

## The Blade Trilogy and its place in Vampire Lore by Courtney Button

*Blade* (Stephen Norrington, 1998) gives us an updated version of the Vampire. A comic book action movie it gave us a newer cooler culture of Vampire and an interesting protagonist to fight against them. The film shows a Vampire sub culture that is split into two parts. On one side there is the more traditional section with the 'Pure Blood' Vampires and on the other there is the turned section of Vampires, those who have been bitten and changed rather than having been a vampire from birth. The 'Pure Blood' Vampires are presented as dull, dark suited, middle aged, holding board meetings and trying to maintain the shaky truce between Vampires and Humans the turned Vampires are the young and the fun; they dress well, party, attend underground night clubs, and enjoy being a Vampire as a lifestyle where they believe they are free to do anything.

The opening scene of *Blade* blasts you in the face with a new Vampire subsection and their lifestyle in a brilliant and memorable scene where they hold an underground rave in an abattoir where blood pours from a sprinkler system. Filled with beautiful young Vampires, in a striking image covered and blood and dancing, it clearly conveys their decadence and love for life. They also see the humans as 'cattle', a food product just waiting to be consumed. The Pure Bloods are the older generation whereas the turned are the younger generation. The Pure Bloods are the marriage, keeping the balance, and the turned are the teenagers, staying out partying, getting in trouble and reproducing haphazardly and without thinking of the consequences.

Bram Stokers original *Dracula* is most notably read as a fear of the exotic foreigner coming to British lands, seducing the innocent English women, diluting the blood line and spreading venereal disease. Interestingly in *Blade*, the fear of the Vampire disease is twofold, Blade and Whistler are Vampire Hunters and have dedicated their lives to eradicating the Vampire species; they fear the fact that Vampires could eradicate humans and become the dominant species. Karen, a human who is bitten but saved by Blade and helps him to defeat the Vampires, describes Vampires as a sexually transmitted disease,

driving in the original Vampire fear. The 'Pure Blood' Vampires hold a prejudice against the turned Vampires, seeing them as inferior, and as diluting their own species. They fear that the turned Vampires will become the dominant sub section of Vampirism and destroy their carefully defended way of life.

In relation to Vampire lore, Vampires are weak to a number of traditional things: silver, garlic, beheading, stakes and sun /UV light are all effective ways of killing a Vampire; however, traditional Christian religious methods such as the crucifix and holy water do not harm a vampire. Instead, *Blade* inverts the religious stereotype by making the vampires the religious ones. The Vampire culture in the film has its own language, bible and legends and the main antagonist, Deacon Frost's, plan is to resurrect the Vampire blood God La Magra, to make humans the subservient race which he thinks they should be. This then raises interesting theological questions regarding the real existence of Gods in the world of *Blade*, and they do exist in *Blade*, and what that means for the dominance and right to life between Humans and Vampires.

Blade himself is an interesting character in relation to the Vampires; he is both vampire and human, his mother having been bitten while in labour. He has all of their strengths and as he sees it only one of their weaknesses, having the need to drink blood. He is technically a Pure Blood and also hates Vampires as an inferior and killer species. He hates them because they killed his mother and made him part Vampire. Whistler is the more traditional Vampire Hunter; he is the Van Helsing of the piece, the old and experienced vampire hunter, and Blade is his protégé. Whistler hates Vampires because one killed his family, both Blade and Whistler act more in prejudice and hate than in a clear sense of right or wrong. They are both happy to kill Familiars (Humans who help Vampires) just because of their affiliation with Vampires. Karen, a medical scientist who is saved by and helps Whistler and Blade, sees Vampirism as a disease that she can cure and looks at it from a scientific viewpoint. She does actually does cure it with a medical cure for a human blood problem. In the end the film shows the clash between religion and science as Karen's vampire cure goes up against the vampire God La Magra.

*Blade 2* (Guillermo Del Toro, 2002) takes the disease and fear aspects a step further. In *Blade 2*, Vampirism has evolved and it is both the Humans and the Vampires who are afraid of being wiped out by The Reaper strain of Vampirism. Unlike normal Vampires, The Reapers, again described as a virus, appear physically diseased. They are skinny, with bones visible against the flesh, with pale skin and large blue veins all across their bodies. Traditionally, Vampires teeth piercing the skin of an innocent young woman are interpreted as a penis penetrating and infecting her with venereal disease. The design of The Reapers in *Blade 2*, particularly their mouths, give them the look of having both sexual organs, with their vaginal like jaws and their penis like barbed tongue which transmits the Reaper virus; with both sexual organs The Reapers are a predator to both the Vampire (Masculine) and the Human (Feminine). The leader of the vampires, Damaskinos, actually takes the purity of the bloodline to the next level with a fascist sensibility. He is trying to create a 'Pure Blood' race, experimenting with genetic science, and his guards and soldiers wear a uniform with a similar look to that of Nazi soldiers.

In the final film of the series, *Blade Trinity* (David S. Goyer, 2002), Dracula actually turns up. Physically a monster with increased strength who can change his appearance, he is the original and ultimate Vampire. He can walk in sunlight and makes reference to the novel *Dracula* by calling it 'Stoker's fable'. *Blade Trinity's* one interesting idea is the corporatisation of vampire feeding as they have created a factory specifically for farming blood from humans. However, the film doesn't add much more and despite the inclusion of The Ultimate Vampire, and what should be Blade's ultimate showdown, the film fumbles and ends up being the least interesting of the trilogy, effectively hammering the final nail into the coffin of the franchise.

Overall, the *Blade* franchise realises the *Dracula* fear. Vampires have spread across borders and seas and have turned many Humans, Men and Women alike, and they have also infiltrated Human Society, having contacts in trusted groups such as Police and in Government. Though it updates the Vampire myth, by dragging it in to the modern age

and giving it a much more action and comic book style, it may pick, choose and twist some Vampire traditions, the Blade franchise firmly sticks in with the Vampire mythology.

Courtney Button is a writer for Hive Radio Manchester and is currently studying for a Masters in Creative Writing at Manchester Metropolitan University. Visit TheHiveRadio site for more of Courtney's writing.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> November, Grimm Up North and BFI Gothic present VAMPIRES at The Dance house, Manchester. As part of the 'Love is a Devil' strand of the BFI's Gothic season we present a double bill of two very different interpretations of the most archetypal of vampires, Count Dracula. First off, to celebrate its imminent re-mastered Blu Ray release from Eureka, FW Murnau's "Symphony in Shadows", NOSFERATU (1922) followed by Francis Ford Coppola's ambitious and underrated BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA (1992). Introducing these two very different interpretations of the count, 70 years apart, will be a talk by MMU Lecturer and expert in the field of Vampires, Sorcha Ni Fhlainn.

Also screening will be Short Film THE GLOAMING.

Doors for the event will be 7pm with the first film starting at 7.30pm.

Tickets now available online from [www.GrimmFest.com](http://www.GrimmFest.com)