

## Jeff Kirkendall's Thoughts For The Month Column

### Thoughts, Opinions, Reviews, Commentary & More!

Hello and Welcome! My name is Jeff Kirkendall and I'm an independent filmmaker and actor from the Upstate New York area. This is the section of the Very Scary Productions website where I write about topics related to independent filmmaking, digital video production, acting, movies in general, horror movies in particular, my own indie movies, as well as anything and everything related or in between.

I decided to create this commentary page because I find that I often come across things that either interest me, excite me, intrigue me, or maybe just bug me. Any topic related to movies and cinema is fair game, from the most mainstream to the most controversial. For example I'll often read about movie projects that I have a strong interest in or opinion on, for one reason or another. This page gives me a forum to discuss these things. It's all about discussion and furthering understanding of our pop culture. Anyone who has feedback concerning what I have to say here, feel free to contact me (see the contact link at <http://www.veryscaryproductions.com/>).

I'd also like to point out that the following is just my opinion, and everyone is free to agree or disagree with what I have to say. Enjoy, and to all the Indies out there: Keep on Filming!

### From *Nosferatu* to *Twilight* – Our fascination with vampires – August 2009

Right now vampires are all the rage. This current wave of popularity most likely began with the mega-success of both the book and movie versions of author Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight*. And it has continued on with the popular pay cable show *True Blood*. Both these tales focus heavily on the dramatic side of vampiric storytelling, with *Twilight* centering on handsome teen vamp Edward Cullen and his equally attractive family of bloodsuckers, and *True Blood* revolving around southern gothic drama. However before these desirable fanged men and women hit screens both large and small, there was the equally popular teen vampire drama *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, preceded well before that by Barnabus Collins and the goings on at Collinwood in the original vamp soap opera *Dark Shadows*. And of course the silver screen was first graced by the original *Nosferatu*, the count who started things in motion.

I've always found that vampire movies tend to lean into one of two camps. They either focus on a dramatic-romantic storyline ala *Twilight* and *Interview with the Vampire*, or they focus on a tale of nasty, vile creatures tearing apart humans for food, such as in movies like *John Carpenter's Vampires*, *From Dusk Til' Dawn*, and *30 Days of Night*. Of course the films I've noted fall pretty squarely into one category or another, while admittedly the vast majority of cinematic vampire tales have at least some elements of each. It's also worth noting that vampire movies centering on vicious creatures are often action-horror hybrid films, while the former romantic films are primarily drama-horror hybrids. Personally I tend to gravitate more toward the horrific than the romantic when it comes to our fanged fiends, as I'm sure is the case with many horror fans; however undoubtedly it is usually the attractive, suave and sophisticated characters that put vampires in the spotlight with mainstream audiences. Such is definitely the case with this current wave of popularity.

Regardless of what type of bloodsucker tale one prefers, there is no doubt this particular horror subgenre is one of the most enduring, as well as the most versatile. The vampire film just never goes away, although vampires arguably go through peaks and valleys in popularity. This is in a way surprising given the ever more extreme horror movies being produced to captivate modern

audiences, from slasher films all the way to the so-called torture-horror films like **Saw**, **Captivity**, **Hostel** and countless others. This breed of slickly-made extreme gore film would seem to make vampire tales appear quaint by comparison; however fanged popularity hasn't been diminished in the least. Of course some of this can be accounted for by individual tastes, with certain audiences liking their horror to be more romantic and less extreme. Nevertheless this type of prevalent competition for eyeballs is a testament to the vampire tales' continuing appeal in the 2000's.

It's also worth noting how popular vampires continue to be in the world of underground and low-budget cinema. \* There is still a steady stream of vampire movies produced by today's new breed of digital moviemaker. I know from my own experience that a vampire tale can be a good choice when it comes to experimental moviemaking. When I first thought about making a feature film many years ago, I decided a monster movie was the way to go and figured a vampire movie would be the most accessible. This was because from a makeup standpoint it was something that I could easily achieve, and from a story perspective the vampire fit easily into the dramatic storyline I had previously penned. Judging by the number of low/no-budget vampire movies released, I'm guessing such was the appeal for many other budding filmmakers as well.

Finally I'd like to speak briefly on the erotic appeal of vampires - another aspect of this particular horror subgenre that has made it one of the most adaptable. The vampire has always been easily blended into the world of erotic film (and literature), and these types of productions continue to be popular and profitable. \*\* Erotic vampire movies are produced by numerous underground companies, such as the previously discussed Seduction Cinema (**Lust for Dracula**, **Sexy Adventures of Van Helsing**, **An Erotic Vampire in Paris** etc.), and Factory 2000 (**The Vampire Strangler**), as well as countless other high and lower-end companies. Many of these movies involve little in the way of horror and much in the way of nude scenes and sexual images. Needless to say sexual imagery involving beautiful female models, scream queens, thongs, fangs and bare skin provide another outlet for the appeal of vamps in countless straight-to-video tales of vampire erotica. Indeed it would seem vampires can fit in almost anywhere.

From the perspective of a horror fan such as myself, I'm glad Edward Cullen and characters like him continue to be so popular. While many horror fans may grimace at romantic, teen-oriented movies like this, there is no doubt surrounding the universal appeal of eternal youth and excitement such dramatic characters offer. If nothing else, the success of a movie such as **Twilight** keeps the horror genre on the map and encourages the production of more fright fare both big and small. And that can only be a good thing!

\* My first foray into vampire movie territory was my 1996 production **Terror of the Master**. I followed it up with **The Temptress** (see "The Temptress" Page for more information) in 2002. I also acted in filmmaker Joe Bagnardi's indie vampire saga **Shadow Tracker: Vampire Hunter** (see Other Projects Page 2) and **Bloodlust**, directed by Michael Kazlo (see the Acting Credits page for more information).

\*\* See the April 2008 TFTM column for a discussion on New Jersey-based Seduction Cinema, actress Misty Mundae, and Factory 2000.