

Nosferatu: 2024 Release
Film Review
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A film I've been looking forward to this year, *Nosferatu* (2024) plays heavily off of the 1897 novel *Dracula* by Bram Stoker and *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror* (1922) a silent film released 102 years ago. It has been years since I saw the original 1922 film but I finished reading the novel *Dracula* only two weeks ago, which is fresh in my mind. From the ratings I've seen, this film is doing well by both critic and audience opinion (none of which I've read)) but I took various issues with many aspects of the film, while appreciating a couple things.

There were many shots and scene transitions that were amazing to look at/experience. Some of my favorites were when Thomas was standing alone in the woods right before the carriage arrives for him, Count Orlok's (Bill Skarsgard) hand stretching out over Wisborg as a shadow, and a moment where Orlok's silhouette was building to fill the frame of a doorway but instead it transitioned to someone else's silhouette walking into an entirely different location. I don't think I've enjoyed camera work and transitions like that this year since *Smile 2*. Along with this train of thought is the shadow of Orlok moving along the wall as it enters Ellen's room at the end. I loved this callback to the iconic shot from the original film and despite my issues with the film overall, I still jumped out of my seat in excitement. I wish other aspects of the film held up to enhance the payoff of that shot.

Starting with the characters, there was no reason to care about them from the beginning. We are introduced to Thomas (Nicholas Hoult) and Ellen (Lily-Rose Depp), newlyweds, and already know Ellen is hiding a dark experience from her past. Instead of establishing her as a normal person who falls into a madness, one we could care for, she is instead incredibly annoying from the start with dialogue and emotion that is way too heavy and jarring for the beginning of a film because it in no way feels

warranted. This is only heightened throughout with her random bouts of screaming which were simply silly because we had no investment/care in or for her. She could have died earlier in the film and I would still be indifferent. One of the worst examples of this was when she is on the beach, we walk away to follow a conversation between Frederick and his wife (one with actual characterization), only to be interrupted by, yes, more screaming from Ellen as she now finds herself half in the water. Why are we banking on her random screaming to add suspense or unnerve us? Her scene involving Thomas in their home after getting kicked out by Frederick was cringy to watch. I hesitate to put fault on her as an actress as it is ultimately the director who decides the flow of the story and the writer's dialogue. I grasp that all of this was brought on by her psychic connection to Orlok. I do. But good god, give her something to do besides be a victim; be proactive or fight back. Mina Harker, the novel character who Ellen is taking the place of, was able to contribute to the overall narrative and still be beneficial in the fight against Dracula despite her own ailment of early vampirism.

Not a single person in the film was competent. Not even Albin Eberhart von Franz (Willem Dafoe) was competent and he was supposed to be the expert! Albin is intended to take the place of Abraham Van Helsing (a character of the novel) who is incredibly knowledgeable despite his admittance to a lack of experience. But Eberhart and his student Dr. Wilhelm Sievers (Ralph Ineson) practically ran around in circles, never accomplished anything, and just regurgitated information to each other to sound like they WERE accomplishing something and the camera follows them moving at a fast pace in order to make it seem like they are active. I didn't even care for the acting of Willem Dafoe due to the insistence of the character to simply be shouting everything he was saying and leaning far into the eccentricity of the character.

Every character simply existed and had things happen TO them instead of they themselves DOING something. Even the ending, with the last remaining men going to Orlok's castle to burn his coffin was useless and undermined because it ultimately didn't matter. The true defeat of Orlok came from Ellen sacrificing herself all night to enrapture Orlok long enough to force sunlight upon him. Thomas realizes this and runs through the streets to try and save her which is a wonderful visualization of each character running around for no reason. Somehow, despite staying behind

to watch the coffins burn, Albin was still magically right behind Thomas when they found Ellen's body with Orlok. It is an ending without much, if any, climax which lines up with one of the letdowns of Stoker's novel in that there is no real climax. We could have had the entire group know Ellen has to sacrifice herself with the men going to the Count's castle to burn his coffin/earth and forcing Thomas to trust in his wife. In that scenario we have the last of the men going off with an actual meaningful purpose and Thomas has to put real faith into his wife.

The only character with a sense of purpose was Frederick Harding (Aaron Taylor-Johnson), a wealthy friend of Thomas and Ellen's whose wife and daughters are ultimately killed by Orlok himself as Frederick is hexed into a deep sleep. Aaron's acting was my favorite to watch in the film and though he stayed skeptical to the reality of the supernatural he still made decisions that he thought would protect his family and the town. His scene in the mausoleum as he visits the coffins of his family was the only moment in the film that I felt something for a character. I'm glad he died in this way, succumbing to the plague atop his wife, because I don't think I could have handled seeing the one person trying to accomplish something end the movie on a wild goose chase.

The plot overall was very rushed. We could have cut some screaming and instead spent that time with Thomas as he was walking through the woods of Transylvania searching for the castle, or build more suspense during his incarceration in Orlok's castle. Speaking of being rushed, the three nights that Orlok gave to Ellen were blown through and wasted. Instead of the characters, say, being useful they instead have things happen to them, talk in circles or argue, and wait for the night to bring Orlok's next tragedy. They even know they have only three nights to stop Orlok and instead don't attempt anything until the final opportunity. Why? Genuinely?

These characters never had any real characterization that expanded upon their relationships with each other. In other words, their reasoning for being in orbit of each other was disjointed with Thomas only wanting to save his wife, Frederick only wanting to save his own family, the two doctors not seemingly caring for the lives of their companions and only desiring to stave off the threat of Nosferatu, and Ellen's purpose not really going beyond wanting her husband back. They argued with no resolutions

and felt nothing like a group banding together to stop an ultimate evil or even having a care for the others. Frederick's friendship with Thomas was apparent and his guilt at sending them both away from his home translated through Taylor-Johnson's acting.. Additionally, we see Ellen and Anna Harding's (Emma Corrin) friendship throughout the film be touched on. But, aside from those, we get no sense of love or cohesion overall. I may be unfair in this assessment since Dracula (novel) does such a good job of expressing the love and care that all the characters have for each other and their dedication to protecting Mina Harker/avenging Lucy Westenra.

Count Orlok was... unimpressive. His design was more laughable than scary with a big bushy mustache, a voice you can't take seriously, and a big fur coat that tanks his intimidation factor. If David Harbour's Red Guardian (MCU) was somehow combined with Uncle Fester from the Addams Family, this is what we'd get. The introduction inside of his castle with his shadow moving all around and his body largely obscured by darkness was cool, fairly unnerving, and built the character's reveal very well. But when we finally get a decent view of him his impact and presence goes down. We didn't even get the monstrous and horrifying vampire fangs that you see on the original Nosferatu which are even more lethal than common vampire fangs. I can't say much for Skarsgard's acting besides I could tell he focused on his body movement and his voice was interesting but ultimately became tiresome.

Even as a horror movie, this film's fear factor was shot because I kept laughing at the random things that were happening. I haven't laughed during a horror movie that wasn't trying to be funny at all in a while. The jump scare in the opening sequence with Ellen on the grass got me and Thomas being chased by Orlok through his castle was creepy as well. But again, I didn't empathize with the characters so their fear and the suspense wasn't transferred to me.

I went into this film really expecting to see something amazing. Most of the performances, save a few or at least a few moments, were simply people reciting lines or overacting for some desired effect. The characters were largely incompetent and reduced to objects blowing in the wind. The ultimate ending for Count Orlok and Ellen was not satisfying at all and took all power from Ellen while also reducing her to a victim. I'm not upset

with her death in some way being required to vanquish Orlok but it could have been achieved in a way that wasn't so reductive and gave the audience members something to celebrate or revere. Along with the other characters having an actual purpose and emotional sacrifice. But no, she just agreed to sex and laid there until the sun came up because I guess the people in charge didn't think she could do anything else.