MOVIES

Murphy's 'Vampire' is toothless

TICKETS PLEASE

JOHN MONAGHAN

On a dark and foggy night, a freighter rolls over fishing boats and crashes into the docks at a New York City shipyard. The wolf that leaps from the vessel can be seen in shadow changing into the figure of a man. Nosferatu has landed.

What's a nice opening like you doing in a movie like this? You'll want to ask after sitting through the rest of "Vampire in Brooklyn," a toothless Eddie Murphy horror comedy that makes "Dracula" look like "Schindler's List."

As about the 70th actor to don the red-lined cape and fangs, Murphy brings little fresh blood to Bram Stoker's creation. His Maximillian is an African-born bloodsucker in search of the only woman in America who has vampire blood flowing through her veins.

She is Rita (Angela Bassett), a police woman whose only hint at a dark side comes through her macabre paintings. Sharp-dressing Max's job is to woo her because, as we all know, a vampire can't do his dirty work unless he is invited.

Bassett, so robust in the current "Strange Days," looks surprisingly sickly in her part. Nothing looks good, thanks to cinematography that's overly murky and dark, even by vampire movie standards.

Cheapness is a trademark of director Wes Craven, creator of the popular "Nightmare on Elm Street" movies, though usually he delivers a clever twist or two. You'd think a veteran like Craven would give us something new, especially in the wake of "Interview with the Vampire."

This is supposed to be Eddie Murphy's comeback, but only one sequence recalls his talent for mimicking, done so well in movies like "Trading Places" or "Coming to America." His impersonation of a Bible-thumping preacher has some funny moments, but it's directed clumsily and goes on far too long.

Murphy in fact spends much of his time as straight man to Kadeem Hardison as the slave ghoul Julius. As the movie drags on, he starts to decompose, losing an ear here, an arm there, replacing what he can with parts from department store mannequins.

As a horror comedy, "Vampire in Brooklyn" is equally inept in both categories. The jokes come across gross instead of funny and the delivery, especially Murphy's, is uninspired. Even his mummy-like coffin looks tacky and garish.

The only spine-chilling part came at the end, when sporadic audience applause at a preview screening proved my innermost fear: the makers of "Vampire in Brooklyn" might actually be rewarded for their efforts. Now that's scary.

To leave a message for John Monaghan, dial 953-2047, mailbox number 1866, on a touch-tone phone, fax him a note at 591-7279, or write him in care of Entertainment, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

Eddie Murphy

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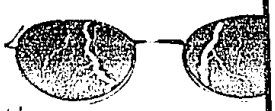

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Vampire in Brooklyn
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