



The Hammer Dracula Pages

Dracula According to the House of Hammer

In the 1960's, Christopher Lee and the Hammer studio defined Count Dracula for a generation of movie fans. Although quite tame by today's standards, it should be remembered that in their era these films were original and daring. They still represent a unique combination of classy filmmaking and bloody murder. And the modern mythology of vampirism that our culture still clings to has its roots in these films. The earlier movies never defined it clearly, and -- with very few exceptions -- the mythologies in later movies are variants of the Hammer interpretation.

More than anything else, it was Christopher Lee who created a new popular image of Count Dracula. Only Lugosi's leering eyes and elegant accent have had as much impact on the public's idea of what a vampire is. But Bela was for an earlier generation -- in the tumultuous 1960's, Lugosi's Dracula was seen as a caricature. The young film fans needed a more credible threat.



Christopher Lee had continuing objections to the way Hammer handled the Dracula character, but through it all he insisted on portraying Dracula according to his own interpretation of the Bram Stoker original. More than merely menacing, he was savage and feral -- and he did that without becoming an over-fanged werewolf-substitute (the popular movie vampire of the 1980's). More than just charismatic, Lee's Dracula was cruelly sensual and openly seductive -- and he did that without becoming an effeminate whiner (the popular movie vampire of the 1990's).

And lest you think that Christopher Lee's vision is antiquated and forgotten by all but old-fogey film buffs like myself, check out 1998's *John Carpenter's Vampires*. Lee would find the role of head vampire Valek to be quite familiar.



in chronological order

HORROR OF DRACULA

(1958 - Hammer - aka *Dracula*) dir: Terence Fisher; w/ Peter Cushing, Christopher Lee, Michael Gough.

The first Hammer Dracula flick -- the script is almost childlike in its simplicity, but it is powerful and moody. However, it may be a bit long-winded & slow for today's audiences. If you set your mentality back to "crawl-under-the-covers" childlike enjoyment, this is a right spooky flick. Cushing revitalizes the previously stodgy role of Van Helsing -- he's a veritable action hero, sprinting up stairs and leaping across the room to yank the curtains off the window and expose Dracula to the dawn.

the BRIDES OF DRACULA

(1960) dir: Terence Fisher; w/ Peter Cushing, Freda Jackson, Martita Hunt, Yvonne Monlaur, David Peel, (Michael Ripper bit).



Lacking Christopher Lee, they went with David Peel, whom the flick's preview trailer describes as "blindingly handsome." Well, he is pretty, but Hammer couldn't bring themselves to call this fop "Dracula," so instead he's Baron Meinster, a Drac disciple. Held in check by his iron-willed mother, he awaits only a pretty bimbo to set him free to terrorize the local girls' school. Cushing is still young enough to continue playing Van Helsing as an action hero -- jumping out of windows, swinging from ropes, and cauterizing his own wounds with red-hot irons. Actually, it's a good flick, if a bit juvenile. The real saving graces, however, are the great supporting characters, especially Freda Jackson as the Baron's wigged-out, cackling servant.

DRACULA, PRINCE OF DARKNESS

(1966 - 7 Arts/Hammer) dir: Terence Fisher; w/ Christopher Lee, Barbara Shelley, Andrew Keir, Francis Matthews, Suzan Farmer.

This was made to be the direct sequel to *Horror of Dracula* -- the climactic moments of that film even form the prologue to this one. Then the script strolls along for 45 minutes until finally we get the niftiest vampire resurrection method ever. A victim is suspended by his heels over a sarcophagus holding the ashes of Dracula -- the victim's throat is slit and his blood gushes out onto the ashes, reconstituting the dehydrated Prince of Darkness. In 1966, this one scene had all the school kids talking and it made this the coolest movie at the drive-in. The film picks up a little bit after that scene but never does hit a good stride. With no Van Helsing, the innocents are aided by a boisterous abbot, and Dracula is dispatched this time by running water. It's well made & the sfx are even decent, but the plot is choppy and wanders back & forth a lot. On a personal note, I do prefer the depiction of vampires as inhuman monsters (rather than suave party animals) -- however, I must still give demerits to a script that gives an actor of Christopher Lee's caliber only two lines -- and both of those are "Aahrar!"



DRACULA HAS RISEN FROM THE GRAVE

(1968 - Hammer) dir: Freddie Francis; w/ Christopher Lee, Rupert Davies, Veronica Carlson, Barry Andrews, Michael Ripper.

After being encased in ice for a while, Dracula is revived when a tipsy priest cracks his noggin and bleeds onto the ice. But Drac finds his castle locked with a cross, so he hunts down the family of the monsignor who did it. This one has some good sets and great scenes, and the script is more involving than usual. Plus there's a nice twist in that our young hero



is an atheist who finds himself struggling with a satanic evil. Dracula himself is more “60’s” -- his approach being less savage and more sensual. However, we’re still missing Van Helsing, and the ending, although dramatic, is a bit abrupt. A solid entry in Hammer’s Dracula series, it’s an improvement over the previous three (at least Christopher Lee gets some lines in this one).

TASTE THE BLOOD OF DRACULA

(1969 - Hammer) dir: Peter Sasdy; w/ Christopher Lee, Linda Hayden, Anthony Corlan, Ralph Bates, (Michael Ripper bit).

The action moves to England this time, where a gang of jaded Victorian hobnobs looking for thrills accidentally revive the Lord of Vampires. Thanks in part to a gutsy script (including a hefty dose of patricide), this is the moodiest and most genuinely scary of the Hammer Dracula series. In a subtle move toward Freudian terrors, Dracula doesn’t just bite people, he subverts youngsters into simply murdering his enemies for him. The script is slow in the first half hour, but then tightens the screws nicely. Although the ending is a little simple and has to be taken on faith (literally), it is probably the most religious destruction Dracula has ever endured.



SCARS OF DRACULA

(1970 - Hammer) dir: Roy Ward Baker; w/ Christopher Lee, Dennis Waterman, Jenny Hanley, Patrick Troughton, Michael Ripper. One nice flash of heinie; a few bloody bits.

The beginning is ham-fisted & abrupt -- Dracula is unceremoniously resurrected when a cheesy rubber bat drools on his remains. Then just as abruptly we’re back in the Old Country in the middle of a weak soap opera. What follows is a ho-hum tale where most things happen by accident. It has the smell of a production they had the money for & needed to crank out quick. However, the photography is good and there are some nice icky visuals. And in a vain attempt to keep things interesting, there is a



parade of Hammer's signature down-the-cleavage shots. Although the scenery is nice, there's not much else here worth watching.



DRACULA - A.D. 1972

(1972 – Hammer) dir: Alan Gibson; w/ Christopher Lee, Peter Cushing, Stephanie Beacham, Christopher Neame, Michael Coles, (Caroline Munro bit). No skin.

Van Helsing finally returns to the series! (Okay, Lee is terrific, but I confess that I'm really a Peter Cushing fan.) It begins by recapping Dracula's last demise, but this one is original to this flick, it did not appear in a previous movie. Fast forward a hundred years and a modern Drac disciple resurrects the count so he can exact revenge on the descendants of Van Helsing. Well, updating the series into the present is a decent idea on the face of it, but they tried way too hard to impress upon the viewer that this was modern London. The clothes are so *mod*, the slang is so *mod*, the music is so *mod* – I'm sure the film looked hopelessly outdated six months after its release. If you can get past that stumbling block, the flick doesn't totally stink. It is very nicely filmed, and the script itself really isn't bad, although it shuffles along at a sleepy pace. For a little extra entertainment, you can count how many times Cushing gets to cop a feel on Stephanie Beacham.





SATANIC RITES OF DRACULA

(1973 – Hammer; aka *Count Dracula & His Vampire Bride*) dir: Alan Gibson; w/ Christopher Lee, Peter Cushing, Michael Coles, Joanna Lumley. Some skin, no gore.

This might also have been titled *Secret Agent Squad vs the Vampire Conglomerate*. Less a horror movie than an action movie, it doesn't really succeed at either. Dracula gets resurrected (unexplained this time) and becomes a CEO in order to foster research on a new & improved bubonic plague – sort of “Bram Stoker meets Tom Clancy” (& loses). Although the budget is low on this one, the photography is nice and the performances are good. Unfortunately, the script is rather a bore. The real selling point of this flick is the first 15 minutes – it is interrupted by frequent flashbacks to an evil ceremony. As Black Masses go, it is tepid, but it does feature a stark naked lady laying on the altar throughout the whole thing.



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Icon Glossary:



Good Stinker -- These are the films where a good deal of the entertainment comes from filmmaking incompetence; fun to watch in spite of themselves.



Goopy Gore -- These films exhibit distinctly above-normal quantities of unpleasantly abused body parts.



Naughty Nudie -- Films with this flag feature frequent and/or explicit nudity (almost always female) beyond that normally found in your average T&A flick.



Butt Stompin' -- These films feature at least one superior violent fight or shootout scene that will get the testosterone pumping.



Gold Star -- These are the flicks that I felt reached above their expectations or at least pleasantly surprised me; they may not always be actually good flicks, but I did find something in them worthwhile.



Blue Max Medal of Really Goodness -- These are flicks that I not only enjoyed, but I think are actually quite good films (not always the same thing).



Lethal Cinema -- These wretched viewing experiences go beyond being merely bad to become genuine sources of pain and regret; they should be avoided by all but the most masochistic trash cinema veterans. Don't say I didn't warn you.