Eco-Vampires explores the relationship between vampires and environment in films, where the ‘vampire’ figure represents humanity’s consumerism as well as the Earth’s natural defense system. While early films and novels emphasized the religious theme of vampire stories, Simon Bacon instead argues that the underlying and more potent themes are anxieties about industrialization and untamed wilderness, and the struggle between overconsumption and a balanced ecosystem. Throughout his book, Bacon compares vampire-related literature, midcentury cinema, and modern blockbusters to prove this correlation.

Each of the book’s five chapters includes five pairs of comparisons. In the Introduction, Bacon begins with a review of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary works on vampires. For the following chapters, Bacon analyzes how the plots of these films mirror key features of the original Dracula and other classic vampire texts. The author applies the term vampire to a being that 1) absorbs life from its victims (be it blood, life-force, or other forms of energy), 2) can transform its shape (transmutation), and 3) can mentally control or communicate with others.

Using this concept, Bacon draws parallels between Dracula and creatures of all sorts, ranging from cannibalistic monsters to aliens, and ravenous holes in the ground to entire planetary ecosystems.

In Chapter One, ‘Dracula the Environmentalist: The Undead and Beyond the Forest’, Bacon first recounts the plot and characters of Bram Stoker’s 1897 Dracula. Then, he explains how the 1922 and 1979 Nosferatu films adapt the story to the silver screen, with subtle changes but still adhering to the qualities of relying on blood, shape-shifting, and representing the terrifying power of nature against the encroaching disruption of humankind. From there, these concepts are applied to films from the early twenty-first century. In these films, the vampire embodies the wild, inhospitable landscape opposite of the daring humans who try to impede upon it, reflecting humankind’s aggressions and anxieties about Earth’s wilderness.

Chapter Two, ‘Vampiric Sustainability: The Undead Planet’, focuses on films where the environment itself becomes vampiric as a defensive reaction to humanity’s encroachment. In some of these films, the initial outbreak of the diseases or animals are caused by a human action, such as the dumping of toxic waste or drilling for oil. The poisoned ecosystem retaliates and attempts to cure itself by attacking the humans who caused the initial damage. Other films in the chapter depict either supernatural creatures, vampiric houses, or undead parts of nature itself. Overall, this chapter focuses largely on ecosystems defending themselves through vampiric manifestations, with an ultimate goal of restoring a less harmful relationship with humans.
After appearing initially in early nineteenth-century literature, the apocalypse became a favored setting for fictional stories and gained popularity through the twentieth century as fears about runaway technology and industrialization increased. Throughout the films in Chapter Three ‘Eco-Warrior: The End of the World as We Know It’, humanity has reached a threshold where the Earth can no longer support them, and may lash out in defense through various types of plagues and disease, vampiric plants, or newly discovered voracious predators. The films portray the causes of these apocalypses as clearly connected to capitalism, over-exploitation, and the hubris of humanity.

While Chapter Four ‘The End of the End: Consumerism Will Eat Itself’ references many of the same concepts from other chapters, it also revolves around the role of consumerism. The vampire is both an embodiment of ravenous consumerism as well as the force working against it to achieve ecological balance. Bacon offers a fascinating interpretation of Christine (1983), Blood Car (2007), and Snowpiercer (2013), which feature vampiric vehicles to critique humanity’s dependence on fossil fuels and obsession with consumerism.

Chapter Five, ‘Vampire Ecosystems: It Came From Outer Space’, steps back to view humanity’s place within our universe. The vampiric aliens act as either the corrective agent protecting the Earth, or as the villainous entity showing the destructive potential of humans. Technology is a tool for both helping and harming the environment, which films portray as a dangerous wilderness of deep space or the untamed corners of the Earth. The pestilence of humanity and consumerism is cured by the vampiric element, restoring planetary and galactic balance.

At times, the films’ connections to vampirism are not as clear. For films such as Splinter (2008), The Pit (2013), and The Witch (2015), the creatures were certainly monstrous and supernatural but the vampiric qualities of the characters are ambiguous. For other questionably-vampiric films, however, once Bacon explains the connection and clarifies how certain plot points mirror the original vampiric novel, it seems surprising that the vampire/environment relationship is not clear from the beginning. For avid sci-fi and horror fans, this publication will change the way they watch their favorite films once they recognize these connections.

The book does not lack a variety of examples of vampirism in film. Throughout the book, Bacon references a total of 176 films, and explored 48 films in depth. However, sprinkled amongst the comparisons to Dracula are brief analyses of racial tensions, religion, colonialism, masculinity and gender, and class divisions. Sometimes the most interesting part of the films’ historical context are delegated to footnotes, but this brevity is understandable given the book’s task to provide a wide review. For readers who are interested in a closer reading, Bacon dives deeper in his other publications.1

While the intent of the films’ writers and directors remains unseen in this book, it is interesting that these themes course through so many popular culture works. Authors of the last 200 years seem to recognize the dangers of their society’s own ‘progress’, and are aware of its growing separation from, and antagonization of, the


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natural world. Bacon’s message is a reminder that we must consider our place on Earth and restore a respectful relationship. Fictional films and literature warn us repeatedly about the consequences of disregarding this responsibility through fantastical, horrific, and futuristic stories. Despite reaching an audience of millions, the question remains: Are we listening?

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