Virtuous Vampires

September 11, 2008 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

Vampires fascinate me. I developed a taste for them after I was diagnosed with HIV in 1992. What we had in common?the fear that people had of our blood?coaxed my curiosity.

My first bite into this new obsession was the movie Bram Stoker?s Dracula, which was released a few months after my diagnosis. Despite the inept acting of a nonetheless handsome Keanu Reeves almost ruining it, the film was captivating.

I then read Dracula by Bram Stoker, originally published in 1897. It was the first time I had read a novel after seeing its film adaptation. I was impressed as to how accurate the movie had been.

By comparison, I was disappointed when I saw the 1979 film adaptation of Salem?s Lot by Stephen King (notwithstanding the attractiveness of the lead actor David Soul?Hutch from TV?s “Starsky and Hutch”). The 1975 novel was much better, but then again that is usually true of most Stephen King film adaptations.

I then sunk my teeth into Interview with the Vampire by Anne Rice, originally published in 1976. The novel had me spellbound immediately. Louis, the virtuous vampire who regretted feeding on humans, was a fascinating character. Still relatively new to being HIV positive, I could relate to his moral struggles just after becoming a vampire. Lestat, the vampire who made Louis, was just as interesting to me. His unapologetic approach to being a vampire was strangely inspiring.

The movie adaptation in 1994 became an instant favorite of mine. There were complaints from Anne Rice fans about the casting, but Brad Pitt as Louis and Tom Cruise as Lestat turned out to be surprisingly great choices. Christian Slater played the journalist who Louis entrusts with his story.

There?s a line at the end of the movie that does not appear in the novel, spoken by Lestat to the journalist. Lestat attacks the journalist, sucking his blood until the journalist is near death. Lestat then says, “I?m going to give you the choice that I never had.” Lestat’s maker made him a vampire without his consent. Lestat would not do what his maker had done to him.

That line encapsulates Lestat?s vampire angst, but it also echoes what back then was my HIV angst. I?ve since forgiven Michael for lying to me about his HIV status, but the fact that he knowingly gave me HIV haunted me for years.

My “maker” died of AIDS-related complications several months before the release of the movie. Michael never got to hear that line, but it often surfaces in my thoughts when I disclose my HIV status. I will not do what my “maker” did to me.

The new HBO series “True Blood” (based on a series of books by Charlaine Harris) has rekindled my interest in vampires. In the first episode, we learn that synthetic blood has been invented for vampires so that they no longer have to feed on humans. Sookie, the lead female character played by Anna Paquin, meets a virtuous vampire (or so he seems) named Bill. Louis would be intrigued.

Watch the “True Blood” trailer:

Click here to read “True Blood Work” (a related post from fellow POZ blogger Shawn Decker).

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