



# The Body, the Blood

Sex, Christ and vampires

**THIRST:** Directed by Park Chan-wook. Written by Park and Chung Seo-kyung. Inspired by Émile Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*. Cinematography, Chung Chung-hoon. Music, Cho Young-uk. Starring Song Kang-ho, Kim Ok-vin, Kim Hae-sook and Shin Ha-kyun. Focus Features, 2009. R. 133 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

**T**hirst is a vampire movie, but it's also not. Like last year's quietly unforgettable *Let the Right One In*, it adjusts vampire mythology to suit its themes; unlike a certain other vampire film currently hotly anticipated by a particular crowd, *Thirst* doesn't shy away from a key element of vampirism: blood. Blood gushes from an infected man's mouth, sprays across a pristine white floor, drips into a bathtub; when a new vampire's heightened senses are awakened, even a small, unseen amount of blood sends him reeling. The

sound of a vampire guzzling blood is as amplified as the sound of two people furiously kissing, and both become deeply uncomfortable, too intimate, too human. Vampirism, in director Park Chan-wook's hands, is visceral and vicious and disturbingly down to earth. Park's vampires have no aversion to sunlight; they cast reflections; they don't grow fangs or find their faces warping into those of monsters. The transformation, for the most part, is internal. For Sang-hyun (Song Kang-ho, from *The Host*), the transformation is a moral test. Sang-hyun, as *Thirst* begins, is a gentle priest who volunteers for a medical experiment. A vaccine needs testing; the virus it will hopefully cure is a nasty thing that raises ugly pustules on a person's skin and sets them to spewing blood. Sang-hyun survives, but only after a blood transfusion — where or who the blood came from is beside the point, but clearly it was some pretty special blood. Soon after he becomes a vampire, Sang-hyun reconnects with a childhood friend, a sickly, annoying fellow named Kang-woo (Shin Ha-kyun) who lives with his smothering mother and the former orphan his mother long ago took in, who's since married Kang-woo. The young woman, Tae-ju (Kim Ok-vin), is mousy and sulky at the start, but a desperate intensity rises in her as she and Sang-hyun connect. *Thirst* refuses to be pinned down as a philosophical exploration, a bloody horror flick, a dark film noir or an

occasionally darkly comedic vampire story. Sometimes the film meanders a bit, and sometimes the beauty of its more somber moments is too quickly swept away in a wash of red. But mostly there's a frenetic grace to the way Park (*Old Boy*) plays with tone and laces brutal and ugly images into gorgeous frames. The film plays itself out in a tangle of blood, sex and violence — and a few bits of eerie humor, often courtesy of the soggy ghost of Sang-hyun's only real victim. Sang-hyun's story is one of moral contradiction: Can the good man continue to be good as a vampire, a being that lives only at the expense of others? Tae-ju, on the other hand, is the embodiment of desire and need given too much power and strength. Kim is more than convincing in her role; she's horrifying, and not simply because of her furious bloodlust. She giggles and squeals and enjoys herself horribly, until her existence is a test of Sang-hyun's resolve, and a question of what the good and right thing to do is. Does he love her? Did he take just take pity on her? Can he stop the bloodbath he's started? In the film's final images, lovely and taut with threat and fury, Tae-ju is a hurricane of fear, but at the eye of her storm is Sang-hyun, still and calm. The vampire and the priest, the murderer and the martyr — finally, impossibly, they coexist. At least for a moment. **EW**

Thirst opens at the Bijou Friday, Oct. 2.

## movie clips

**OPENING OR RETURNING:** **Best of the Northwest Film and Video Festival:** A cross-section of short films from the Northwest. 7 pm Saturday, Oct. 3, DIVA. \$6.  
**Capitalism: A Love Story:** Michael Moore's latest, a look at the still-ongoing financial crisis, is getting mixed reviews; to some it's an "emotional attack" and "scattershot and lazy," while others think it's moving and energizing. R. VRC Stadium 15.  
**Confessions of a Superhero:** This film, which screens as part of the J-Schnitz's superheroes exhibition, follows Hollywood's "reigning Superman impersonator," as well as the folks who dress up as Wonder Woman and Batman. Screening will be followed by a live Skype discussion with director Matthew Ogens. 5:30 pm Wednesday, Oct. 7, Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art.  
**Dante's Inferno:** Sandow Birk presents this animated version of Dante's classic, for which he was art director, writer and producer. Here, Dante is "a slacker in a hoodie" voiced by Dermot Mulroney. The handmade film is in the style of "an apocalyptic graphic novel crossed with Victorian-era toy theater." Hey, that sounds nifty! 7 pm Thursday, Oct. 1, 180 PLC, UO. Free.  
**Films of John Ford, The:** LCC and DIVA join forces to show *The Informer* (1 pm), about an Irishman who hopes to emigrate to America, and *The Grapes of Wrath* (4 pm), based on John Steinbeck's novel, Sunday, Oct. 4, DIVA. \$5 for both.  
**Hangover, The:** This summer's dirty-fun buzz movie stars Bradley Cooper, Zach Galifianakis and Ed Helms as three guys who have no idea what happened at the bachelor party last night. Where'd that guy's tooth go? Where'd the baby come from? It's a really good time finding out. Movies 12. ★★☆☆☆ (6/11)  
**Indie Film Night:** Two documentaries screen for the start of this new series from DIVA: *My First Second Home*, about six foreign lesbians who find new homes in the U.S., and *Ebony Chunky Love: Bitch Can't Get a Date*, which mixes comedian Keith Price's stand-up act with interviews for what the press release describes as a "funny and intelligent commentary on issues of family dynamics, class, race and body image in the gay community." 7 pm Sunday, Oct. 4, DIVA. Donation.  
**Invention of Lying, The:** Ricky Gervais (BBC's *The Office*) stars as the man who brings lying to a world in which everyone always tells the truth — and finds fame and fortune in the process. "Course, things probably go wrong after that. With Jennifer Garner, Tina Fey, Jonah Hill and Jeffrey Tambor. PG13. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.  
**It Might Get Loud:** Davis Guggenheim (*An Inconvenient Truth*) directs this documentary about Jack White, Jimmy Page and U2's the Edge, taking each guitarist to a significant location in his life and setting them to jamming together. "The lore in this documentary will be catnip" to rock geeks, said *The New York Times*. PG. 97 min. Bijou. **See review this issue.**  
**Thirst:** Director Park Chan-wook (*Old Boy*, *Lady Vengeance*) mixes horror, dark comedy, messy romance and more in this story of a priest who finds himself turned into a vampire after a medical experiment. He tries to live as he did before, but the attentions of a needy young woman (Kim Ok-vin) are too much to resist, and before long, both their lives — if you can call them that — have gotten deeply complicated. R. 133 min. Bijou. **See review this issue.**  
**Toy Story 1 & 2 3D:** Pixar's triumphant feature-length debut and its sequel get dressed up in 3D in order to get us all totes psyched for *Toy Story 3*, which comes out next year. G. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.  
**Whatever Works:** Larry David and Evan Rachel Wood star in the latest from Woody Allen, which is about an eccentric New Yorker (No! Really?) and the young Southern girl he meets. With Patricia Clarkson. 92 min. PG13. Movies 12.  
**Whip It:** Ellen Page is a Texas beauty pageantgoer who does pageants for her mom (Marcia Gay Harden). A flyer for roller derby — and Kristen Wiig as a friendly derby girl — change her life entirely. Page is a charmer, as is Alia Shawkat (*Arrested Development*) as her best friend, but it's slightly amazing how a film about this alternative sport manages to get so dressed up in Hollywood predictability. Directed by Drew Barrymore. PG13. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.  
**Willow:** Oh, Val Kilmer, your flowing locks! This fantastical '80s adventure screens for Heckler's Night, 7 pm Wednesday, Oct. 7, Wandering Goat. Free.  
**Zombieland:** Jesse Eisenberg (*Adventureland*) goes back to the amusement park (OK, so the films aren't related, but it is kinda funny) in this zombie flick that costars Woody Harrelson, Emma Stone (*Superbad*) and ... Abigail Breslin? *Little Miss Sunshine* fights zombies? I'm in. R. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Films open the Friday following EW publication date unless otherwise noted. See archived reviews at [www.eugeneweekly.com](http://www.eugeneweekly.com)

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