – the cobweb-strewn crypts, misty nights, lack of reflections in mirrors – the twists in character development (almost everyone has a secret side) and the evocative vampire attacks make it a classic. Germán Robles' imposing Count is as smooth and aristocratic as they come, one of cinema's great vampires.

Naturally, Robles returned in *El Ataud Del Vampiro*

(*Vampire's Coffin,* 1957). Immensely popular, countless horror films followed in its wake, some based on local legends, others being influenced by Hollywood or Hammer. Yet more borrowed elements from science fiction, producing some unexpected results. *El Grito de la muerte* (1959), *El Mundo de los vampiros* (1961) and *El Barón del terror* (1962) all feature elements of vampirism. The latter is particularly bizarre: a reincarnated Baron, executed by the Mexican inquisition, is brought back to life and seeks vengeance on the descendants of his tormentors by sucking their brains out with an extendable forked tongue. The ever-popular Lucha Libre, or wrestling films, also occasionally featured vampires and even Dracula himself, often fighting top film wrestler Santo. *Santo vs the Vampire Women* (1961), *Santo and the Treasure of Dracula* (1968), *Santo and the Vengeance of the Vampire Women* (1969), *Santo and the Blue Demon vs the Monsters* (1969) and *Santo and the Blue Demon vs Dracula and the Wolfman* (1972) contain plenty of enjoyable stretchy-pants undead action.

Perhaps one of the more startling feature debuts is Guillermo del Toro's *Cronos* (1992), in which a sixteenth-century alchemist creates the Cronos device, a clockwork instrument that extends the user's life, but at a price. Tycoon De la Guardia and his nose-job-obsessed delinquent son Angel seek the mechanism, now in the hands of antique dealer Jesus Gris. Gris is addicted to the device, which restores his youth but also gives him a craving for human blood. Angel unwisely kills Gris, but he returns from beyond the grave and, aided by his granddaughter Aurora, seeks revenge. *Cronos* is a magnificent curiosity, a gothic Mexican horror tale that engages from the opening. Notable is del Toro's use of insects and timepieces, motifs that run through all of his work, be it Hollywood mainstream features, or his

more personal Spanish-language films. This is a strangely moving, intimate film, at times morbid and sticky, but never exploitational or crass. Del Toro would return to vampire movies with *Blade II*.

Prolific Argentinian filmmaker Emilio Vierya specialised in low-budget quickies packed with bountiful sex, violence and psychedelic excess. *La Sangre de vírgenes* (*Blood of the Virgins*, 1967) sees a group of young hipsters on holiday forced to spend the night at a haunted residence when their van runs out of petrol. Before you can say 'nosferatu', the nubile girls have gone missing and Ofelia, a vampire turned on her wedding night by her lover, is wrestling with her conscience and her bloodlust.

Among the most financially successful of Russian films is Timur Bekmambetov's adaptation of Sergei Lukyanenko's superb *Watch Trilogy*, which converts the novels' low-key/high-stakes tales into hugely enjoyable high-octane fantasies. In *Night Watch* (2004), we are introduced to the uneasy truce between the two Others, forces of Light and Dark. The Night Watch ensures that the Dark are kept in line, the Day Watch monitor the Light. When two vampires turn rogue, threatening exposure of the existence of the Others to an oblivious humankind, Anton of the Night Watch is given the task of investigating the case. The combination of crowd-pleasing spectacle (medieval battles, whirlwinds of crows, plentiful pile-ups) and imaginative special effects (swords drawn from a spinal column, a vampire exposed to light loses the back of his head in a cloud of ash and dust), coupled with a tight, dense script makes for superior entertainment. It's all the more impressive considering the ridiculously limited budget, which managed to stretch to shape-shifting and descents into hallucinogenic otherworlds

co-existing with our own. The marginally less hyperbolic *Day Watch* (2006) followed with the final part of the trilogy *Twilight Watch* eagerly anticipated, at the time of writing.

Although Japan does have tales of bloodsucking monsters – *kyûketsuki* are bloodsucking demons that are averse to daylight and killed by decapitation – the main form of vampirism in Japanese cinema comes from the Western model. There are exceptions, of course, most notably Nobuo Nakagawa's *Onna kyûketsuki* (*Vampire Woman,* 1959). Clearly influenced by European horror films, Michio Yamamoto's loose trilogy of vampire movies *Night of the Vampire* (1970), *Lake of Dracula* (1971) and *The Evil of Dracula* (1974), were produced by the famous ToHo studios. *Night of the Vampire* tries too hard to make a story of a cursed family bridge the gap between East and West, whereas *Lake of Dracula* has scant regard for traditional Japanese folklore. Akiko is compelled to paint the image of a ghastly eye, a memory of a recurring nightmare she had as a child. A mysterious crate is delivered to the lakeside resort and, inside, the body of Dracula stirs. He bewitches the living to do his bidding and infects his new-found brides with the vampire's curse. One of these brides is Akiko's sister. Yamamoto's film takes elements from Hammer and Universal and places them in the Japanese countryside with deliberately surreal results, giving the vampires' scenes a jarring, otherworldly feel that is reflected in the dark cinematography. Dracula himself, with his high-necked collarless shirt, is menacing when commanding his minions, his pallid blue-white face arresting. When he attacks, his eyes turn vivid orange, his teeth yellow and sharp as he tears into his victims' necks. *The Evil of Dracula* is stylistically similar, but feels more contemporary than its rural-based predecessor. It also features another graphic and

impressive denouement with the staked vampire screaming in agony while melting, then crumbling before our eyes.

Japan's prodigious output of animated series has resulted in many vampires being rendered in anime as opposed to live action. *Vampire Hunter D* (1985), based on the novels by Hideyuki Kikuchi, is set 10,000 years in the future where the cowboy-attired D gets on with the business of ridding the world of vampires and other assorted demons manufactured by the Nobility, who wisely stayed in fallout shelters when the nuclear bombs dropped. D is suited to his role as, being half-vampire, he is just strong enough to defeat his prey. An early example of anime's dark side being exported to the West, *Vampire Hunter D* remains a popular film with its blend of science fiction, horror and the western. A belated sequel, *Vampire Hunter D: Bloodlust* (2000), follows D's attempts to rescue a kidnapped girl before she is turned… or to kill her if she becomes a vampire. In *Kyûketsuki Miyu* (*Vampire Princess Miyu*, 1997), Miyu, along with her companions Lava, a violent brooding executor, and Shiina, a *kawaii* rabbit-like spirit with an enlarged bloodshot eye, are given the unenviable task of vanquishing *shinma*, demon spirits illegally running riot on the martial plane. A brooding TV-series full of inventive angles and unexpected storylines, *Vampire Princess Miyu* is more concerned with the fragility of life than gore-drenched battles, although it does contain a fair share of those too. Far more action-based, although still carefully plotted, is *Hellsing* (2001, 2006), with an aggressive angular style that makes its titular anti-hero as grotesque as the beasts he seeks to destroy.

The short anime *Blood: The Last Vampire* (2000) follows the violent adventures of schoolgirl Saya, the last of the original vampires, tasked with expelling the mutant vampire offspring

from Japan. Posing undercover at a school adjacent to an American airbase where suspected beasts reside, she needs all her cunning and a sharp antique sword to defeat the demonic foe. Sumptuous, glowing animation, emotional depth and exemplary design make *Blood* a visual treat, although one that is over far too soon to be satisfactory. A belated TV spin-off, *Blood+* (2005), followed. The superior anime series *Trinity Blood* (2005), based upon a series of novels by Sunao Yoshida, imagines a post-apocalyptic future where the effects of nuclear destruction are compounded by a virus that turns much of the surviving population into vampiric creatures called Methuselah. Pitted against this is AX, a small group of disparate crusaders, including a robotic priest and a holographic nun, who are hired by the Vatican to put down those condemned by the Catholic church, in an enjoyable but bizarre cross of genres.

Japan is not alone in producing vampire animation. Although there are cartoons such as *Mona the Vampire* (1999) and *Count Duckula* (1988) aimed at children, the adult-themed Cuban feature *¡Vampiros en La Habana!* (*Vampires in Havana,* 1985) certainly is not. Unaware that he is a vampire, trumpet-playing Joseph Amadeus Dracula can survive daylight because he has been drinking a potion created by his scientist uncle. When two opposing vampire syndicates from each side of the Atlantic obtain the potion they use it in fundamentally different ways, but both to make money.

In the polar extremes of Sweden, Anders Banke's *Frostbiten* (2006) is a fresh twist on the vampire film with the humans at a serious disadvantage, at least for the one month a year when northern Scandinavia is plunged into Arctic night. Newly divorced Annika and her goody-two-shoes daughter Saga set up a new life in a remote town, where Annika gets

a medical job specialising in blood research. Saga is persuaded to join the revelry at a local party, but the teenage ravers are unaware that the punch has been spiked with strange red pills. These are experimental drugs that turn the recipient into a new breed of vampire, thirsty for blood. A widescreen scream from start to finish, *Frostbiten* relies as much on laughs as scares in an enjoyable blend of medical hokum and teenage partying mixed with the odd gore effect and prosthetic/CGI monsters. After taking the sinister red pill, the unfortunate user finds that they can read thoughts and even, *Dr Dolittle* style, talk with the animals. The snowy settings make for a pleasant change (also seen in the similar environment of *30 Days of Night*) and the general, laid-back combination of blood, social embarrassment and drug humour do a lot to endear the film to its audience.

A variant of the Lilith style vampire can be found in Indonesia and Malaysia. The *pontianak* or *kuntilanak* often takes the form of a beautiful woman, an undead spirit who can metamorphose into a terrifying beast that kills men or steals the blood of babies. A series of films were made in Malaysia, starting with *Pontianak* (1956) and concluding with *Pontianak Gua Musang* (1964); all proved to be very popular. The *pontianak* film has recently been revived, although censorship in Malaysia has resulted, ironically, in films that are less overtly horrific than their predecessors. *Pontianak Harum Sundal Malam* (2004) proved popular enough to spawn a sequel in 2005.

Indonesia's similarly themed (though less censored) *Kuntilanak* (2006) also proved a success, with a rushed sequel put into production the same year. Also from Indonesia, *Mystics in Bali* (*Leák,* 1981) is based upon another form of the undead – the *penanggalan*. The *penanggalan* also targets

babies, the unborn and pregnant mothers, appearing as a frightful floating head with lungs and intestines dangling from the bloody stump of a neck, drifting in the air detached from its temporarily inanimate body. *Mystics in Bali* is one of many films telling of these terrifying creatures. Catherine is keen to extend her knowledge of international black arts by learning Leák magic, a form that can give the user tremendous powers, apparent immortality and the ability to shape-shift – but at a dreadful price to any local villagers. Accepted as a disciple to a haggard witch, Catherine learns the secrets of Leák magic but payment for these lessons is harsh – she becomes a *penanggalan* in order to give her teacher eternal beauty. *Mystics in Bali* is undeniably imaginative, overcoming the limitations of its budget with the sheer nerve of realising such memorable moments as super-long tongues draining bottles of blood and Catherine's detached head and oesophagus killing a mother in labour by sucking the baby from her. Rhythmic music with analogue synthesisers drives the film towards its thunderbolt magic climax. The Leák witch, different every time we see her and, bar one occasion, hideously malformed, is a constantly cackling creation of gleeful malevolence, manipulating the eager student for her nefarious purposes. Quite simply bizarre, but always engaging and inventive.

The Thai film *The Curse of the Sun* (2006) tries to update the vampire legend in modern-day Thailand by having its hero Totsapark return from the dead after his fatal car crash coincides with the resurrecting power of an eclipse – he is brought back to half-life by the evil Dr Pun, who turns him into an indestructible killing machine. Although jam-packed with action, *The Curse of the Sun* relies too heavily on obscene amounts of gunfire to realise the frequent supernat-

ural and scientific elements of the plot, but does retain some charm for being a bizarre romance film that comes across as *Terminator* for the undead.

Bollywood's premier producers of horror with a side order of sauciness, The Ramsay Brothers, have often turned to Western films as a springboard for their creative talents. *Bandh Darwaza* (1990) is their take on *Dracula*. At Black Mountain, the Master, a shape-shifting evil vampire with a bevy of temple beauties, arranges for a desperate local woman to become pregnant, his only proviso being that if the child is a girl it should be his. Naturally it is, but the local villagers reclaim the child by stabbing the Master, who vows to return. The girl, Kaamya, grows into a dancercise addict with a butch boyfriend, unaware of her past. But a group of Satanists are intending to perform a sacrificial ritual using a dark occult tome to ensure the Master rises once more. Bombastic scenes of crashing lightning, Dutch-tilt zooms to glowing-eyed bat statues and mist-covered graveyards ensure all the trappings of the genre are covered, with the Ramsays' characteristic use of extreme coloured lighting making the most of their budget. The Master is a supremely menacing vampire, with blood-red eyes, protruding veins and a high-necked cape, his eventual resurrection truly revolting in its blood-drenched glory. Really, the main cast of 'soon to be weds' are predominantly there to provide very mild titillation to offset the scenes of gothic malice. The Ramsays' ingredients for success are present – at least one shower in a swimsuit, young couples, fisticuffs, underlying morality, a comedy relief character, concerned elders, a few musical numbers, coloured filters, psychic links and gratuitous use of cymbals – so that while the end result is disjointed, it does provide the requisite number of scares along with some inventive surreal sequences.

Australian vampire film *Thirst* (1979) is an early example of the 'blood farm' concept of vampire domination which has been used as a plot device in a number of films such as the *Blade* series as well as the exemplary British television series *Ultraviolet* (1998). A society of vampires, the Hyma Brotherhood, who have adapted to modern business practices, are keen to convince Kate Davis to acquiesce to joining a breeding programme. Kate is important because she is the last of the Bathorys, but convincing her isn't going to be easy, even if swapping her milk for blood begins to reignite the 'thirst' that gives them immense power. Kidnapped and taken to a research facility, the Brotherhood reveals its brave new world plans – the facility is a prototype farm where docile humans wander aimlessly, providing food for the vampires. *Thirst* sets out to make its vampires a very real, tangible part of contemporary society rather than ancient creatures struggling with modernity. The vampires' direct links to the aristocracy are made plain in the way they view their position as superior to the peasant humans; they even have their own Latin motto. Mix elements of *The Prisoner* (brain-washing techniques, an apparently inescapable compound, technological advances) into the pot and you have an unusual and disturbingly imaginative film. Ritualistic ceremonies, bloody death and a thoughtful script, *Thirst* has them all.

Naturally, we've only been able to dip our toes into the international waters of the vampire film; there's a vast pool of bloodsucking entertainment out there to enjoy and hopefully this chapter has served as a starting point.

Pardon Me, But Your Teeth Are in My Neck

It's not all gloom and morbid longing for death. With a rich vein of vampire lore to suck dry, comedy writers have plenty to get their teeth into. Batty sidelines include food (America has *Count Chocula* breakfast cereal and in the UK there used to be cheese and onion maize *Fangs*), cartoons (Bugs Bunny in *Transylvania 6-5000* [1963], *Count Duckula*) and even education (*Sesame Street's* 'The Count'). It seems as though nothing is immune from ridicule or commercialism, even the undead. Comedy often forms an essential ingredient in vampire films as a way of counterpointing the scares, but in some cases comedy is the *raison d'être* for the film.

Cinema spoofs have been around almost as long as the genres they parody. *Old Mother Riley Meets the Vampire* (John Gilling, 1952), features the titular Riley (Arthur Lucan, a popular music hall drag artiste) who is falsely accused of murders committed by Béla Lugosi's vampire and his horde of robots, of all things. The fifteenth and final of the *Old Mother Riley* films, this saw Lugosi at the end of his career, sadly where he would often end up lampooning his past glories. His first major parody was *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948), where he seeks the brain inside Lou Costello's head in order to reanimate a Frankenstein's monster style creature. The film may be misnamed, but its

amiable blend of jumps and goofing go a long way to please the audience. A variety of additional monsters are added to the pot, including the wolfman (Lon Chaney) and the invisible man (Vincent Price, uncredited). The sets and make-up are great, due to Universal's tightly guarded copyright on its monsters. The film's reputation diminished because of the rush of inferior sequels made in its wake.

The 1960s saw many monster comedies move to television, as mainstream cinemas were more concerned with expensive spectacle and drive-ins with exploitation flicks. Shows like *The Munsters* with Al Lewis as OAP vampire Grandpa (he virtually reprised the role for New Zealand's *My Grandfather is a Vampire* [1991] as a dead relative who can do wacky tricks in a charming family comedy), have remained a daytime television staple. *The Addams Family* with Carolyn Jones as the Vampira challenger Morticia, a role taken admirably by Angelica Huston in the excellent cinematic remakes, brought the unlikely combination of sitcom and monsters to the small screen. *Carry On Screaming* (1966) is one of the highlights of the venerable British comedy series, a glorious pastiche of Hammer films featuring Kenneth Williams as the evil Dr Orlando Watt and Fenella Fielding as his husky-voiced vampish wife Valeria. Notable for being fairly macabre amidst the sauciness and puns, the film is stunningly lit for such a low-budget production.

Hammer and Universal Studios, as well as half a century of assorted vampire films, came under fire in Roman Polanski's tremendous *The Fearless Vampire Killers* (*Dance of the Vampires*, 1967). Even before the start, where the MGM lion transforms into a vampire monster, you know it's going to be a scream. Wild-haired Professor Abronsius and his assistant Alfred have been travelling through Europe in search of

vampires. Chancing upon a remote snow-clad hideaway they are greeted by the weirdest villagers ever to grace a weird village. Bulbs of garlic hanging from the ceilings, the kidnapping of the innkeeper's daughter Sarah and the discovery of the innkeeper's frozen body with bite marks in his neck lead the Professor to continue his investigations at the local castle, home of suspected vampire His Excellency. When they arrive at the castle, His Excellency's knowledge of the Professor's work is as apparent as his son's appreciation of Alfred. There's slapstick and situation comedy aplenty: key scenes include Abronsius and Alfred pretending to be vampires at the ball; failing to notice a giant mirror that reflects only three people in the entire room; a coffin lid sledge escape; a Jewish vampire who is unfazed by crucifixes; bodged stakings; and saucy bath-times. Polanski's lightest, frothiest film, it remains the finest of vampire parodies.

Far more obvious was the lamentable Filipino comedy *The Vampire Hookers* (Cirio Santiago, 1978), starring veteran vampire John Carradine, and in which the best gag was the teaser line 'Warm blood isn't all they suck.' Cashing in on John Badham's 1979 version of *Dracula*, *Love at First Bite* (1979) stars George Hamilton. Dracula has been evicted, along with Renfield, from his comfy castle by the Romanian authorities, who want to turn his pad into a gymnasium. Emigrating to America he seeks out the girl of his dreams – Cindy Sondheim, a model. Cindy is, frankly, a good-time girl, but the Count's special brand of lurve is decidedly persuasive, something that does not go down with Cindy's beau, psychiatrist Jeff, who is a Van Helsing by birth. The romantic comedy aspect of the script works well, but the actual execution is too insipid to realise the film's potential. Hamilton's Count is as smarmy as Frank Langella's, but he

remains the only character of interest by default – Renfield is irritating and Cindy is just trampy. A few nice touches include a blood-bank heist which leads to the toast 'here's blood in your eye' and a frustrating night of searching for victims, in which the Count becomes drunk on winos' blood and babbles maudlin nonsense to Renfield, but these moments can't save the distinctly average whole.

Love at First Bite was aimed at an adult audience, but during the 1980s vampire comedies were intended predominantly for the teen market. Some, like *Fright Night* or the incongruous Grace Jones stripping vampire flick *Vamp*, are more sassy horrors than outright comedies, but a number drift closer to laughter territory, by accident rather than design! *Transylvania 6-5000* (1985), featuring Jeff Goldblum and Geena Davies, has two hapless reporters searching for 'real' vampires in modern Transylvania, but sadly the scenery is the most interesting thing that the film has to offer. *Once Bitten* (1985) features Jim Carrey in an early role and is a crass excuse for vampire sex gags. Lauren Hutton's Countess is on the hunt for virgin blood. In LA? That's the gag. Equally gross but also hugely entertaining is British no-budgeter *I Bought a Vampire Motorcycle* (1989). Nick Oddy (Noddy) thinks he's found a bargain when he buys a Norton Commando, unaware that its previous owner was killed whilst performing a bizarre demonic ceremony and that the bike is now possessed. When his best mate is murdered, the bike refuses to start in the daytime and his girlfriend is attacked, Oddy suspects it's time to call an exorcist. Made in the West Midlands when the British film industry was really in the doldrums, this is a quirky little oddity, a *Psychomania* for the eighties, that you can't help but enjoy. The bike itself obeys all the vampire conventions – keeps out of the

daylight, has aversions to crucifixes and garlic, and sports a fine set of fangs and chomping headlights. It does border on the puerile occasionally – the talking turd being a movement of note – but the genuine enthusiasm of all involved is infectious.

You know a genre has become a genre when Mel Brooks parodies it, so *Dracula Dead and Loving It* (1995) would seem to be a winner. However, this comedy look at the Dracula phenomena is an unsatisfactory affair. Taking his cue from the cinema as opposed to Stoker's novel, the film nevertheless remains fairly close to its literary predecessor. In terms of set design and lighting it's hard to fault the film, Brooks clearly knows his sources and milks them for all they are worth: the phantom carriage and doomed ship from *Nosferatu*; the ominous shadows of *Coppola's Dracula*; the castle from Tod Browning's version; the mirror dance from *The Fearless Vampire Killers*; and the mausoleum from any of Hammer's films. If it were simply a matter of identifying the references then this would be great, but sadly it's little more than a third-rate *Young Frankenstein* mixed with a post-modern 'spot the film' quiz. There are some highlights, though – Leslie Nielsen is surprisingly deep in his portrayal of the Count, be it Lugosi drawl or the iconic stances of Christopher Lee, there are some great dance numbers and the lighting/camerawork is wonderfully imitative. The fault lies in the fact that it is just not funny – unforgivable in a comedy.

Offbeat Indies

Hollywood studios, with their huge budgets, galaxies of stars and masses of advertising clout may seem to rule the coven when it comes to producing films, but there has always been an independent sector willing to, if not compete with the mainstream, at least survive alongside it. Sometimes they mirror the Hollywood product by creating similarly titled films that turn a profit through association. Often offering more sex and violence than their high-profile siblings, they create an alternative to mainstream entertainment. What indie films lack in budget, they usually make up for with originality and a passion for the genre. As we have already seen, the vampire is an incredibly malleable creature that can function as a metaphor for countless ideas and run the gamut of genres from cartoons and comedy to social critique and pornography. Independent vampire films can stand on their own merits – not every movie needs the lavish set design of *Interview with the Vampire* or the elaborate special effects of the *Blade* franchise.

An early example of the indie vampire flick, *Blood of Dracula* (1957) follows the tried and tested American International Pictures' formula of the period – a group of trendy teens, a bit of contemporary rock pop and as many hints of lasciviousness and mild horror as was deemed acceptable. A science teacher experiments on a schoolgirl,

who, whilst hypnotised, commits acts of vampirism that she later forgets. AIP weren't the only players in the low-budget market, as *Blood of the Vampire* (1958) tapped into the world-wide buzz generated by Hammer's successes, even cheekily hiring *Dracula*'s screenwriter Jimmy Sangster to pen the predominantly dungeon-bound tale of reanimated mad scientist Dr Callistratus.

It was the studio crisis of the late 1960s that really brought the independent sector into the limelight, although not always with pleasant results. *Dracula (The Dirty Old Man)* (1969) is just one of a seemingly endless stream of vampire sex films, here with an extra side order of misogyny, as Dracula creates a monster with the sole purpose of kidnapping girls for his softcore rapacious attentions. Originally conceived as a sex film, *Count Yorga, Vampire* (1970) was eventually shot as a conventional vampire movie but retained the production values of cheap porn. Following a car breakdown and a bit of rumpy pumpy in a camper, Erica is bitten by Count Yorga (Robert Quarry) and starts developing the disconcerting habit of eating cats. Given the choice between a transfusion and Yorga's offer of 'eternal love', Erica unfathomably plumps for the latter and joins the Count's bevvy of buxom brides at his Spartan mansion. This film is neither swift nor subtle – knowing Count Yorga is a vampire destroys any hint of intrigue the film may have. Yorga is so oozy-smoothy, suave and smarmy you want to throw up and the pacing is so deadly dull you'd be hard-pressed to see it through to the end. An atrocious 'pish bing' avant-garde muzak soundtrack bangs the final nail into the coffin. *Count Yorga* was, however, so successful that it spawned a sequel, imitators and launched the career of director Bob Kelljan. Yorga's second charm offensive in *The Return of Count Yorga*

(1971) is exactly that – offensive – and his re-emergence is left thoughtlessly unexplained. Count Yorga instructs his brides to gatecrash a sparse and tedious fancy dress party in a vain attempt to liven things up, but it turns into a massacre. Kelljan produces some inventive shots including a nice pink-toned flashback and a great ending, but he also manages to make events drag and relies too much upon second-rate handheld camerawork. However, there is a nice touch of humour when Yorga loses the fancy dress competition to some upstart dressed as a vampire.

Count Yorga's tight budgets seem positively overflowing compared with its many imitators. In the poverty row cash-in *Guess What Happened to Count Dracula?* (1970), Count Adrian, a vampire with a remarkably bad goatee, runs Dracula's Dungeon, a themed bar popular with every hippie drop-out, hunchback and wizened old hag in the neighbourhood. Guy and Angie go to a little soirée there, but Adrian decides that he wants Angie as a bride, wooing her with his cod-European accent. Angie becomes addicted to raw meat and is invited to the Macumbar Ritual – a stupefyingly dull dance of the mad, culminating in the chant of 'eat the lizard'. Breathlessly terrible, *Guess What Happened to Count Dracula?* (actually you have to – it's never revealed) features so much red and green lighting you could be forgiven for thinking that it's meant to be 3-D. It isn't. Enlivened briefly by a (green) dream sequence and the line 'Adrian, there's a gorilla in there' (there isn't, it's a guy in a gorilla suit), this is bargain basement cinema, without the bargain.

The 1970s also saw the rise of independent cinema (sometimes made by studio subsidiaries) aimed at the afro-American community. Blaxploitation, as the name suggests,

represents the sex and violence aspect of the market. At the height of the blaxploitation craze came the atrociously named *Blacula* (1972). Any concerns that the titular vamp would be a stereotypical jive-talking funkster – *Superfly* with fangs – proved unfounded as Blacula is probably cinema's most eloquent nosferatu with impeccable posture and diction as well as a rounded grasp of historical politics. In 1780 Prince Mamuwalde and his beautiful bride seek the abolition of the slave trade at Dracula's castle, but the Count has other ideas. Changing the Prince into a vampire he has him incarcerated to endure everlasting hunger, naming him Blacula as a final insult. Fast forward to the present day and two unscrupulous antique dealers have purchased Dracula's belongings, which include the prince. Blacula kills the pair and finds the spitting image of his long-dead bride in the shape of Tina, but, being a gent, he won't turn her unless she desires immortality. What a decent fellow. Blacula is a socially conscious, intelligent aristocrat whose anachronistic attitudes single him out from the start. William Marshall excels as the titular character and the rest of the cast support him admirably, the script is tragi-comic and only the average direction lets the side down. The ending is suitably poignant and noble, leaving the audience wanting more and setting up the possibility of a franchise for the character. Directed by *Count Yorga*'s Bob Kelljan, *Scream, Blacula, Scream* (1973) soon followed. Featuring Pam Grier as a voodoo practitioner seeking a cure to the Count's affliction, this is another interesting attempt to convey vampire mythology in a contemporary black environment. However, it does little to disguise the fact that it is basically an inferior rehash of the original.

Inventive and daring, *Ganja and Hess* (Bill Gunn, 1973) is a fiercely underground feature. Dr Hess Green was stabbed

three times – for the father, the son and the Holy Ghost – and now has a habit to feed. Stealing blood from hospitals helps, but sometimes the craving for warm fresh corpuscles is too much to bear. What Hess needs is a companion to help him through this spiritually difficult time – which is where Ganja comes in. A film with a tortured history, *Ganja and Hess* was greeted warmly by Cannes critics and with incredulity from its distributors – they hacked over half an hour from the running time and tried to push the film as blaxploitation, relegating it to seedy drive-ins and video re-releases under a bewildering array of misleading titles, including the blunt *Black Vampire*. Seeing the film as the director originally intended it is clear why the distributors panicked – a two-hour long intelligent analysis of cultural and religious mores with cinematic nods to Van Peebles, Pasolini and 1960s underground filmmaking was hardly likely to pack 'em in at the midnight triple bill. It does, however, make for a thought-provoking piece that doesn't simply bear repeat viewings, it demands them – right from the multiple voiceover opening shot in the New York Art Gallery. Gunn's assertion that blood is an intrinsic part of his cultural heritage is as intriguing as it is compelling in a film that never compromises its ideals and is better for it.

George A Romero is a name familiar to horror aficionados for his hugely influential Living Dead films. *Martin* (1977), his lesser-known vampire film, remains his masterpiece, a feature unlike any other. Cuda is a fiercely religious old man, bound by a family curse to look after his cousin Martin, an '84-year-old-going-on-20' vampire, something Martin vehemently disputes. Christina, Cuda's daughter, despairs at his bombastic fanaticism, but there is reason for concern as Martin is a very troubled lad – cursed

by visions of his past he sedates women, rapes them and drinks their blood. But is he a vampire or a delusional serial killer? The opening shows the full extent of Martin's crimes; meticulous, calculated and protracted. Stalking his victim on a train to Pittsburgh, his sedative-filled syringes held in his mouth like surrogate fangs, makes for a chilling image. Even as he reassures his victims that everything will be alright you know that it won't be, for murder is a messy business and Martin's kills are anything but pretty. Yet despite Martin's voyeurism, curt manner and unsavoury habits, he still remains a figure of audience sympathy – his boyish looks and need-to-be loved cries for help mean we want him to escape as much as we don't want him to kill. Cuda, with his white suits, cane and booming voice appears the real perpetrator – filling Martin's head with threats and wasting no opportunity to abuse him. Romero's production is grim, believable and unwilling to provide definitive solutions – by the end we are still unsure as to Martin's true vampiric roots. Flashbacks, in period black and white, provide Martin's dreampoint prior to periods of stress or elation, further compounding this uncertainty. A classic film in every sense, it can be read on multiple levels, each subsequent viewing revealing more.

The end of the 1970s saw a brief decline in independent production as the clamour for blockbuster films dominated the cinemas. However, the rise of the video recorder as a common household appliance meant that a new market was born, one the major studios was initially slow to embrace. Independent films filled a gap in a market that was insatiable for product to rent and eventually buy. The importance of home viewing cannot be overstated, with even major studios viewing theatrical releases as publicity for the sell-through and rental markets. Sadly, we can't cover the sheer volume of

vampire films created in this free-for-all environment.

In *Def by Temptation* (1990), a randy barman dies brutally at the hands of a predatory female vampire, bathed in a shower of blood. Action actor K nearly falls for her gold-nailed charms but has to postpone their date in order to offer lodging for trainee minister Joel (played by writer, director, producer James Bond III), who has, unbeknownst to all, been lured to New York as a victim for the temptress. A meagre budget is offset by deliberately extreme lighting and some suitably surreal effects, including a *Videodrome* style television set that sucks in its victim and spews out a stream of flesh and entrails. A strong cast helps paper the cracks in what ultimately turns a sex and death exploitation flick – well, it is a Troma release – into a morality tale about clean living.

Among the low-budget film studios of the 1980s and 1990s Charles Band's Empire Pictures and, more notably, Full Moon Pictures, were renowned for producing horror and science fiction films for the big screen and, more often, video. Over 200 films can be credited to Band, including a number by Ted Nicolaou.

The Vampire Films of Ted Nicolaou

Ted Nicolaou, sound recordist on Tobe Hooper's seminal horror *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, had worked in the film industry in a variety of roles from editor to writer before directing for Charles Band. He is most renowned for a number of successful but cheap vampire movies, notably the *Subspecies* series – all bar one of which he also penned. What is interesting about these films is the way in which they are steeped in Romanian culture. In *Subspecies* (1990), two American research students visiting Transylvania become

involved in a duel between two vampire brothers – one good, one evil – who are fighting to gain control of the powerful Bloodstone. Shot on location in Romania, it's a tale that truly celebrates the folklore of the region. The legend of the vampires adds an unusual twist and sympathetic tone to the film: after saving the village from Turkish invaders the vampires still require blood for their existence, so instead of feasting on the local population, they use the Bloodstone, a relic infused with the lifeforce of the saints. The vampires and humans can then live in harmony. But dishevelled Radu, who has Max Schreck fright-hands and dribbling double fangs, kills his father, the king of the vampires, in order to win the Bloodstone and shatter the peace. Although the budget limitations are clear, Nicolaou uses simple yet classy lighting effects and camera movements to create a sumptuous and otherworldly tone that make for evocative viewing.

Bloodstone: Subspecies II (1993) sees the return of Radu, stitched together by miniature animated demons. After staking his brother, he demands the return of the Bloodstone. Student Rebecca is determined to discover the fate of her sister Michelle, who was bitten in part one. The action moves from the country to the city (Bucharest) and back, but Nicolaou has lost none of his ability to light a scene in the transition. Whether it's the backlit forests of the film's opening or huge menacing shadows cast dynamically over buildings, the effect is startling and deliberately shuns realism. Once again, this is a fine advert for Romania; the architecture and countryside are beautiful yet mysterious and the plum brandy looks very tasty. Moving on from the mythic dread of part one, we begin to see the basis of a vampire soap opera emerging, with the film ending on a deliberate cliff-hanger.

Bloodlust: Subspecies III (1994) sees fledgling Michelle consolidate her burgeoning powers in order to facilitate an escape from her loathsome lover Radu. Becky persists in her search and has CIA cameo man Bob, with his Milk Tray man abseiling antics, shipped over to wrest Michelle from Radu's substantial fingers. Centuries have not improved Radu's eating habits, he really is a mucky pup and he will insist on talking with his mouth full of blood. Nicolaou's command of in-camera trickery reaches new heights with his portrayal of fast vampire movements – they are breathlessly smooth and reminiscent of the pre-sound pioneer filmmakers, and complemented by another impressive folk and orchestral score. In *Subspecies 4: Bloodstorm* (1998) Radu rises again as a result of a hasty escape in part three. Michelle seeks help in Bucharest, but has fallen into the hands of sinister Doctor Ion, who wants to experiment on her to find a cure for ageing.

In between the final two *Subspecies* films Nicolaou made *Vampire Journals* (1996). Initial indications weren't promising: a stupendously low budget; over-reliance on voice-overs; the presence of TV-sitcom actor Jonathan Morris; and the marginally silly premise of an anti-vampire vampire. However, *Vampire Journals* proves to be a highly enjoyable addition to Nicolaou's oeuvre. Zachary is 'God's most desolate creature – a vampire with a compassionate heart', driven to vengeance by the death of his beloved Rebecca. He has the blade of Laertes with which he intends to dispatch arch-vampire Ash. But he doesn't expect to fall in love again, this time with pianist Sophia. Ash offers Sophia the prospect of eternal life and although she declines, it doesn't stop him having a nibble anyway. A face-off with Zachary becomes inevitable. Nicolaou uses extensive and impressive shadows

and jump-cuts to portray the movement, metamorphosis and power of the vampires. Zachary is another of cinema's reluctant undead – 'I drink in shame… I dare not face my prey' – but redeems himself by being an A-class decapitator. Normal vampires can be destroyed in the standard manner, but a master such as Ash can only crumble into dust if caught in the ecstasy of feeding, which, fortunately for Zachary, happens with alarming regularity. Aside from the artistic merits of the production, we are not short-changed when it comes to genre conventions – heads roll, necks are bitten and there are oodles of writhing bodies and spurting blood. *Vampire Journals* is an unexpected surprise, akin to finding a diamond in a Kinder egg.

Indies Post-Rice

The successes of *Dracula* (1992) and *Interview With the Vampire* (1994) gave the vampire film mainstream prominence and formed the basis for a Hollywood exploration of the more sensual aspects of the genre. Moreover, the vampire film was finally being acknowledged as a subgenre of the horror market that appealed to a wide female audience as opposed to a predominantly male one. Tapping into the female romantic/erotic market, *Embrace of the Vampire* (1994) offers the initial draw of seeing Eastenders and ex-Spandau Ballet man Martin Kemp making an idiot of himself in a ropey vampire flick. Centuries after being feasted upon by three water nymphs, The Vampire is searching for 'my love, my virgin' before he falls into a sleep of ages. Said virgin is convent-raised Charlotte, whose hip friends and boyfriend Chris know that what she needs is sex. But Charlotte has a secret, a nocturnal visitor in the reawakening form of The

Vampire. Credibility is not this film's strong point, but it's an amiable little number with some fine art direction and a solid supporting cast, even if Kemp's smooth 'Come to me Charlotte' murmurings are fairly nausea-inducing. The plot is familiar to anyone who has read a Mills & Boon novel – take one virginal girl with a nice boyfriend, let her dally with a love-machine, wrestle with her conscience and finally return to the good man having *just* avoided sex with the desirable aristocrat – for whom she will secretly yearn for the rest of her life. Wholesome to the core despite the substantial nudity, you'll either love the diffused forest shots with dreamy floaty feathers (think *Legend* and you're nearly there) or vomit.

Nadja (1994), a low-budget independent feature film executive produced by David Lynch was never going to be to everyone's taste. Director Michael Almereyda made his name by shooting art films on a Fisher Price toy video camera that produces low-resolution black and white pixilated images. This technique is prevalent during *Nadja*'s vampire point of view shots, complementing the traditional film stock perfectly and creating a genuine sense of 'otherness' – it is almost hallucinatory at times. Nadja has fallen out with her brother Edgar, who wants to find an alternative to their vampire ways. She seduces Lucy, whose husband Jim is already associated with a slightly psychotic vampire. A standoff is inevitable. But will it be in America or Romania, ancestral home of the Caucescu Draculs? There is far more to *Nadja* than underground aesthetics and philosophical discourse; it revels in both film and vampire lore. Nadja's slave is called Renfield, her victim Lucy, her family are from the Dracul line. Nadja herself, played by Elina Löwensohn, harks back to Garbo, in speech and expression ('Sometimes I want

to be alone'), and certainly in her perceived sexual ambivalence and androgynous beauty. The main strength of the vampire is that of persuasion, melting the wills of lesser mortals. Nowhere is this talent more apparent than within the changing Lucy whose growing powers are so strong she can successfully hail a cab. In New York! If there is a problem with *Nadja* it lies with a need to provide political comment on contemporary events in Romania and somehow link this to the theme of vampirism, which is unnecessary. That said, *Nadja* is unusual because it is an art film that entertains as well as stimulates.

Overt politicisation of the vampire film comes in the shape of the almost unbearably grim *The Addiction* (1995). Kathleen is a philosophy student with a thirst for human blood, the result of an alleyway attack by an aggressive female vampire. Now she has taken to wearing dark shades and indulging in corpuscular slurpings, which provides practical application for her ethics paper. Abel Ferrera, no-nonsense guerrilla filmmaker that he is, has crafted a relentlessly bleak and harrowing tale of urban vampirism which takes on genocide, drug addiction and the propensity for humankind to perpetuate atrocity without remorse. To enhance the desolation, Ferrera decided to shoot entirely in unflinching black and white, emphasising shadows, blood and despair. Juxtaposing Kathleen's decline into vampirism with images of the Holocaust and America's atrocities towards the Vietnamese hammers home the film's fundamental message – evil is perpetrated by guiltless people and allowed to happen by the weak will of others – inaction is complicitous. Ferrera's film is lean enough to hold the audience's attention but the ceaseless barrage of soundbite philosophy and harrowing imagery is as draining on the viewer as Kathleen's bite.

In the UK, *Razor Blade Smile* (1998) entertained with its gleeful love of the tackier side of the genre. Lilith Silver is a hit woman by day, but fraternises with imitation vampires in seedy clubs by night, mainly to relieve the boredom of immortality. She becomes involved in killing members of an Illuminatus sect, which leads her into danger. Filmed on a small budget, but with access to decent post-production equipment, *Razor Blade Smile* is a film made with genuine affection for the genre. Lilith looks delicious in her full fetish gear and tells her story direct to the camera, dispelling or confirming the various myths when she sees fit. She grades her victims' blood depending on how tasty a quaff they produce – but she's very discerning in her evaluation, with even the lesbian vampire wannabe only getting a B+. The plot is tight, the pacing right for the chase scenes and there's a genuine twist at the end. It's well-designed, loud and looks great; even the credits are stunning. However, there's something lacking and unfortunately it probably lies with the performances. The enthusiasm of all involved is plain to see, but with the exception of David Warbeck, no one seems particularly animated.

Far less flashy is the deliberately paced *The Wisdom of Crocodiles* (1999). Stephen Grlscz needs only two things in life – love and a surname with vowels. Unfortunately, the love he needs flows from the blood of his partners – he would be the perfect boyfriend were it not for his killing embrace. Grlscz begins his 'wooing and killing' ritual with Anne, but faces an unexpected problem – what happens if he begins to love his victim as much as she loves him? A cracking piece of thoughtful cinema where nothing is wasted, *The Wisdom of Crocodiles* goes some way to creating its own odd myths. Jude Law is ideal material for the myste-

rious and moody vampire, exuding tenderness until his violent streak pervades. He keeps detailed diaries of all the women he encounters, gathering pieces of their lives, possessions and emotions to keep in an eternal scrapbook. When he feeds, it is not just his victim's blood that he drinks, it is also their love and feelings – his body rejects the negative emotions as crystalline deposits. Anne is beautiful and intelligent and has a similar detached view of the world, which makes it hard for Grlscz to kill her. Grlscz's reptilian third of his brain is dominant and therefore he is a predator – at times he crouches like a crocodile, contemplating his next move, waiting for his next kill, disposing of the bodies with crocodile tears and an infectious smile. Full of carefully composed imagery and a studied approach to character, this is a surprisingly intelligent and complex film.

In *Modern Vampires* (1999), Richard Elfman, brother of composer Danny, has managed to create a film brimming with good ideas and a few poor ones too. Nico, The Hollywood Strangler, is unaware of the huge underground network of vampires led by the Count. Dallas, a morally confused vampire, has returned to LA, much to the Count's chagrin. Van Helsing is on all their cases, finding help in the shape of YTS slayer Timebomb and his posse of overenthusiastic reprobates. *Modern Vampires'* main problem is that of focus and coherence, with its multitude of ideas appearing seemingly at random. It succeeds with some lively vampiric movement, a rush of surreal images that accompany a feed, a 115-year pregnancy and some great throwaway lines, as 'Let's kill some people together real soon' replaces 'Let's do lunch'. All the cast seem to be enjoying themselves, especially veteran vampire Udo Kier.

Although there have been a multitude of films about the

fictional Dracula, there are only a handful that look to his historical precedent Vlad Tepeş. *Dark Prince: The Legend of Dracula* (2000) is perhaps a slightly misleading title in that while it tangentially explores the possible origins of the vampire's curse (bloodlust, live burial, staking, fear of light), its main purpose is to relate the story of Vlad and his brother Radu in fifteenth-century Romania which is under the terrible shadow of the Ottoman Empire. His father murdered, his brother a slave to the Sultan and his country under a brutal Turkish regime, Vlad seeks help from Hungary to regain Romania for its people. His methods are, how shall we say, extreme – instigating fear through cruel execution. The bodies of his foes – marauding Turks, traitorous noblemen – are impaled on the streets, their rotting bodies a warning to those who threaten Romania. When his wife Lidia finds out the horrible truth a passing peasant points out 'He has brought peace,' although this assertion rings hollow. *Dark Prince* has high production values for a TV movie and makes for fascinating viewing. Admittedly its historical accuracy is occasionally questionable, but it does go some way to explain the horrific deeds of a man still considered a saviour to many in Romania. Viewed mainly in flashback as Vlad is interrogated by religious leaders, *Dark Prince* is a bloody but romantic account of the man behind the legend.

The huge success of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and its spin-off *Angel* has created an almost insatiable market for straight-to-video vampire product. The quality is variable but these are almost inevitably made with love by people whose budgets make that of *Count Yorga* look positively decadent. They include such films as *Vampires vs Zombies*, *Hollywood Vampyr*, *Blood Thirsty* and *Vampire Resurrection*. The latter,

directed by Denice Duff who starred in the *Subspecies* films, featured a horrific cat murder, realistically achieved by the use of an old slipper!

Deranged and Confused

Throughout this book we've been providing you with an overview of the more familiar aspects of the genre – the literary vampire, the saucy vampire, the comedy vampire – but there are some films that don't really fit the bill. They are vampire films, to be sure, but so deranged that they would unbalance a lesser chapter. Which is why you'll find some of the more off-kilter or bizarre examples of the genre here. How bizarre? Well, as concepts go, none come close to *Incubus* (1965), starring William Shatner just prior to his Captain Kirk days. *Incubus* is made entirely in Esperanto, an artificial language created for all the right reasons but which never took off. Returning from war, Marc (Shatner) falls in love with the beautiful Kia, unaware that she is a demon. Kia's sister is infuriated at the affair and raises the incubus to halt the blasphemous partnership. What adds to the distinct oddness of this obscure production is the exemplary use of expressionist chiaroscuro lighting, unusual angles and innovative technique. At times the film comes across as a strange hybrid of Ingmar Bergman and Hammer horror, *The Virgin Spring* by way of *The Devil Rides Out* with an almost out of time European setting punctuated with scenes of devil worship, reanimated dead and dark invocations. Rather than being a distraction, the Esperanto actually enhances the strange other-worldliness of the production, which features

Rollinesque beaches and even the devil himself amongst its multiple delights. A strange mix of art and horror with cinematography by *American Beauty*'s Conrad L Hall, this is one curio definitely worth seeking out.

Another oddity is *Deathmaster* (1972), in which a vampire (played by none other than Mr Queasy vamp himself, Robert Quarry) becomes a figurehead to a bunch of hippies in California. In *Blood for Dracula* (Paul Morrissey, often attributed to Andy Warhol, 1974), Udo Kier's anaemic, pallid Count Dracula searches for the blood of virgins in Catholic Italy. An aristocratic family on the verge of financial ruin are keen that the Count marries one of their four daughters, unaware that not all of them are as pure as they seem, having satiated their lust with Aryan gardener Joe Dallesandro. Any jugular snacking results in violent vomiting as the Count becomes increasingly weak. Behind the scenes of sex and nudity, beneath the fluctuating acting quality and occasional longueurs, *Blood for Dracula* is an enjoyable romp but also one that examines the roles of the bourgeoisie and proletariat in a changing world, echoing the contempt of the working classes for the aristocracy. Witty and with a knowing script that pastiches literary as well as cinematic sources, the outrageously bloody climax is merely the icing on the cake. Although *Blood for Dracula* has its tongue firmly in its cheek, it was made at the time when the vampire film began to move away from being sensual or erotic and turned into blatant pornography for some parts of the market. It's a fine line that, now crossed, has given the world everything from the Playboy softcore couples porn of the *Embrace the Darkness* series (1999 on) to the (obviously) gay *Gayracula* and the faux-lesbian *Lust of Dracula* (2004), alongside more by-the-numbers cash-ins on popular titles such as *Muffy the Vampire*

Layer (1992), *Interview With a Vamp* (1994) and the appallingly titled *Sexy Adventures of Van Helsing* (2004).

His son Charles may have produced the excellent low-budget *Subspecies* series, but Albert Band was no slouch in the vampire department either. Unfortunately, *Zoltan: Hound of Dracula* (*Dracula's Dog,* 1977) is such a bad, bad dog of a film that it marks the nadir in canine vampire action. Yes, this time the focus of attention is on man's best friend, in this case complete with glowing white eyes and an incongruously gleeful trot. A Russian soldier removes a stake protruding from a veiled body. The body stirs, leaps and kills – for it is Zoltan, hound of Dracula! The motley mutt plays fetch with the stake protruding from his servant and the pair seek the last surviving Dracula. He is Michael Drake, forced into exile two years ago and now on a camping holiday with his family, unaware that their lakeside vacation will turn into a terrifyingly tedious set of canine encounters. Zoltan, often a glove puppet or a fake paw on a stick, is always an inscrutable bore. Compounded by a dated muzak score, the plodding script, lame direction and tired gore effects (by oscar-winning Stan Winston, the credits say – unbelievable), you are advised to put this one down. Permanently.

Similarly bizarre but wholly more enjoyable in a camp exploitation way is Ken Russell's deliriously tasteless *The Lair of the White Worm* (1988). The D'Ampton worm, steeped in myth, is ready to feed on virginal blood once more. Lady Sylvia Marsh (Amanda Donohoe) serves as high priestess to a vampiric snake cult, her reptilian charms and infectious poison turning the countryside population into fanged servants of the worm Dionin. Angus the archaeologist, Mary and Eve whose parents mysteriously disappeared a year ago, and new lord of the manor, James D'Ampton (Hugh Grant),

need to pool their resources, including a collection of 78rpm records and Angus's bagpipes, to defeat the slinky snake. Based very loosely on Bram Stoker's story, this film is a gleeful homage to the low-budget British horror film, but is imbued with Russell's own inimitable style. Mixing all the clichés with gay abandon, the deliberately stilted dialogue and boyish desire to offend are as infectious as Donohoe's delicious venom. She is simply marvellous as Sylvia, vamping her performance as she slinks around in a variety of fetishistic costumes. Whether spitting venom at crucifixes, dancing sinuously or burning her snakes and ladders board to the lament 'Rosebud', she dominates the film. But the real star of the show is Russell himself as writer, director and producer, showing that age has not mellowed his impish *enfant terrible* reputation. Anything vaguely snakelike, be it vacuum attachment or hose, is brought to life, and Sylvia's venom causes outrageous hallucinations. These dayglow video tableaux are mini-masterpieces of appalling taste, recalling Russell's earlier *Altered States*. 'You're bonkers!' says Angus, and who can argue? Outrageously naughty and misunderstood by virtually everyone, this is another classic slice of utter madness from Britain's most under-appreciated auteur.

Two very different 1995 films offer even lower budget examples of the genre. In *Addicted to Murder*, Joel Winter, aka the New York Mangler, is subject to intense media interest. Half Henry from *Eraserhead*, half *Henry Portrait of a Serial Killer*, his confused sexuality causes him to kill. Which is initially where Rachel fits in because Rachel likes being killed – phallicly chainsawed, stabbed, electrocuted – you name it, she'll die for it. Being a vampire she can just repeat the whole process the next day. But Rachel leaves and Joel needs a substitute. Audaciously mixing television's propensity

for sound-bite psychoanalysis and false disgust at the process of murder with the fragmented life and loves of Joel, *Addicted to Murder* can't be accused of trivialities. Ignoring linear coherence to distort the world in Joel's eyes, the combination of Nicholas Roeg-influenced editing and social critique makes for a thought-provoking, if queasy, experience. The acting is uniformly excellent and the television shows that sporadically sprinkle the film are convincing. Any problem lies squarely with the format – BetaSP – which renders the image flat and insipid, a necessity of the obviously low budget. It's a brave attempt at filming a different kind of vampire tale with verve and tenacity.

More tenacity is on display in *Darkness*, Leif Jonker's feature-length film shot on the infeasibly low budget of $6,000. As is fitting for a production funded partly by the writer/director selling his own blood, this is an exceptionally violent splatterfest, borrowing liberally from Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* and Kaufman's remake of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Tobe is mulling around a petrol station convenience store when a bloodied man announces 'He's coming' and blows his own head off with a captured police handgun. 'He' is the Evil One, head of the vampires, with a dusty trench-coat and waist length hair to match. One massacre and three days later, Tobe is a 100 per cent certified vampire hunter, teaming with a group of sassy kids in order to survive. Bodies are shot to pieces, chainsawed, burnt, splatted by vehicles and all manner of unpleasantries rendered with highly effective make-up and in-camera effects. Jonker constantly keeps us on our toes by judicious, unusual editing, Carpenter style sideways tracking and a barrage of inventive camera angles. The huge cast of friends and locals do a fine job of keeping the tension rolling as they generally head towards damnation

and a sticky ending. Never dull and always inventive, *Darkness* deserves your attention if only for its sheer nerve and persistence.

Troma Studios has been responsible for either making, distributing or encouraging low-budget exploitation films for many, many years. *Sucker the Vampire* (Hans Rodionoff, 1998) proves to be an inventive stab at low-budget modern vampirism. Gone are the extreme gore effects that generally lighten up Troma's output and instead you are left with a tongue-in-cheek script that is tight and normally funny. Plasma is a rock group façade for a bunch of vampires eager to suck on groupie blood. Lead singer Anthony breaks up the band but need not have bothered because the vengeful Miss Vanessa Helsing is dispatching the rest of the group with ruthless efficiency. And Anthony's hedonistic lifestyle has serious repercussions when he contracts AIDS. Although the tasteless elements of *Sucker* run the risk of veering into taboo areas, the film's gleefully macabre tone pulls it back from the brink. The spectre of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* appears in the shape of the punnily named Vanessa Helsing but the film subverts expectations with her early demise. Top marks for Reed, Anthony's mad hunchbacked assistant without the hunchback, whose disturbing sexual practices make him a far more interesting character than his master. With a hip, jokey indie soundtrack and some nice exchanges ('I'm a vampire' – 'I know, you're a lawyer') *Sucker* is not art, but it is inventive and fun.

The Canadian film *Jesus Christ Vampire Hunter* (2002), as its title suggests, is not the most serious look at the nature of the undead, although it is packed to the gills with wacky ideas and an undeniable sense of campy fun. A series of vampire attacks has devastated the lesbian community and even the

church is having difficulty coping with the problem – for these vampires seem apparently immune to daylight. It's down to our lord and saviour Jesus Christ to save the day with the power of redemptive love and prodigious kung fu skills. Shot on 16mm when every other zero budget film had turned to video, *Jesus Christ Vampire Hunter* has a distinctly anachronistic aesthetic. Never short on originality – vampires are given the ability to walk in daylight through skin grafts pioneered by a necrophile scientist – this is also, bizarrely, a musical with choreographed dance numbers that question modern morality while Jesus skateboards through the congregation. Okay, so some of the fights are a bit long, but the cast are having so much fun you are pulled along by the sheer craziness of it all. It may be a ramshackle production but its fun, frothy and surprisingly heartfelt (and indeed tolerant).

Also from Canada, although from the heart of Winnipeg rather than Ontario, is Guy Maddin's extraordinary, beautiful and utterly bizarre *Dracula, Pages from a Virgin's Diary* (2003). In a world where the word 'visionary' is scattered about like discarded popcorn, Maddin is one of a select few directors who deserve the accolade; his style harks back to a pre-sound era but is imbued with sexual tension, dark passions and malevolence. Maddin had toyed with the supernatural in his previous work, most notably in the dark comic melodrama *Careful* (1992), but *Dracula, Pages from a Virgin's Diary* is solely concerned with a retelling of Stoker's novel. Only Maddin's adaptation features no spoken dialogue (only intertitles), is set entirely to the music of Gustav Mahler and is relayed through the medium of ballet. This concept would be considered madness were it not for the compelling way the ballet company's expressive moves complement Maddin's use

of non-realist visuals. Here, vampirism is seen as society's fear of immigration and set against a backdrop of class-consciousness and greed for gold. Exemplary use of light and shadow, tinted sequences reflecting the characters' emotions and motivations and razor-sharp montage editing make for an exhilarating experience, condensing the weighty book to just over 70 minutes of music and dance. Breathtaking.

Uwe Boll has a fierce reputation as one of contemporary cinema's most appalling directors, partly because of a series of ill-advised video game adaptations. *BloodRayne* (2005) concerns the patricidal intentions of dhampir (half-human, half-vampire) Rayne (Kristanna Loken), escaping her carnival prison as a regenerating freak to wreak bloody vengeance on Kagan (Ben Kingsley). With a motley group of misfits she cuts a bloody swathe through Europe to rid the land of the vampires' curse and to wear a tenth of what her male colleagues do. *BloodRayne* is a pretty bad movie but is rarely dull for a number of reasons. First is the top-notch cast, many of whom perform at the trough of their abilities – Michael Madsen's drunk scene is indistinguishable from his non-drunk ones, Michelle Rodriguez is more wooden than a forest, Ben Kingsley tries to hide behind atrocious make-up and Meat Loaf is howlingly inept as a histrionic hedonist. Only Udo Kier manages to save face, but then he's been in far too many films like this not to realise the pitfalls. The dialogue's stilted. Abrupt. And often garbled. But best of all are the outrageous amounts of bloodletting and gore – torrents of the stuff spraying all over the place, guts and body parts sloshed around like give-away day at the abattoir. Hilarious. Boll followed with *BloodRayne 2* (2007) set 100 years later in the Wild West, of all places, and featuring Billy the Kid. It did not feature any of the celebrity cast of part one…

Sci-Fi Suckers

The vampire genre declined in the 1940s and 1950s as Sci-Fi B-movies were becoming the rage. The rise in tensions between the US and USSR during the Cold War had a knock-on effect on popular culture and monster movies reflected fears about the atomic age. Vampires, initially, seemed too old-fashioned to compete, but the science fiction genre proved to be just as adaptable at accepting them into its fold. Consequently, numerous films were released which involved bloodsucking fiends in other forms. *The Thing from Another World* (1951) featured an alien animate vegetable frozen in ice, which, when revived, needed human blood to propagate its species. Hammer's influential *The Quatermass Xperiment* saw doomed spaceman Victor, the last surviving member of a disastrous mission, stumbling through London, unwittingly sucking the lifeforce from terrified victims. *The Quatermass Xperiment* would provide the template for many subsequent 'vampires + spaceships' films.

In *It! The Terror from Beyond Space* (Edward L Cahn, 1958) a mission to Mars is mysteriously decimated. The rescue craft is put in jeopardy when an alien lifeform secretly hitches a ride, living off the blood of the crew. This variation of the vampire film would reach its highlight with Mario Bava's vibrant and disturbing *Planet of the Vampires* (1965) where a ship lands on a planet scattered with the dead, only for the

bodies to rise and suck the essence of the living. Key elements of the film would eventually feed into Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979). Similarly colourful is Curtis Harrington's *Queen of Blood* (1966), an effects-rich film that combines B-movie stiltedness with thoughtful matte-paintings and design. Set in 1990, two groups of astronauts are sent to rescue any possible survivors of an alien race that has made contact with Earth and crash-landed on Mars. One of the humanoid aliens, barely alive, is to be brought back to Earth for examination, but it seems her green-skinned countenance hides a terrible thirst for human blood. The crew head home, but at what cost to humanity? A bizarre blend of wonder and stageiness, scientific plausibility and blatant pulp melodrama makes for interesting viewing. *Queen of Blood* refuses to be categorised by its budget or its eclectic cast (a pre-*Easy Rider* Dennis Hopper and a venerable Basil Rathbone) to become a strange hybrid of cliché and invention, never wholly satisfying but always engaging.

Closer to home, the bloodsucking plant Audrey II from *Little Shop of Horrors* (1960, remade in 1986) proved that budget limitations can sometimes focus the imagination. Shot in less than three days by legendary director-producer Roger Corman, the inventive script provides laughs along with the chills as Audrey II seeks more blood via its nominal owner Seymour in order to realise its plans of world domination.

The most famous of science fiction vampire stories is Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend*. A chequered production history led to the novel eventually being made as an Italian/US co-production for AIP as *The Last Man on Earth* (1964), starring Vincent Price. Morgan believes he is the last man on Earth, the population having been obliterated by a

plague that has left them vampires. Roaming the streets, he stakes as many as he can in order to survive. The end result is an effective, low-budget, black and white chiller, some way from the larger budgeted, more familiar, adaptation *The Omega Man* (Boris Sagal, 1971). Set six years in the future, a virulent plague has turned the population into night dwellers with pallid skin and spooky eyes. All save Robert Neville (Charlton Heston), that is, a scientist who has developed a powerful anti-virus which he selfishly uses only on himself. He now spends the day talking to himself and exterminating vampires, while at night he defends his fortress home. Neville stumbles across some other survivors and faces the choice of either developing a serum from his immune blood or using the fact that he's the only 'real man' to his advantage and start spreading his seed. *The Omega Man* is a big-budget action film with unforgivable pretensions; it should have been fun but is ruined by ham-fisted religious symbology and anti-Communist soap boxing. Matheson's text is substantially altered because stakes are apparently boring compared with good traditional US gunfire that represents the freedom of the individual. Heston really is too old for this, and comes across as sinister with his remarkable chat-up lines – 'If you were the only girl in the world and I… I guess I am the only boy' – and as hilarious when striking sombre crucifix poses. It makes his nemesis in the film, Matthias, all the more sympathetic; you start believing his assertion that Neville is nothing more than a mass murderer.

I Am Legend (2007) replaces the bombastic gung-ho hedonism of *The Omega Man* with a more sombre take on *The Last Man on Earth*. The outlook appears bleak for military scientist Robert Neville (Will Smith) as he seeks a cure for a devastating virus that has decimated humanity and turned its

victims into light-sensitive creatures with an insatiable appetite for human blood. Neville represents the fraction of humankind that is immune to the virus and becomes convinced there are no other unaffected people still living. His only companionship lies with his dog Sam and a collection of shop dummies at the local DVD shop where he is slowly working his way through the titles alphabetically. But when Sam is bitten by a contagious dog and has to be put out of her misery the last vestiges of sanity drain from Neville and he begins to lose hold of reality. The scenes of a desolate New York, covered in weeds and populated by deer and zoo animals, is strikingly eerie, while Will Smith's grim-faced performance is far from his more established screen personas. The dark wanderers are far more feral than in previous incarnations, with only one of them beginning to show signs of sentience as he screeches ear-piercing orders to the ravenous hordes. Although the film is sparse on graphic blood-letting, the slow, deliberate, build-up and the nihilistic tone make for a refreshingly solemn blockbuster, which, despite its ray-of-hope conclusion, really does offer its hero a desolate fate.

Science fiction can be an expensive business if it relies heavily on groundbreaking effects work and nowhere is this more apparent than in the jaw-droppingly dumb but fun *Lifeforce* (1985). The concept was breathtakingly simple: take one successful director (Tobe Hooper, fresh from *Poltergeist* and *Salem's Lot* but with street cred from *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*), a cracking genre scriptwriter (Dan O'Bannon of *Alien*, *Dark Star* and *Return of the Living Dead* fame) and a special-effects genius (John *Star Wars* Dykstra) and throw them an unprecedented amount of hard cash. The result was a trashy mess that lost a small fortune at the box office. Following the trail of Halley's Comet, the rocket *Churchill*

comes across a 150-mile long spaceship. Inside, the crew discovers and recovers weird fossilised bat creatures and three humanoid bodies. When the *Churchill* returns to Earth the crew have died, shrivelled like walnuts, and before long three hard-kissing naked vampires from outer space are spreading their own kind of love around London, turning its denizens into exploding bloodlust mad-things. *Lifeforce* remains a very silly but hugely enjoyable B-Movie smothered with big-budget effects. And what effects they are, a stunning combination of optical and prosthetic work – when some poor unfortunate gets drained you see it all happen before your very eyes, no dissolves or cuts. The earlier sequences in the alien spacecraft are superb, Hooper making the best of his wide canvas to portray the drifting astronauts dwarfed by the organic hive-like surroundings. Chiefly, however, it's still remembered for its prime concept – naked chick kills people, a grade-Z exploitation device that found another outing in the *Species* films. Cheesy to the point of full farmhouse cheddar maturity, it takes a lot to dislike a film that includes the line, 'She killed all my friends and still part of me didn't want to leave.'

Also in the camp camp is prolific filmmaker Jim Wynorski's *Vampirella* (1996), based upon the popular scantily attired comic book character. Wynorski, a veteran of countless low-budget projects, often at the salacious end of the market, was no stranger to science fiction vampires, having helmed *Not of This Earth* (1988). In that film a vampire ambassador from a doomed planet visits Earth, the most notable thing being that this was the first 'mainstream' film featuring porn actress Traci Lords. Blessed with a (nominally) larger budget and far less nudity, *Vampirella* retains its B-Movie charms, understandable given that Roger Corman is

the film's producer. Thirty centuries ago on Drakulon Vlad's renegade vamps escape imprisonment for drinking living blood, killing the Council and heading for Earth, with vengeful Vampirella in hot pursuit. On Earth, Adam Van Helsing teams up with Vampirella. But Vlad has plans for Judgement Day when a satellite-induced nuclear winter will allow the vampire hordes to rule the darkened planet. In the film version Vampirella has a marginally more practical outfit than her pen-and-inked counterpart, but fortunately maintains her ludicrous white collars and 'raven-haired charms'. However, the real star of the show is Roger Daltry, relishing his role as evil vamp Vlad. Replete with ghastly fangs that change size frequently, this is not his first encounter with vampirism – he appeared opposite Paul Nicholas's full-fanged Wagner in Ken Russell's masterfully deranged biopic *Lisztomania*. Daltry tackles his role with pantomime theatricals and hysterically overdone cloak swishing. This is all part of the knowing humour. Like a cheap version of Mike Hodges' camp classic *Flash Gordon* mixed with an episode of *Wonderwoman*, *Vampirella* is pure hokum that is amusing when intentional and hysterical when not.

Kurt Wimmer's visually stylish future society in *Ultraviolet* (2006) sees the battle between a totalitarian state and a group of haemophages – a form of vampire whose superhuman powers are the side effect of a disease that marks them out as sunlight-averse pariahs. Violet, a member of the underground resistance movement of hemophages, manages to infiltrate a highly secure government research centre and walk out with a briefcase containing a weapon that is to wipe out all of her kind. Unfortunately, the weapon turns out to be a child, which amazingly fits into such a tight space due to some interdimensional gubbins, and whose genetic make-up could

result in a 'cure' for the virulent disease. Violet is unwilling to see a child die and so becomes a fugitive from her own kind as well as a target for the government. Highly stylised with opening credits that suggest the film is based upon a comic book *Ultraviolet* is constantly inventive in its use of extreme camera angles and exaggerated colour schemes, outrageous action sequences and plenty of martial arts and gunplay. However, the end results are cold and antiseptic to the point of apathy. The extensive use of CGI may mean that the film can show a domineering future society but it also renders much of the action weightless and ineffective, with some of the fight scenes lacking punch, although this could also be due to the studio's decision to cut the film in order to reduce its rating. Ultimately, the wealth of ideas is squandered in a showy, vacuous whole.

Bloody Hollywood

Hollywood is the *de facto* centre of the film industry with an influence over the viewing habits of the world. Hollywood vampire films are a bit like buses, you can wait a few years, then several come along at once. Many respected directors have had a bite at the genre – Francis Ford Coppola, Tony Scott, John Carpenter, Kathryn Bigelow and John Landis amongst others. In general, the larger budgets afforded the Hollywood product can be seen in their more grandiose visual aesthetics.

From Small Screen to Big

Hollywood's influence is not restricted to the big screen. *The Night Stalker* (John Llewellyn Moxey, 1971), released theatrically in many countries, was America's highest-rated TV movie at that time. Shirley Hughes is 'en route to her doom', the first of a succession of women who are attacked and drained of blood. A news story for reporter Kolchak, if his editor Vincenzo will print it. When a hospital blood-bank is raided and police bullets have little effect on the perpetrator, they begin to take notice of Kolchak's madcap theories. Although highly regarded, *The Night Stalker* is so deeply flawed that it provides virtually no entertainment. Kolchak can't shut up – his ceaseless patter goes on and on like a bad

cabby as he peppers you with meticulously pointless detail and hard-nosed reporter similes. *The Night Stalker* does have one of the most tasteless credit sequences of all time – an autopsy shot from the corpse's point of view which pulls off the rare feat of being gratuitous and protracted, yet showing nothing. The film's success led to a further movie, *The Night Strangler,* and a short-lived TV Series, *The Night Stalker*, with a 'monster of the week' style format, which was briefly revived in 2005.

Similarly, Tobe Hooper's film of Stephen King's *Salem's Lot* (1979) had started life as a TV mini-series before being honed down and released as a feature film with additional gore. In the process, it lost the exposition and tension that made the longer version so memorable. Writer Ben Mears (David Soul) returns to his hometown of Salem's Lot. Straker, partner of the elusive Mr Barlow, has purchased the super-creepy Marsten house and establishes an antique shop. Before long, the Glick boys disappear, only to re-emerge as floating vampires under the power of the exceptionally bald and blue Mr Barlow. An epidemic soon spreads and only three people are brave, or stupid, enough to try to defeat the menace – horror-film fan Mark, Ben and his new girlfriend Susan. Hooper's attention to set design mirrors that of his groundbreaking debut *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, with the Marsten house fitted out with stuffed animals and an aura of putrefaction. Even if the scares are a bit 'da-da' and designed to fit advertising breaks, their effect is still jolting. Mr Barlow is a hideous feral creature of dominating stature and a Schreck-like screen presence, a formidable and memorable figure. However, even he is dwarfed by James Mason's superbly droll performance as Straker, who gets all the best lines – 'You'll enjoy Mr Barlow – and he'll enjoy you.' If that

were not enough, the child vampires are amongst the creepiest ever filmed, floating in the mist and scratching endlessly at windows. Soul is bearable as the hero, but his sidekick Mark is great as the teen on the edge who survives because of his love of Lon Chaney flicks.

At a Cinema Near You

It took nearly half a century for Hollywood to reinterpret the *Dracula* story, with Frank Langella taking Lugosi's mantle in a prestige production. *Dracula* (1979) opens with the Count arriving in Britain, completely by-passing the Harker and three brides section of the novel, and focuses primarily on his love affair with Lucy. Interestingly, the film plays on the conflicts between the working and upper classes, with broad Yorkshire accents employed throughout, most notably with insurance salesman Renfield, who has the impertinence to talk back to Dracula when he's getting tired of lugging coffin loads of dirt up the winding stairs of Carfax Abbey. The gothic abbey itself is magnificently out of place, beautifully realised in long shot by matte painting supremo Albert Whitlock. Throughout, the effects are evocative, even when employing jump-cuts or simple fogging techniques. Langella is commanding in the role, although smarmy to the point of Mills & Boon parody. The film is surprisingly bloodless, despite a couple of throat gougings, a cannibalised baby and Renfield's shock 180-degree head twisting – this is actually far tamer than Hammer's version 20 years previously. Primarily, its purpose is to provide romance amidst the scares and, for the most part, it succeeds.

Far more overtly sexual and with a mythology of its own harking back to pre-Christian Egypt, *The Hunger* (1983) gave

mainstream vampires style and artful visual gloss. As old as the Pharaohs, Miriam (Catherine Deneuve) maintains her immortality by feeding on the blood of the living, slashing them with an ankh knife and destroying the bodies in her basement crematorium. Her age-long companion John (David Bowie) suffers abrupt and severe ageing, for which he tries to seek help from Dr Sarah Roberts (Susan Sarandon), to no avail. Sarah is seduced by Miriam and turned vampire, so her research into ageing finds a living experiment within her own body. *The Hunger* remains a firm favourite with genre aficionados. Undeniably pretentious, the *raison d'être* of the film is to provide a discourse about age and immortality amidst a constant stream of beautiful and disturbing images. Director Tony Scott is a master of the widescreen format and he wastes no opportunity to fill the frame with tightly composed images or spatial separation. Judicious use of sound and visual editing to foreshadow events enhances the fragility and fragmentary nature of immortal time. Music plays a key role, from the opening gothic strains of *Béla Lugosi's Dead*, the elegiac *Miserere* and Delibes' delightfully Sapphic *Flower Duet,* which becomes a soundtrack for Miriam and Sarah's lovemaking. The acting is uniformly superb with Deneuve the most alluring vampire since *Daughters of Darkness,* to which the film is heavily indebted. As slick, tight and profound as you want it to be and with an ending so horribly lyrical yet inevitable you really can't ask for more.

Teens and Comedy

The increase in disposable income amongst affluent teenagers led to a rise in teen comedies and youth-orientated

blockbusters in the 1980s. Many were aimed at the R-rating in the US so that they could employ (limited) sex and nudity as well as gore. There was a knowing playfulness about these cocksure films, their audience brought up on cable television and videos, creating a wider but vacuous film-culture knowledge. A merging of these elements could be found in *Frightnight* (1985), a post-modern twist on the vampire film. Pent-up teenager Charley Brewster is convinced that his neighbour Peter Vincent, a washed-up TV horror presenter, is a vampire responsible for a series of gruesome murders. Needless to say, his assertions are met with general derision so it's down to him to eradicate the town's population of the undead. The self-referential horror comedy did not begin with *Scream*, but has been part of the genre since the early days of cinema – think *Cat and the Canary* (1927) or *Old Dark House* (1932). The exceptional prosthetics hark back to Lon Chaney's make-up on *London After Midnight* with their full entourage of incisors and a face-splitting Tasmanian Devil grin making a striking impression. There are a fair few chills along the way, long fingernails scraping up the banisters, sudden appearances, a disco kidnapping, even a distressed damsel. For all its taste-free New Romantic fashions, atrocious synth-pop muzak and Reaganite teenagers, *Fright Night* still manages to be an amusing and scary popcorn movie that deserved the attention it received, although many felt its blend of graphic gore and teen comedy to be incongruous. So successful, it spawned an inferior but watchable sequel.

Based around the tagline 'Sleep all day, party all night, never grow old and never die' and starring a bunch of pretty brat packers, *The Lost Boys* (Joel Schumacher, 1987) is probably the ultimate teen vampire movie. It's fast, loud and

contains enough angst to satisfy the most hormonally challenged. The title borrows from Peter Pan, but that's about as far as the analogy goes. Michael and his brother Sam have arrived in Santa Carla and are keen to make new friends. What they don't envisage is fraternising with the local vampire community, who may be cool but are also the reason that their town is called the 'Murder Capital of the World'. *The Lost Boys*, like many Schumacher films, has an excellent premise but is as vacuous as outer space, despite his arsenal of showy camera techniques and pop-promo editing. Some of the film's most successful sequences, notably the opening shot showing an aerial point of view vampire attack, are offset by stagy scenes of teen bonding. The most interesting characters, Edgar and Alan Frog, run a comic store and happen to be vampire hunters in their spare time, but these are exceptions in a cast of teen stereotypes and James Dean/Jim Morrison wannabees.

Far more cool, because it deliberately seeks not to be, *The Monster Squad* (Fred Dekker, 1987) is an affectionate attempt to introduce Universal's pantheon of horror characters to a modern youth audience whilst retaining a sense of nostalgia for older viewers. Dracula has flown to America to find a magic amulet that will tip the balance of power to evil, aided by a resurrected mummy, a gillmonster, an angst-ridden wolfman, three vampire brides and Frankenstein's monster. Who can stop the incessant wave of evil crashing devastatingly into middle America? The Monster Squad, that's who! Formed to swap spooky tales, these plucky twelve-year-olds have got the lowdown on anything esoteric. The thought of a bunch of kids doing *ET* and *Ghostbusters* impressions is not a particularly pleasant one, but *The Monster Squad* defies expectations by being funny, exciting and scary without

resorting to saccharine sensibilities. Although some of the visuals look dated, all the monsters have been lovingly created from the original Universal horror films, Dracula's castle even comes complete with Tod Browning armadillos. The prosthetic work really shines – the scene where the wolfman, a stick of dynamite stuffed next to his, ahem, 'wolf-dork' explodes only to reform in a dazzling display of sticky body parts is particularly effective. If, when the boys' teacher declares 'Science is real, monsters are not' you feel like shouting 'Oh yes they are', and cheer when a kid kicks a bad guy in the unmentionables, then this is for you.

Redefining the Genre

As the boom years of the teen comedy began to fade and before the rise in popularity of all things vampiric brought about by the triple whammy of *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992), *Interview With the Vampire* (1994) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (TV, 1996) a number of films sought to re-examine the role of the vampire in American culture. In Kathryn Bigelow's *Near Dark* (1987) a young farmer, Caleb, is bitten by waif stranger Mae and joins a gang of nomads who ride throughout the Midwest, killing and destroying anything in their path. They are reluctant to accept Caleb and he, in turn, is unwilling to kill, although it soon becomes clear that he can no longer tolerate daylight and has developed an unhealthy appetite for human blood. *Near Dark* is a refreshing kick in the teeth for Hollywood vampire flicks. The gift/curse of vampirism is not restricted to the privileged classes, but extends to a bunch of obnoxious rednecks, who do exactly as they please in an endless hedonistic quest for excess. When they walk into a bar with

the sole purpose of killing and destroying, they are bold, offensive and lethal, relishing their bloody mayhem. The kid Homer, an odious little monster, drinks, smokes and uses his considerable cunning to kill his victims – but he is an ancient, trapped in a child's body. Kathryn Bigelow is an assured director who makes intelligent films that never fail to entertain, always containing substantial subtext whilst delivering high-octane visceral thrills. *Near Dark*'s techniques cannot be faulted; it is well-paced, looks great (particularly the backlit shots of the vampires) and takes an unusual perspective on a familiar genre. Its only let-down is an unconvincing conclusion.

A similar re-examination of the vampire genre, though less focused, can be found in Larry Cohen's insane *A Return to Salem's Lot* (1987). A typical Cohen film includes plenty of pace, invention and exploitation, but with a political or social message should you want it. *A Return to Salem's Lot* is no exception, effortlessly taking in such weighty topics as class, capitalism ('vampirism and financial security go hand in hand'), police hypocrisy, age, fascism, AIDS, animal welfare and media voyeurism, while providing more than enough opportunity for squishy effects and latex gross-out. When hard-nosed anthropologist Joe Weber is pulled away from filming tribal sacrifices to look after his delinquent son in Salem's Lot, he doesn't expect to find the town run by vampires. Rather than kill Joe, the townsfolk want him to document their behaviour and create a vampire bible for future generations. It soon becomes apparent that they are not being open about the documentary process and their reliance on cattle as a food source is a smokescreen for more predatory nocturnal behaviour. The thinking person's splatter film, *A Return to Salem's Lot* packs a lot into its

running time, including the killing of two hobos by a troupe of giggling school children, a teenage punk being eaten by OAPs and the villagers hungrily snacking on anaesthetised cows to keep the human quota down – they later give up on the bovine diet and get a coachload of tourists in as a takeaway. While bearing no resemblance to Stephen King's stories, this film acknowledges the mini-series by having the protagonist inherit 'the Hooper's House on the hill'. Sadly, the terrifying Mr Barlow has been replaced with a towering bright blue muppet Yoda-alike, but what the film lacks in suspense it more than makes up for in energy and verve.

A Return to Salem's Lot enforces Cohen's agenda by using caricature to critique the American consumerist ethos. *Vampire at Midnight* (Gregory McClatchy, 1987) is almost the polar opposite, a reactionary example of lazy filmmaking. Its sickeningly eighties look and ideology combined with insipid lighting, unimaginative camerawork and legwarmers add up to an excruciatingly dull experience.

Not quite as reprehensible, *Dracula's Widow* (Christopher Coppola, 1988) is still a sorry affair, despite the nice idea of twisting the genre into a Raymond Chandler style detective story. Hollywood House of Wax owner Raymond becomes the slave of Dracula's widow Vanessa (*Emmanuelle* star Sylvia Kristel), whom he unwittingly finds among the boxes of paraphernalia for his Dracula display. Unsurprisingly, the hideous mutilation of a local gangster and group of devil worshippers does not go unnoticed, so hardened police inspector Hap Lannon is called onto the case to bore us to tears with his faux-Sam Spade voiceovers. Blessed with expert over-the-top lighting, this messy production throws it all away with lacklustre cinematography and bland direction.

Incongruous and way too long, the supposedly witty script and comic-book framing devices are dashed by some inappropriately graphic murders. Nasty, not funny and, the biggest crime of all, not interesting.

Nicolas Cage is one of Hollywood's more interesting A-List actors, who's known for his occasionally outré performances. However, in terms of sheer audacity, none of these come close to *Vampire's Kiss* (Robert Bierman, 1988). Cage plays Peter Leow, a thoroughly arrogant and offensive literary agent who humiliates his employees, just because he can. After a drunken night of feeble under-the-bedclothes fumblings, he finds himself unexpectedly aroused by an intruding bat, and before long has a new lover, the neck-gnawing Rachel. Developing an aversion to mirrors, a penchant for dark glasses and taking to sleeping during the day underneath his upturned sofa, Peter begins to think he is becoming a vampire. Taking the American work ethic as vampirism, this wannabe art film portrays Leow as a manic bastard of humungous proportions, a vampire before he meets the bat. His disturbed behaviour is made more wince-inducing because it feels strangely real. Despite quickly losing focus, the film is resurrected by the towering presence of Cage himself. A truly outstanding performance that increases the ante to sublime levels, his character is genuinely insane. Wince as Cage eats a real cockroach! Gasp as he teaches the alphabet! Snigger as he dons plastic vampire teeth and tries to speak properly! He jumps ferociously on tables, accosts people in toilets, rolls his eyes like a madman on angel dust and trashes anything in sight. Outstanding.

Filmmakers often mix their monsters in order to revitalise a flagging franchise or juxtapose popular mythologies.

Howling VI: The Freaks (1990) is an attempt to revive the overripe corpse of a series that had been in decline since Joe Dante's masterfully playful yet nasty classic *The Howling* (1981). It fails. Apparently some bright spark came up with the idea of mixing *The Howling*, *Freaks* and *Vampire Circus*, with abominable results. Ian is a 'new man' sort of a werewolf who is kidnapped by the annoying Mr Harker, a nasty vampire with elf-like pointy ears, who runs a circus. Caged as a freak, Ian's only chance of escape lies with the pitiful Alligator Boy. For the first hour of this film virtually nothing happens. Blandly. The actors aren't even poor enough to be funny, and the effects would be laughable but they are too dull. The tagline 'It's time to howl again' does at least warn any potential viewer to avoid this travesty.

Dracula Has Risen from the Grave

The slow decline in the Hollywood vampire film was given a spectacular boost in the shape of the high-profile, high-budget *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1993). *Francis Ford Coppola's Bram Stoker's Dracula*, to give it its full title, is as grandiose, melodramatic and operatic as its overblown moniker would suggest. In 1462 Vlad Dracul (Gary Oldman) renounces God following the suicide of his beloved wife. After many centuries he decides to take residence in London, convinced that his solicitor Jonathan Harker's (Keanu Reeves) fiancée Mina (Winona Ryder) is the reincarnation of his dead bride. Dracula leaves Jonathan to be fed upon by three voracious vampire lovelies in Romania, while he swans about London, infecting Lucy and seducing the prim Mina.

Coppola attempts to mirror the book's style by emphasising the use of letters and diaries to convey the distance

between the protagonists and the stretching of time between scenes. As such, to many, the film is contrived and pompous, lacking realism and burdened with insufferably hammy acting (Keanu Reeves' accent is so outrageously plummy he could set up business as a fruit merchant). By opening the film with Vlad's story, acknowledging the origins of Stoker's character, the emphasis is placed upon Dracula as a tragic figure, portraying him as a patriotic hero so that our sympathies lie with him despite the barbarity of his actions. Previous incarnations of Dracula have emphasised the sexual allure of the character, but here he is portrayed as romantic, if feral. Visually, the film is a masterpiece, the sumptuous set designs and glass paintings have a gothic fairytale look. Dracula's presence is often felt, his eyes melting into moonlit skies or flickering gaslight. However, the real star of the film is Eiko Ishioka who designed the magical costumes – a triumph of opulence and colour that revels in the decadence of the setting, from Renfield's Burtonesque straitjacket (Tom Waits in a film-robbing role) to Lucy's incredible bridal attire. *FFCBSD* is ultimately an operatic love story, spiced with lashings of blood and a fair slice of erotica, a decadent; if guilty, pleasure.

Far removed from the period melodrama of *FFCBSD*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Fran Rubel Kuzui, 1992) rebelled against the Victoriana to produce a contemporary, sassy twist on the genre, but it fails on almost every level. Buffy, an irritating teenager with trashy friends, discovers that she is the Slayer – an executioner of the undead. Still, she does have Merrick to instruct her in the ways of slaying, which is good because there are vampires in town and they have an eye on the local school as a fast-food outlet. Joss Whedon's justly successful television series, with its hip humour, romance and

scary situations, began life as this feature film. It's a miracle anyone greenlighted the subsequent series on the basis of viewing this unattractive and dull work. There is not a single likeable character amongst the whole sorry lot of them – even the good guys are thoroughly despicable and venomously bitchy. The baddies do not fare much better – Rutger Hauer lazily hams up his role and the 'oh so funny' extended death throes of a staked vampire in the final credits are a juvenile bore. Buffy's prodigious kung fu skills would not worry a five-year-old, let alone a 500-year-old, but as everyone else is as nimble as a sedated geriatric you hardly care. Apparently part of Whedon's motivation for creating the television series was to exorcise the memory of this hideous film. The finest roses grow from the smelliest manure.

John Landis sought to reprise the glory of his superb horror comedy *An American Werewolf in London* (1981) with the vampire-themed *Innocent Blood* (1993). Marie (Anne Parillaud) is a beautiful French vampire 'living' in America who only feeds on criminals and ensures that they don't rise again. There are two rules to being a vampire: never play with your food and always finish it. Unfortunately, she is disturbed whilst feeding on gangster boss Sal 'the Shark' Macelli (Robert Loggia) and he rises from the dead. Sal sets about creating a gang of undead mobsters, redefining the term 'made man'.

Parillaud makes a great, occasionally enigmatic, vampire who devours her victims like a zombie. Loggia is impressive as Sal, a dry run for the seriously deranged Mr Eddy in *Lost Highway*, and he hams up his performance without ruining the tone. Landis knows how to keep everything moving at the right pace, although he will insist on peppering his films with pointless car crashes and tacky strip joints. There are plenty of cameos for genre aficionados – Dario Argento, Sam

Raimi, Frank Oz and effects supremo Tom Savini all make an appearance, making *Innocent Blood* fun and frothy but occasionally incongruous.

Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* had been slowly building a following since the first was released in 1976. By the time *Interview With the Vampire* (1994) was released in cinemas, her works had become international bestsellers. Concentrating on key episodes in melancholy Louis' (un)life, director Neil Jordan manages to tell a tale that spans the centuries with considerable verve. In modern-day San Francisco, Louis relates his life history to a young journalist. Turned by Lestat in 1791, Louis relates the details of his sorry existence: his reluctance to feed on humans, the adoption of a child, Claudia, and his eventual escape from the clutches of his maker to a vampire community in Paris, led by the enigmatic Armand. *Interview With the Vampire* was destined to be huge, particularly with heartthrobs Brad Pitt, Tom Cruise and Antonio Banderas in the leading roles. Beautifully designed and lavish throughout, from the sumptuous recreation of the Old South to the extravagant Théatre des Vampires, it's a ravishing production. The effects are stunning, particularly Louis' revenge as he burns down the Paris coven, decapitating the wailing vampires as they burst from their coffins in fiery agony. All the performances are good; Cruise is convincing as the 'snob who loved to hunt in society' and Pitt suitably tortured as Louis, but they may actually have been more suited to the other's role. Although it deals with some quite complex issues, particularly with respect to Claudia, the girl who would never grow up, it doesn't really take them any further than is completely comfortable. It remains a perfectly crafted piece that, like its protagonists, looks gorgeous but maybe lacks a soul.

However, it certainly runs rings around the belated sequel, *Queen of the Damned* (2002), a more modest affair with instantly dated CGI effects that stand up poorly to the prosthetic work that graced its A-List predecessor. Lestat, now played by Stuart Townsend, has elected to sleep through boring times, but he finds inspiration in gothic-metal music and becomes lead singer of an inexplicably popular band that he arrogantly names after himself. Lestat's extended nap is nothing compared with that of Akasha, Queen of the Vampires. She is awakened from a 6,000-year snooze by the band's 'mystical' lyrics, electing to make the brazen singer her king and rule the world. Sadly, director Michael Rymer does little with the preposterous material he's been given, blurring the line between narrative coherence and extended pop-video style sequences to create an occasionally inventive but ultimately unremarkable piece. Only Aaliyah's spirited, exaggerated serpentine performance as Akasha offers any relief from the by-the-numbers filmmaking.

Eddie Murphy's erratic successes over the years have thrown up some oddities and a similar assertion could be applied to 'crash and boom' director Wes Craven. Their teaming on *Vampire in Brooklyn* (1995) was bound to be… interesting. Max (Eddie Murphy), the one remaining pure-bred African vampire, inexplicably only has until the full moon to reunite with his soulmate Rita. The problem is that Rita is living in Brooklyn, unaware of her lineage and, even worse, works for the police. Max turns petty larcenist Julius into his ghoul, then heads out to find his love. But Rita's police chum and reggae club nosferatu expert Dr Zeko is on hand to scupper the nightwalker's plans. The combination of gore and Murphy's brand of comedy may seem incongruous, but in the main it works. As in *Coming to America* and many

subsequent Murphy vehicles, he gets to appear as a number of different characters; the difference here is that Max possesses these people. The disguises are expertly handled, with a great turn as alcoholic Preacher Pauley convincing the congregation that 'Evil is Good.' After an overblown opening involving an ocean vessel smashing through the harbour, the film settles in with its quirky blend of gruesome horror and slapstick. By no means perfect, *Vampire in Brooklyn* nonetheless manages to entertain with its pleasant combination of chills and chuckles.

At least the horror and comedy in *Vampire in Brooklyn* do work, if not always at the same time. The same cannot be said of the utterly risible spin-off from the *Tales from the Crypt* series, *Bordello of Blood* (Gilbert Adler, 1996). Vincent the dwarf (we mention this fact as he's there purely for exploitation value) revives Lilith in darkest South America. Back in the USofA heavy metal yob Caleb goes missing and his sister Katherine, a publicist for a TV evangelist, hires PI Rafe Guttman to find him. They find Caleb at a local funeral home, actually a front for Lilith's vampiric bordello, and resolve to close it down using holy-water-filled water-pistols. The daunting array of Hollywood behind-the-camera big names on show seems at odds with the final product: adolescent T&A with no threat or sensuality, with acting that's uniformly bland and plastic. No attempt has been made to credit Lilith with any of her legendary status – it's just a name they've lazily dragged up without thought, care or attention. Some decent effects, including Lilith French-kissing Caleb's heart out, are rendered tedious by unremittingly average direction.

Something of an anomaly in the genre, *The Little Vampire* (2000) is a children's film based upon the series of books by

Angela Sommer-Bodenburg. Tony is having a hard time at his new school in Scotland, ridiculed for being American and revealing his dreams about vampires to his class. Tony finds a friend in the shape of Rudolph who happens to be a vampire, but a nice one who lives with his family and snacks on the local cows. All very idyllic, but the rare reappearance of a comet means that the vampire clan need to locate a magic amulet quickly if they are to have any hope of returning to human form. *The Little Vampire* is a well-crafted story with a few scares (all appropriate for a young audience) and lots of comedy. There are some lovely details – including a herd of vampire cows which develop blood-red eyes and refuse to graze in the daylight, much to the farmer's chagrin. Everyone gets into the spirit of the film, with particularly good performances from Richard E Grant as the dominating father and Rollo Weeks as Rudolph. A film that's both exciting and charming.

A further mainstream twist on the vampire story is *Shadow of the Vampire* (2000), which follows the shooting of Murnau's *Nosferatu*, the twist being that Max Schrek really *is* a vampire, with terrifying consequences for an increasingly paranoid and drug-addled crew. Set at the height of the Weimer Republic, John Malkovich plays a driven FW Murnau, who will stop at nothing to realise his vision, but Willem Dafoe steals the show as Schreck, with his astonishing make-up and sinister demeanour. With scenes from the original film lovingly recreated, this is definitely one for a nostalgic audience, with its loopy premise, period setting and dark humour.

Crammed with nudity and violence *The Forsaken* (2001) uses its limited budget to its advantage, even if it does fall apart a bit towards the end. Sean is earning money for his

sister's wedding by driving an expensive car across America. Needless to say, when he runs into hitch-hiker Nick and a group of vampires the prospects of the car reaching Miami intact are slim. Writer-director J S Cardone's unpretentious film clearly nods to Kathryn Bigelow's *Near Dark*, but imbues matters with enough originality to sustain interest by focusing primarily on Sean's metaphorical as well as physical journey from movie trailer editor to vampire hunter. *Forsaken* comes with its own myths: drugs that can stave off vampirism for a time (explicitly linking vampirism with disease and particularly AIDS); psychic links; a werewolf style 'kill the bloodline' get-out clause; and the origin of the original vampires as cursed cannibal survivors of a Turkish massacre during the crusades. This later part means the film sets itself up for a (as yet unrealised) sequel.

Franchise Fever: From Dusk Till Dawn

Scripted by Quentin Tarantino before he made *Reservoir Dogs*, *From Dusk Till Dawn* (1996) was originally designed to be a quickly produced exploitation flick. Director Robert Rodriguez brings his energetic style to the proceedings and it bears the marks of his other films: people walking coolly towards the camera as buildings explode in the background; desert road shots; the mariachi band (here shown playing corpses as instruments!); the love of 1950s B-Movies; and the crotch gun (*Desperado*). The notorious Gecko brothers need to cross the border into Mexico to escape the authorities, so they kidnap a faith-free ex-priest and his kids and hijack their campervan. The destination is the Titty Twister, a dodgy bar and strip joint in the middle of nowhere where they will wait till dawn to finalise a lucrative business deal. However, it

soon becomes abundantly clear that a large portion of the staff and clientele are vampires, hungry for blood. Though hugely enjoyable, *From Dusk Till Dawn* comes with a major caveat – it is a lad's film pure and simple, with nothing for women to do except to be provocative or die. Tarantino's irritating performance is uncomfortable as he tortures and kills an innocent victim and becomes thoroughly unwholesome as we see his sexually deranged fantasies towards Juliette Lewis's character. The film is basically two unresolved pulp scripts tacked together, lurching into vampire territory when the thriller angle is exhausted. It's a delirious splatterfest of such proportions its sheer stupidity is the only reason it avoided the censor's shears: phallic stakes are attached to pneumatic drills; water pistols filled with holy water; and each leg of a table used to impale a squishy vamp. The effects are great when they stay within prosthetic territory but are remarkably poor when they stray into CGI. This is a brain-cell-free ride that never drags, is gross yet funny but is sadly overburdened with some misogynist attitudes.

Following the success of the film the moderate budget opportunities of the project convinced the Weinstein brothers to bankroll two further productions. *From Dusk Till Dawn 2: Texas Blood Money* (Scott Spiegel, 1999) strays into Tarantino territory as five criminals shack up at the El Coyote hotel prior to a bank job. An army of cops are on their trail and one of the gang has done a hit-and-run-and-shoot job on a vampire bat, stupidly mentioning this to the barman of the Titty Twister. One by one, the gang get turned into vampires, but they don't allow this to get in the way of their heist plans. Spiegel's film takes all the worst elements of the original and accentuates them to the point of disgust. Despite some inventive touches – the smeary red bat vision,

sticky endings and cartoonish wipes – this film exists for one purpose alone, to let men watch women being brutally violated under the cover of entertainment. Men die macho stunt deaths, being blown up or thrown off buildings, but the women are all violated. Nasty, cynical, chauvinist crap. All of which would indicate that part three should be given a very wide berth, but, strangely, *From Dusk Till Dawn 3: The Hangman's Daughter* (PJ Pesce, 2000) is a surprisingly strong and imaginative film. A prequel set 100 years ago, and showing the origin of Salma Hayek's character from the original, *From Dusk Till Dawn 3* follows Ambrose Bierce's encounter with Esmerelda, the daughter of a sadist hangman. The pair are lured to a bar by the prospect of gold, but, with the familiar barman looking older here than he does 100 years later, their futures ain't looking too rosy. *The Hangman's Daughter* feels more like a Rodriguez film (indeed, he and his cousin wrote it) with dynamic, impatient camerawork and editing, but there is also a debt to Salvador Dali in the surreal scenery and Alejandro Jodorowsky's *El Topo* in some of the design and imagery. The climax is a mass of inventive special effects, even if some of the prosthetics are a touch ropey. It's all jolly tasteless, with ripped-open abdomens spewing forth armies of bats, but it works. Returning to its Mexican roots was the best thing that could have happened to the franchise; there's even a guy in a Santo mask!

Franchise Fever: Blade

With the torrent of superhero films that floods the multiplexes in day-glo lycra each summer it can be difficult to remember quite how revolutionary *Blade* (Stephen Norrington, 1998) was. Based upon a character appearing in

Marvel's *Tomb of Dracula* comic, Blade, half human, half vampire, is on a mission to rid the world of the undead, particularly a new 'lower class' breed led by the flamboyant Frost. Frost's aims are simple: hedonism, eradicating all the stuffy vampire elders, and world domination. *Blade* was Hollywood's attempt to update the vampire myth, right from the opening: a pulsing soundtrack accompanies a young victim into a rave at an abattoir where the undead dancers indulge in a bloodbath before Blade comes crashing in, wreaking havoc. It sets the pace for a bloody, action-packed romp where the vampires have a kind of die fast, live young existence. Their leader Frost is cool, manipulative and out for a good time. Perhaps bitter that he is a 'turned vampire', rather than 'pure blood', he doesn't care for the elder vampires' rules, discovering a means to raise a Blood God to rule the planet, whilst partying to the max. Blade, in contrast, really doesn't have a very good time at all. Sure, he can walk in the daylight and has vampiric strength, but he has to inject serum to stop his blood-cravings – he's all tortured soul on a mission to avenge his existence. And he has grumpy old Kris Kristofferson to live with too. The action is energetic, including a good deal of swordplay, heavily borrowed from Hong Kong cinema, it's edited speedily and the pacing never drags. If there is one criticism, it lies with the computer-generated blood which is just not bloody enough, although there's plenty of it. Slick, solid, enjoyable Hollywood entertainment, with exemplary design and much macho fang snarling from Wesley Snipes. Stephen Norrington would return obliquely to the vampire world in the troubled but exquisitely designed *League of Extraordinary Gentleman* (2003), a group superhero film in which Mina Harker is a vampire helping to save the world from an evil genius.

Blade II (2002) follows our mopey hero as he battles another scheme for world domination. The twist this time is that he needs to align himself with the vampires rather than kill them in order to defeat a new threat – a genetically modified breed of super-vampire raised via the deadly Reaper Virus. Director Guillermo del Toro clearly relishes the horror genre as a true aficionado and, while his Hollywood films lack the warmth and emotion of his Spanish language output (*Cronos*, *Devil's Backbone*, *Pan's Labyrinth*), they nevertheless have the verve and excitement you expect from a studio flick plus a strong sense of visual flair. *Blade II* is no exception – the super-vampires are truly repellent, with detachable jaws that can devour a victim's entire face. But in contrast when two vampires poignantly face certain death at dawn they embrace and calmly await their fate – as the sun rises amber and gold, their bodies slowly flake into ashes, drifting on the breeze like petals in a river. Admittedly, the plot is a bit haphazard and the shock return of Kris Kristofferson's Whistler is borderline ridiculous, but there is enough slicing and dicing, martial arts and body horror to ensure that it never flags.

The writer of parts one and two, David S Goyer, took on the mantle of writer-producer-director for part three. What *Blade Trinity* (2004) lacks in coherence and visual inventiveness it more than compensates for with its sheer 'throw everything at the wall and something will stick' attitude and a range of borderline pantomime characters. The vampire nation unearth the king of the vampires, Drake(ula), in order to try, once more, to rule the world. Realising that Blade is the main thorn in their side, the nation set him up on a murder rap, so now the FBI are on his tail too. Reluctantly, Blade teams up with the Nightstalkers, a disparate group of vampire hunters

researching an anti-vamp virus. *Blade Trinity* manages to take the film series out with a bang, not a whimper, with Blade becoming even more morosely earnest in order to compete with Parker Posey's brilliantly histrionic Danica Talos. A spin-off television series, with Sticky Fingaz as Blade, was produced in 2006 but cancelled after a dozen episodes.

Franchise Fever: Vampires

Some films do exactly what the title says; in the case of *John Carpenter's Vampires* (1999), John Carpenter makes a vampire film. When all bar one of Jack Crow's slaying team are killed by a Master Vampire, Jack is determined to seek revenge. Consulting with the Catholic church, he learns that his nemesis is in fact the first ever vampire, on a mission to complete a ceremony that will give him supreme power. With chum Montoya, naive priest Father Adam and bitten prostitute Katrina on hand, Jack sets out to save the world. James Woods as Crow is a typical John Carpenter hero – tough, cool and competent, he works for the establishment but plays by his own rules. It's a vampire Western with Leone-esque sweeping vistas, great use of deep-red lens filters (the shots of the vampires rising from the earth at dusk are amazing) and, of course, Carpenter's own expressive score. The addition of some unusual means of slaying – stake 'em, then winch 'em out into the sun, whereupon they combust – makes for essential pulp viewing. It's not without flaws though; although Thomas Ian Griffith is a great looking and ruthless vampire, aside from the opening, there isn't an awful lot for him to do – the focus is on the slaying team. The film also suffers from a certain degree of misogyny and unnecessary non-linear exposition (something that would plague Carpenter's space

vampire/zombie crossover *Ghosts of Mars* to a greater degree). That said, it's always engaging and looks great.

Vampires: Los Muertos (2002) is clearly a lower budget sequel, though still impressively shot in 'scope, with Carpenter regular Tommy Lee Wallace writing and directing, while Jon Bon Jovi takes the reigns as the lead vampire hunter, the unfortunately named Derek Bliss. Receiving assignments from the net and recording kills on his camera, Bliss has set himself up as a sucker-exterminating franchise. A lucrative deal sees him join a rapidly diminishing team of hunters in search of a powerful female vampire. Plentiful gore (owing much to Romero's *Living Dead* films) and a kooky cast of sidekicks – the mysterious goth girl, the kid in tow à la *Salem's Lot*, the suspect monks – makes sure things never flag. While many of the scenes are repeated from the original film there are still plenty of twists to keep things fresh, with strange rituals and potential cures for the affliction set against the glaring, vampire unfriendly, Mexican sun and the dingy comic-book lighting of underground crypts.

Vampires: The Turning (2005), despite its marketing as *Vampires 3*, has little connection with the others in the franchise and is, in fact, a Thai/US production. Connor splits up with his girlfriend because she doesn't like Muy Thai fighting but when he realises that she's been seduced and bitten by a local vampire, he runs to the rescue. But the stakes are higher than patching up a lovers' tiff, for the vampires are seeking immortality and world domination through the power of an eclipse. Fortunately for Connor, there is a group of vampire hunters and even some 'good' vampires on hand, determined to scupper their plans. Plenty of martial arts, wire-work and swordplay make this an amiable enough 80-minute film, despite the dubious acting and unfortunate

post-production CGI blood. Putting the vampires in a motorcycle gang just adds another B-action movie cliché to the pot and the risible dialogue actually makes the film quite enjoyable. What it is not is *John Carpenter's Vampires*. At all.

Franchise Fever: Dracula 2001+

Regular editor for Wes Craven, Patrick Lussier turned writer-director for the production of *Dracula 2001* (*Dracula 2000* in the US), a contemporary version of the story. More than one hundred years since he defeated Dracula, Van Helsing, kept alive by injecting himself with the vampire's blood filtered through leeches, guards the remains of his mortal enemy. Unfortunately, an unscrupulous employee and her gang rob his antiques business – unwittingly freeing Dracula in the process. Dracula seeks out Van Helsing's daughter Mary, currently living in New Orleans, so Van Helsing and his irritating cockney sidekick Simon head to the USA to save the day. A visually sumptuous and imaginative reworking of a familiar story, *Dracula 2001* has plenty of promise and art direction to die for, but manages to squander them in spectacular manner. Updating elements of the story to appeal to a modern age generally works well: an aeroplane's pilot is found lashed to the controls; vampires can't be seen though video cameras; and electric lighting can prove as effective as natural sunlight in the right circumstances. Mary's psychic link with Dracula gives a sense of surrealism that is effective and startling, and mainly achieved by simple in-camera effects. However, despite all of this, the end result is an unmitigated mess – choppy and occasionally pretentious. The acting is quite simply woeful, the Virgin product placement laughable and Dracula's origins as Judas Iscariot, while

novel, leads to an outrageously contrived climactic demise.

Except, of course, Dracula doesn't stay dead for long, returning in *Dracula II: Ascension* (2003). Eschewing the close of the first film to allow for a bit of narrative juggling, Dracula's body is recovered so that it can be used to research its restorative properties and potentially cure degenerative diseases. Of course, you can't keep a good, or even not-so-good, vampire down and soon the killing begins anew with Jason Scott Lee's conveniently employed vampire-hunting priest Father Uffizi at hand. Dracula spends most of the film as a barbecued corpse (presumably because Stephen Billington doesn't look much like Gerard Butler, who played Dracula in the first film) and, just when matters look like getting interesting, the film stops stone cold dead. *Dracula III: Legacy* (2005) moves the action away from New Orleans to Romania, where civil war is compounded by the addition of vampires and long-suffering Father Uffizi tries to put an end to the curse once and for all. Once again, Dracula has disguised his appearance by turning into Rutger Hauer and the overall result is as confused as the previous films in the franchise.

Franchise Fever: Underworld

The premise for the *Underworld* films is a good one – what if vampires *and* werewolves (lycan) exist? And what if they don't get on? *Underworld* (Len Wiseman, 2003) proposes such a promising 'difficult-to-kill monsters who ruck a lot' premise and even throws in the lush gothic backdrop of Budapest along with some myths about why a war started between the two races. Selene, played by Kate Beckinsale, wearing her Kate Beckinsale Impractical Tight Black Number, is a vampire who, wouldn't you know it, falls in

love with a new werewolf called Michael, whose fate could alter the future of both lycan and vampire. The film has ideas aplenty – the aristocratic vampires and the street gang lycan, apocalyptic plot, doomed romance – but ultimately it all falls apart with its magpie approach to visual sensibilities (a touch of *The Matrix*, a dash of *The Crow*), messy editing and shallow dialogue. The worst crime of all is that neither side seems particularly motivated to do what they do best – that is, biting and slashing – preferring to rely on guns with 'special ultraviolet, steeped in garlic and covered in hawthorn' bullets. *Underworld: Evolution* (2006) improves on part one considerably but is still a mess of a film. Having killed the vampire leader Viktor, Selene is on the run from her own kind. Matters get more heated when a vengeful Marcus, son of the first vampire, is raised from his tomb. This time round the still impractically clad Ms Beckinsale is given a series of increasingly physical set pieces to jump, shoot and dodge her way through. A combination of high-octane action, explosions, guns, wire-work, helicopters, car chases and martial arts ensures that the film never slows down and there's much to enjoy in the washed out flashbacks to the start of the war. At the time of writing, a prequel is in development.

Still saucily attired, Ms B also gets to fight vampires, though this time she isn't one herself, in Stephen Sommers' glossily barmy homage to Universal horror films, *Van Helsing* (2004). Loopy from the outset, the premise sees Count Dracula force Frankenstein into solving his procreational problems by helping him breed thousands of offspring which grow in placental sacks hanging in the cave beneath his interdimensionally cloaked castle in the Carpathian mountains. Harpy vampire brides attack a village and there's

a masquerade ball recalling *Dance of the Vampires*, but Sommers over-eggs his pudding considerably with a gallery of cameo monsters and some ludicrous, if enjoyable, set pieces that make his *Mummy* films look like modicums of restraint.

Vampires get chilly in the Alaskan based comic-book adaptation *30 Days of Night* (David Slade, 2007), the title referring to a month-long Arctic night. These are, of course, ideal conditions for vampires – they don't feel the cold and there's none of that 'back by dawn' problem which can make feeding such a rushed affair. The local Sheriff, Eben Oleson, is still trying to come to terms with the break-up of his relationship, but such personal matters fade into the background when a wild-eyed stranger comes to town and causes havoc with acts of sabotage and insane ramblings foretelling doom and destruction. He isn't wrong, for a pack of vicious vampires are heading their way, hell bent on massacring every man, woman and child in a month-long orgy of gluttonous excess. How long can the rapidly diminishing population last and what can possibly stop the killing? The vampires in *30 Days of Night* are genuinely nasty, soulless beasts – their jet black eyes, razor-sharp incisors and lacerating bone-yellow fingernails coupled with the strength to lift cars and leap from buildings make them apparently impossible to kill. They are not sympathetic, they are totally alien – speaking their own language (subtitled) and screeching ear-piercing screams. Almost feral, they attack swiftly and savagely – ensuring that they decapitate their food to prevent them turning into vampires too. The gore from their kills hangs on their mouths like grotesque crimson beards. With a number of shock attacks, vampires that crash into homes rather than wait to be invited and

plenty of messy axe and vehicular slaughter, this is a tense and enjoyable ride marred only by the occasional overuse of handheld camerawork.

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