

FEATURES



David Bowie and Catherine Deneuve in *The Hunger* (1983)





VAMPIRE VIEWING

RECOMMENDATIONS TO RELIEVE LOCKDOWNS

During the tedium of lockdown what could be better than catching up on your favourite vampire movies? Here are twelve of my absolute must see faves.

30 DAYS OF NIGHT

A small town in Alaska Experiences thirty days of absolute darkness once a year due to its geographical position. A perfect opportunity for a terrifying pack of vampires to descend and hunt down the townsfolk. Danny Huston is particularly good as the leader of the vampires who in a nice bit of detail even speak in their own guttural ancient Eastern European language. In one scene a begging victim about to be slaughtered says 'God help me!' to which the leader of the vampires looks at the sky and replies 'God?' Then shakes his head 'No God!' Bleak and brutal and with a savage ending, the only thing that is slightly off-putting is the head vampire's striking resemblance to Neil Tennant, lead singer of the Pet Shop Boys. Apart from that a must see.

NEAR DARK

The 1980s brought with it a new take on the vampire genre, courtesy of director Kathryn Bigelow. Set in the deep South, a young American country boy, walking alone one night, encounters the beautiful Mae played by Jenny Wright. He is bitten, falls for her and subsequently gets caught up with a vicious gang of leather jacket wearing, ultra-violent, Hells Angel biker vampires. Starring Lance Henriksen, Bill Paxton and Jenette Goldstein, fresh off the set of James Cameron's *Aliens*, highly original and surprisingly violent for the time, a terrific thrill ride of a movie.

MR. VAMPIRE

Tired of Western-centric vampire movies? Then this is for you. Interesting to see another culture's take on vampires. This movie from Hong Kong pictures quickly gained a cult following with Western audiences. It's out with wooden stakes, garlic and crucifixes, instead vampires can be stopped by placing a piece of paper with a sacred inscription dipped in holy wax on their foreheads. It is also possible to hide from a vampire by holding your breath. There is also something genuinely bizarre and terrifying about the way the Jjangshi (Vampires from Chinese folklore) hop along menacingly in rows. Part arthouse movie, part martial arts fest, part black comedy, but also strangely beautiful and haunting.

THE HUNGER

David Bowie! Catherine Deneuve! Opening titles by Bauhaus! – What's not to like?

Watch Bowie and Deneuve stalk the New York clubs looking stunning and slaughtering beautiful young victims. Based on the short story by Whitley Strieber and with echoes of Le Fanu's *Carmilla*. *The Hunger* is a strange movie in that it operates between looking a bit like a massively souped-up beautifully lit 80s pop video and some kind of strange arthouse movie. The results are oddly pleasing, and of course there is the famous lesbian scene between Deneuve and a young Susan Sarandon in her absolute prime. (Susan Sarandon's bottom looks particularly amazing). The strange dreamlike quality of the film also really captures something of what it might be like to be seduced by vampire.

(Any excuse for a picture of David Bowie! – Ed.)

NOSFERATU

Werner Herzog

It's rare to have a remake that stands as a great movie on its own. Made by one of my all-time favourite directors the infamous Werner Herzog and starring Klaus Kinski and Isabel Adjani. Kinski in particular is fantastic as the Count, he carries the great burden of the centuries, savage, weary and at times wretched. Deeply atmospheric and full of Germanic existential gloom. For one scene the director and crew famously released an enormous quantity of rats on the Dutch town of Delft and were unable to round them up afterwards, leaving them to roam free in the city streets. (If you like Herzog also check out the documentary film *My Best Fiend* about his long and tumultuous relationship with Kinski)





DRACULA

Universal

Obviously this has to be included, it's thrilling to watch Lugosi in action in such an unbelievably iconic role, let down by unimaginative directing but made up for by the Lugosi performance. Should also be watched in tandem with the Spanish version which is much more interestingly directed and was made at night on the same sets when the Universal team were not working. Shame Lugosi could not have teamed up with the Spanish version's director George Melford; we might have ended up with something genuinely brilliant.

SALEM'S LOT

I first saw this film very late at night when I was about 10 years old. It was during one of my parents' summer parties when the adults were all very drunk and not paying attention, a friend and I sneaked into a spare room to watch this on the telly and it scared the hell out of us! Directed by horror master Tobe Hooper, creator of the original *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, and based on Stephen King's book. A great cast including James Mason and David Soul. The most frightening scene of all is when Danny Glick's younger brother returns as a vampire and floats outside his window in a peculiar, twisting, vaporous cloud of smoke beckoning to be let in. There is also a great climax when you finally get to meet the ominous and much spoken of Mr Barlow and he doesn't disappoint!

LET THE RIGHT ONE IN

Just when you thought the vampire genre was exhausted and nothing new could be done with it, along comes this utter gem. A lonely Swedish boy being bullied at school befriends a young girl one night who has the uncanny habit of climbing the side of his flat block and popping in through the window. Part gritty realist Scandinavian drama, part horror story, part fairy-tale, a totally new and genuinely original approach. Make sure you see the original Swedish version not the American remake. If you like this also check out *Border*, an unnerving and brilliantly bonkers film from the same writer John Advide Lindqvist.

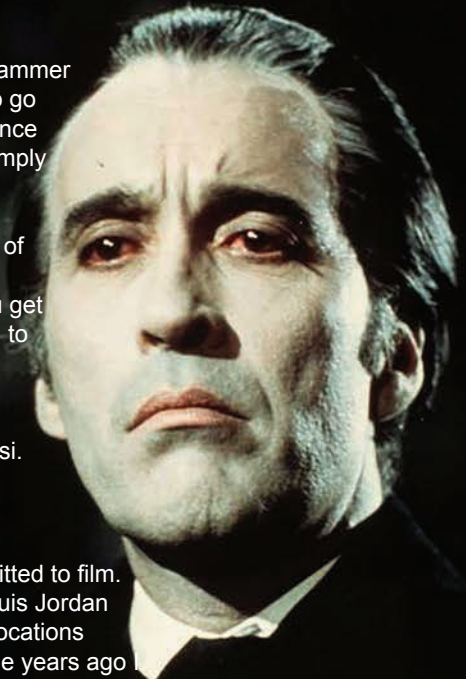
INTERVIEW WITH A VAMPIRE

Directed by Neil Jordan who also made the fantastic *A Company of Wolves*. Surprisingly the movie stays quite close to Anne Rice's excellent book. It's great to see a huge budget thrown at such a venture, with fantastic costumes and vast, lush sets. Tom Cruise- not an actor I am particularly fond of, manages to rise to the occasion as Lestat. Sadly, this movie also represents one of the great casting misses of all time. Rutger Hauer was interested in playing Lestat, but unsurprisingly lost out to the more box office friendly Cruise. A great shame. (After Rutger Hauer's incredible performance in *Blade Runner*, I often dreamed I might get to see him play Dracula in a really lavish high budget version, but sadly such a film never came to pass, other than in my own imagination.)

[Rutger Hauer did, in fact, get to play Dracula – in 'Dracula III: Legacy, directed by Patrick Lussier in 2005. But this was neither a version of Stoker's novel, nor a particularly lavishly budgeted production – Ed]

DRACULA – CHRISTOPHER LEE

It's hard to pick one of the many Christopher Lee Hammer horror outings as Dracula but I think I would have to go for the original. Christopher Lee is a powerful presence as the Count. There are very few actors who can simply stand still in front of the camera, hardly moving and conjure such a sense of striking menace. Also don't miss the now dated, but still brilliant, special effects of the final battle between Dracula and Van Helsing (played by Peter Cushing – of course!) in which you get to see Lee famously crumble to dust when exposed to the sunlight, after Cushing tears down the window curtain – forcing him into the light with the help of a makeshift candlestick cross. One of the truly great Draculas of all time and a worthy challenge to Lugosi.



COUNT DRACULA

BBC 1977

By far the most true to the book version ever committed to film. Very popular with the Soc* and for good reason. Louis Jordan is magnificent as Dracula, also uses great original locations with filming at Whitby and Highgate Cemetery. Some years ago

I was fortunate enough to have a long and memorable conversation with the late Philip Saville who directed this version. It was fascinating to hear his views and also see how deeply he had thought about *Dracula* and the vampire genre. He made the very interesting point that *Dracula* appeals to our deepest human urges – to bite and to suck. What does a child do when it first comes into the world? It sucks at its mother's breast. What do we do when we eat? We bite – it is tied in with our instincts for survival. *Dracula* explores many of our most primal human urges, including of course sex. The fact that it explores such fundamental human drives might in part explain its enduring and universal appeal.

* Bruce Wightman, one of our Co-Founders, can be spotted in Jonathan's coach in this adaptation. - Ed

NOSFERATU - MURNAU

The absolute mother of all vampire movies and probably my number one pick. Max Schreck looks terrifying even today as Count Orlock in his bizarre make up, long fingernails and bald head, plus the classic two teeth at the front as opposed to the more common extended canines on either side. Wonderful German expressionist visuals of stark light and shadow from genius director FW Murnau. Full of haunting, unforgettable, dreamlike iconic images. Recognised as an innovative masterpiece not only of the horror genre but also in all of cinema history. It doesn't get much better than this. Also well worth seeing if you haven't checked it out is FW Murnau's *Faust*. Another beautiful and haunting masterpiece.

Other excellent vampire movies well worth seeing –

Roman Polanski's *Fearless Vampire Killers*, *Mark of the Vampire* with Bela Lugosi, the original *Fright Night*, *What We Do in the Shadows*, *Only Lovers Left Alive*, Carl Dreyer's *Vampyr*, *Dark Shadows*, *Byzantium*, and Abel Ferrara's *The Addiction*.

TOM PLENDER