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BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA

A Columbia release of an American Zoetrope/Osiris Films production. Produced by Francis Ford Coppola, Fred Fuchs, Charles Mulvehill. Executive producers, Michael Apted, Robert O'Connor. Directed by Coppola. Screenplay, Hart, based on Stoker's novel. Camera (Technicolor), Michael Ballhaus; editors, Nicholas C. Smith, Glen Scantlebury, Anne Goursaud; music, Wojciech Kilar; production design, Thomas Sanders; art direction, Andrew Precht; set decoration, Garrett Lewis; costume design, Eiko Ishioka; sound (Dolby), Robert Janiger; sound design, Leslie Shatz; visual effects-2nd unit director, Roman Coppola; special visual effects, Fantasy II Film Effects; makeup-hair design, Michele Burke; special makeup effects, Greg Cannom; associate producer, Susie Landau; assistant director, Peter Giuliano; 2nd unit camera, Steve Yaconelli; co-producers, James V. Hart, John Veitch; casting, Victoria Thomas. Reviewed at Ziegfeld Theater, N.Y., Oct. 30, 1992. MPAA Rating: R. Running time: 123 MIN.

Dracula Gary Oldman
Mina/Elisabeta Winona Ryder
Van Helsing Anthony Hopkins
Jonathan Harker Keanu Reeves
Dr. Jack Seward Richard E. Grant
Lord Arthur Holmwood Cary Elwes
Quincey P. Morris Bill Campbell
Lucy Westenra Sadie Frost
R.M. Renfield Tom Waits

Also with: Monica Bellucci, Michaela Bercu, Florina Kendrick, Jay Robinson.

Francis Ford Coppola's take on the Dracula legend is a bloody visual feast. Both the most extravagant screen telling of the oft-filmed story and the one most faithful to its literary source, this rendition sets grand romantic goals for itself that aren't fulfilled emotionally, and it is gory without being at all scary.

Grandiose production's main pleasures reside in its exceptional design and in seeing the original tale told in full. The Dracula name, such as it is, and a mighty promo push for its Friday the 13th bow should generate some strong early frame numbers, but pic's extreme adult nature will limit potential with younger auds, and reaction will be mixed.

Bram Stoker finally achieves title card billing à la Jackie Collins and Danielle Steele as James V. Hart is the first screenwriter with the good idea to fundamentally follow the wonderful 1897 novel. The considerably different 1927 Hamilton Deane-John Balderston stage play yielded the best known Dracula films, notably the 1931 Bela Lugosi version.

Hart sets epic parameters for his script with a prologue introducing Dracula's historical origins as Vlad the Impaler, a 15th century Romanian king who fought off Turkish invaders. As dramatically sketched here, the



LONG IN THE TOOTH: Under Francis Coppola's direction, Keanu Reeves, left, and Gary Oldham face off in 'Bram Stoker's Dracula.'

ruler's inamorata, Elisabeta, killed herself upon receiving false news of his death in battle, whereupon the monarch furiously renounced God and began his centuries-long devotion to evil.

In casting Winona Ryder as both Elisabeta and Mina Murray, the overarching story becomes Dracula's quest for recapturing his great love. Unfortunately, familiar plotting, Coppola's coldly magisterial style and Gary Oldman's plain appearance in the title role combine to prevent this strategy from working in more than theory.

But it does set a serious tone, and the director manages to steer a relatively steady course embracing dramatic conviction as well as the humor necessary to send up the vampire conventions that have inevitably become hoary with constant use. He also invests it with a primal sexuality and animalism consistent with the book.

Sent to the count's Transylvanian castle to advise him on London real estate, Jonathan Harker (Keanu Reeves) ends up being held prisoner there and being feasted upon by his host's three luscious concubines. Dracula, meanwhile, is plotting his unique conquest of Britain, which involves transporting coffins filled with fertile Transylvanian earth and infecting the populace via incarnations as wolf, bat and fog.

Mina awaits the return of her fiancé Harker in the company of her best friend, Lucy (Sadie Frost), a popular young lady whom Dracula soon seduces into the world of the undead. In a desperate bid to save her life, a beau, Dr. Jack Seward (Richard E. Grant), calls upon the eminent Dutch doctor/metaphysician Abraham Van Helsing (Anthony Hopkins), and they, along with Lucy's fiancé Lord Arthur Holmwood (Cary Elwes) and footloose Yank Quincey Morris (Bill Campbell) team to foil Dracula as he sets his sights on Mina.

Shot almost entirely on sound-

stages, film has the feel of an old-fashioned, 1930s, studio-enclosed production made with the benefit of '90s technology. From the striking, blood-drenched prologue on, viewer is constantly made aware of cinema artifice in its grandest manifestations.

Thomas Sanders' production design, Michael Ballhaus' lensing, Michele Burke's makeup and especially Eiko Ishioka's amazing costumes create a dark world of heightened unreality within a context both Gothic and Victorian. Linking all these elements together are many exceptional transitions—dissolves, superimpositions, juxtapositions and cuts that have been worked out with tremendous premeditation and imagination. Visual effects and second unit director Roman Coppola no doubt had a hand in all this, along with the three editors, and the threateningly turbulent score by Wojciech Kilar furthers the brooding mood.

Using a Romanian accent, Oldman comes up with a few unintelligible line readings, but enacts Dracula with wit, sophistication and proper seriousness. The problem may be, however, that the fundamentally fine young character actor and chameleon lacks the charisma and insinuating personality that would put across Coppola's conception of a highly sexualized vampire.

Other performances range from a bit stiff (the young male contingent) to playfully energetic (Hopkins) to compelling (Tom Waits as the insect-eating lunatic Renfield). Ryder has just the right combination of intelligence and enticing looks as Mina.

Coppola doesn't push it, but underlying everything here, as perhaps it must with any serious vampire story today, is an AIDS subtext involving sex, infected blood and the plague. Overall, this Dracula could have been less heavy and more deliciously evil than it is, but it does offer a sumptuous engorgement of the senses. — Todd McCarthy