



The Vampire Diatribes

Of all the endangered animals, the one that has been teetering on the edge of extinction the longest never actually existed in the first place. I refer, of course, to vampires. It has always struck me as odd that creatures possessed, as they apparently are, of such an impressive array of supernatural powers, not to mention multiple entry visas to Immortaldom, are invariably portrayed in books and films as numerically miniscule as a species and always one pointy stake away from oblivion.

Is it because human beings like their gods to be fallible? Even Superman is constantly tripping over bits of kryptonite and being temporarily reduced to a nerd, nervously fumbling for his bifocals. Only when a mere mortal comes along and kicks the offending green pebble out of the way is he again able to soar into the stratosphere to swat away incoming meteors.

But at least Superman is modest and unpretentious, if you don't count the blue tights and the cape. When he saves the planet he usually looks embarrassed about the effusive praise heaped upon him by a grateful Metropolis, and quickly disappears. In contrast vampires are ostentatious and obnoxiously flamboyant, the ultimate party animal, only getting up at dusk and crawling back into their velvet-lined box with red-rimmed eyes at the first glint of

dawn. In between they hit the nightspots and knock back Bloody Marys - and Annes and Stephanies and Fionas - like there's no tomorrow.

Each individual member of this peculiar species has been alive for hundreds if not thousands of years, or so they keep reminding us. Quite clearly none of these immense amounts of time have been spent in a library because most of them are barely articulate. Their main means of communication seems to consist of moody and malevolent stares, a bit like a mortal thug when you politely object to him barging ahead of you in a supermarket queue. The corners of their mouths curl up in the same way too, except that instead of a line of crooked, tobacco stained teeth the vampire reveals an impressive set of pearly white canines.

Vampires quite often hang out with werewolves, at least when there's a full moon. Why is anybody's guess because they seem to have little in common. Werewolves are the slobbering, muscular morons of the netherworld whereas vampires at least make some pretence at social refinement, traditionally choosing to reside in impressive castles or other high end pieces of real estate. They obviously buy their cloaks in Saville Row and their wine goblets from Waterford. More often than not they employ impeccably mannered butlers. In contrast, werewolves aimlessly gallop about in the woods and bay at the moon, pausing every now and again to messily dismember a rabbit or a lost hiker.

That's how it used to be anyway. These days vampires and werewolves have moved into the suburbs and taken out mortgages. In this thoroughly modern milieu they are even interbreeding, producing offspring who attend the local school. They spend their time worrying about the same silly things that we do. Count Dracula is probably turning in his coffin at the sheer banality of it all. But they're still immortal and have to keep a wary eye out for the bloke with the sharpened stake or the silver bullet. Presumably, in the case of a crossbred vampwolf, he'd have to use both.

At the end of the day, if you'll pardon the expression, werewolves and vampires are kept alive by the entertainment industry. I would hazard a guess that the gross takings from book sales, TV shows, films and merchandise comfortably topped US\$30 billion last year alone. It's just a thought, but if you invested that sort of money at 4% you'd probably be able to pay the expenses of many of the world's wildlife sanctuaries and parks until the end of time. At least that would give real creatures, like the rhino, the wild dog and even *Desmodus rotundus*, the not-so common vampire bat, a chance of immortality, or at least a fair stab at avoiding extinction.