

DRAC'S BACK!

DRACULA, LORD OF THE DAMNED

(2011) ♂♂♂

D: Theodore Trout, Ian Case, Brian Clement. Theodore Trout, David McPherson, Amanda Lisman, Denise Brown, Mike Grimshaw, Ian Case, Randall Carnell, Hal Hewett, Alexandra Steinmetz, Emily DeKorte, Michelle Chowns, Kjell Cawsey, Imogene Cookie-Bailey, Gala Apple, Giles, Kingo, Ethan Jensen. 102 mins. (thefishshow.com) 5/13

Inventive Canadian illustrator/ animator/filmmaker Theodore Trout took five years to craft this strange, eerie, and inspired adaptation of Bram Stoker's classic vampire tale. In 1872, British solicitor Jonathan Harker (McPherson) travels to Transylvania to conduct business for the bizarre Count Dracula (Trout), a medieval warlord who rose from his grave as a vampire and now believes himself to be the savior of men. Dracula plans to share the gift of eternal life with the unsuspecting inhabitants of London. Leaving Harker to his fate at the hands of his harem (DeKorte, Chowns, Cawsey, Cookie-Bailey), Dracula arrives in England and decimates the population, including aristocrat Lucy Westwood (Brown), best friend of Harker's fiancée Mina Murray (Lisman). Professor Van Helsing (Grimshaw) is brought in to help diagnose this mystery illness but he can't save Lucy from Dracula's clutches: she must be destroyed by her own fiancé, Dr. John Seward (Case). When Harker escapes Dracula's Transylvanian fortress and returns to England, Van Helsing and Seward are able to determine that Dracula is the master that bug-eating lunatic Renfield (Hewett) has been babbling about. Aided by Seward's American friend Quincy Morris (Carnell), they attempt to track Dracula down, but he has already infected Mina with his unholy blood. Led by Van Helsing, who knows Dracula's true nature—he is the Anti-Christ—they use Mina's psychic link with him to pursue the vampire back to Transylvania and stop his true reign of terror over all humanity. The monochromatic film is shot in the style of a silent movie, even though it features sound, songs by Priestess, and a soundtrack by "Anton Phibes and Winslow Leech." Trout has painstakingly infused each frame with artistic touches and provided the illustrations for the title sequence. He also makes for an interesting, impressive Dracula. The cast is mostly competent, although the British accents come and go, and some are about as convincing as Keanu Reeves' in Francis Ford Coppola's 1992 *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (VS #3). The inclusion of gore and nudity give it a bit of a Hammer Films vibe, but for the most part it tries to be fairly original. There are more nods to Max Schreck than Lugosi, Lee, or Oldman, and the insertion of End Times religious themes adds an interesting twist on the story. Copies of the film on DVD-R are available at Trout's web-



site, as well as Amazon.com. Although *Dracula* is one of my all-time favorite stories, and one of the most frequently adapted to film, it's sometimes hard to find a new version that isn't a rehash of everything that came before, a re-imagining that's now incomprehensible and unrecognizable as *Dracula*, or, worse, just boring and redundant. Trout and company have brought some interesting touches to the tale, although some of the animation is a bit primitive and seemingly out of place at times. Mostly, though, it works. ♂

SHOCK DOCS A GO-GO: FORRY'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW! By David-Elijah Nahmod

THE LIFE AFTER DEATH PROJECT

(2013) ♂♂♂1/2

D: Paul Davids. Forrest J Ackerman, Richard Matheson, Whitley Streiber, Joe Moe. 106 mins. (Yellow Hat Productions) 8/13

Of course, anything featuring the late, iconic Uncle Forry is going to be of interest to us middle-aged Monster Kids. This fascinating and occasionally moving documentary is one of only a small handful of decent items to be broadcast on the Syfy Channel ever since it abandoned classic film and TV in order to re-brand itself as the *Sharknado* network. Davids, an artist and filmmaker who also gave us the sublime *The Sci-Fi Boys* (VS #59) a few years back, now tackles an age-old topic: proof of life after death. The film's delicious twist is whether or not ultimate Monster Kid Forrest J Ackerman (1916-2008) might still be hanging around this mortal coil, leaving messages for those whose lives he touched. The film includes archival footage of Forry, along with newly shot interviews with his closest friends from his final years. (Joe Moe, Forry's live-in caregiver during that last chapter, is a bubbly delight.) All of them claim to have

received messages from the Ackermanian's spirit. While it would be easy to dismiss a lot of their stories as coincidence, these ghostly tales are bizarre and frankly hard to explain. After a while, it really seems as though...

Davids takes viewers back to the Ackermansion, the legendary Hollywood abode which served as Forry's home and as a museum of classic horror memorabilia, which he opened to the public every Saturday. We see the remodeled house as it now is, nearly a decade since Forry vacated it. Even the current residents, who are not horror fans and have no connection to the former occupant, have felt his presence. They've seen and heard things that let them know he's been popping in to say hi. Boo!

But Davids' camera also takes us on visits to the offices of scientists, and to their labs, where actual scientific experiments are conducted. By the time all is said and done, even the most ardent skeptic might start to wonder if we do indeed survive after we move on. There are other stories besides Forry's. Among them, noted horror novelist Whitley Streiber shares a fascinating personal encounter he had with a medium who pulled out a long-forgotten, long-dead name from his distant past: without receiving any clues—she named the dead man and his profession! Was that he who just walked by, brushing against your cheek? Brrr...

Riveting and intelligently made, *The Life After Death Project* surely won't be the last word on this topic, but it is an educational look at a subject that will never be fully resolved. Until we get there. The disc comes with 40 minutes worth of extras, most of which are charming tributes to Forry's life and his relationships with his friends. A second disc is entitled *Personal Encounters*. It features 100 minutes of interviews with people from varied walks of life who share their own encounters with the "other side." ♂

