

A Bloodthirsty Weekend in Minnesota

Labor Day Weekend. Three words that should be enough to ignite the fear of Satan into any reasonable Midwesterner with a 40 IQ and a 20 heart rate. Add feline leukemia or equine encephalitis or canine gonorrhea to the mix and you only have those banking on the lottery to cure their ills out on the highway. Legend purports that the animals clue into certain natural phenomenon of which humans are unaware. Dogs eat grass, it rains. Birds fly south, it snows. The wind changes directions, lemmings head for a cliff; and, of course, my favorite, horses panic and cause their brains to fatally swell, you can bet that the undead are ready to rally their dusty bones.

I saw the signs, as clear as was the summer sun. I put the coolers away. I parked the car. I popped in the Beck bootlegs, cracked open the gin and rented as many vampire movies as the local video store could provide. But obviously everyone else was thinking the same, so Dracula was out, same with Dracula 2000, ditto to Interview and Lost Boys, and even From Dust to Dawn was gone – boy was someone desperate. But I was in luck as there was one DVD of Shadow of the Vampire remaining, one of the two. I asked the clerk (who looked like a pissed-off Steve Buscemi, so I didn't mess with him) how this could be, and he said that once people realize that it is basically a documentary of the original, black and white, silent, German film, they put it back. Ahh...

After collecting the original, black and white, silent, German film from, not the horror section, not the classics sections, and not even the Sci Fi section, I also found Vampyr and Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht in the foreign section. I had no knowledge of these other films, nor any intention of renting them, but as the foreign sections can't really be alphabetized, I had these and about seven others stacked by the time I found the original, Nosferatu.

Just saying the words Carpathian Mountains or Varna gives me what I believe the dated of this nation refer to as the heebie-jeebies. I call it the feeling of uncertainty in places reeking of death. And as we've already had one horse put down, and an entire 4H barn at the State Fair choking with panic, I felt it was necessary to take certain precautions, so I made a pact with my cats, no one says the word Nosferatu, no one. I quickly check the label to make sure the Sapphire wasn't bottled or exported from Romania. Where does one get properly aged angelica root from anyway?

The gin and I decided that the best plan was to watch the original, then Shadow (2001), followed by der Nacht and close down the miserable weekend with Vampyr. Beck was mumbling some denigration about the Spice Girls in Stuttgart. I promptly stomped to attention, shouted heil Himmler and shut it off in favor of Max Shreck and F.W. Murnau. Murnau directed this noir classic and Shreck provided all the ghoulishness one would need pre-third reich. It's fairly slow although it crams the entire Bram Stoker* novel into 60 minutes. With the exception of Shreck, the acting is horrible. The text slides linger long enough for even my juniper-soaked cerebellum to assimilate them. However, the locations are breathtaking and the camera work is much ahead of its time. The scene

where the coach is speeding through the mountains and the film is ran as a negative is alarming -- it actually broke me out of a DT fit. I give it four out of seven.

I had to listen to Beer Cans and cut another lime, but once I did, it was off to interactive land. I love DVD. I'm sorry if you don't know what that means. Shadow was superb, better than I expected. Willem DaFoe and John Malkovich were meant to be in a movie, like this one, together. What a great idea. I don't like Nicolas Cage's acting, but I am forever in debt to him for co-producing this film. DaFoe plays the overzealous character actor Schreck, kind of, and Malkovich, who needs not the role of a fanatic, to seem fanatical, plays the fanatical Murau brilliantly. They even throw in the lead from A Princess Bride just to make life easier for those still obsessed with the Kevin Bacon game. I've never seen Begotten, but from the trailer-looks of it, director Elias Merhige is nearly as obsessed with his art as Murau or Malkovich. Without giving it away, the film is great, it's a documentary in the Oliver Stone sense, and them some. I give it a five out of seven, and I'm stingy.

I had to switch to beer for a while, not because I was worried about pissing blood again, it was that this next movie sounded not for the faint-of-heart, or the faint, and I was flirting with that realm of consciousness. Der Nacht (1979), as I like to refer to it, impressed me, and scared the shit out of me. The acting was great, as were the locations, costumes, make-up and scenes. Klaus Kinski is as spooky as Schreck. Werner Herzog did a great job directing.

Roger Ebert said it was "...the most evocative series of images centered around the idea of the vampire that I have ever seen..." and, anyone want to guess, "four stars." It'd be different if he was evaluating the social impact of the latest romantic comedy starring the flavors-of-the-month, okay, an authority, but come on, what does he mean by that. Did he like it? Or maybe Roger was on to something, perhaps my sensitivities have been moistened, dampened and drowned.

It was in this film that I was pleased with a new term. The undead is about as fresh as wassup or hump. Once Wesley Snipes says it, it's done. I thought that "beyond dead" was more ominous, more mysterious. My cats and I made a pact and stuck with it for the duration, although they briefly lobbied for "sans dead," I believe used by Antonio Banderas in the high-budget bust remake. But this one gets four and-a-half out of seven.

Then I made the mistake of the weekend. No I didn't walk into a pond of mosquitoes, close, I switched back to gin. And it couldn't have come at a worse time because this next film, Vampyr: The Dreams of Allan Grey (1931), was 107 minutes of Danish head games. Carl Theodor Dreyer fantastically adapted Sheridan Le Fanu's story, In a Glass Darkly. I couldn't believe this film was made in 1931, but I could barely believe it wasn't 1931. Gin, for those who don't know, for those who've never entertained more than a Tom Collins or two, can be an epiphany in a jar. It's more than a drink, more than alcohol. If I had to put it in a syringe, I wouldn't do it, but I don't, I only need lime, tonic and a low-ball. A bartender in Alaska once told me that, and I quote, gin makes men mean. Her solemnity was only overshadowed by the four-inch scar of knowledge on her

left cheek. I've never got that far, not that I remember. Most of the movie is shown through shadows. It's so smart, it makes you jealous. Was this 1931? Is it 1931? Julien West acts perfectly as Allan Grey, and the rest of the cast supports him well, especially the Einstein-looking doctor who knows too much. I loved it. But I even starting loving the end of summer and back-to-school and the hordes of campers rolling south down Federal 10, so it might have been the Bombay. Some idiot TV journalist is live on location, knee deep in horse shit, explaining that the weekend concluded with no additional casualties. Thank you, and thank me. Lord knows I did my part. Five out of seven, not a penny less.

* If you haven't read the Bram Stoker version, put that \$25, sorry-ass copy of Harry Potter down, and head to the nearest used bookstore.